



# Understanding of the natural resource conflict dynamics

The case of Tuareg in North Africa and the Sahel

## INTRODUCTION

Tuareg are pastoral desert nomads who live in the north part of Africa. Political environment at independence, migration and environmental changes have interacted to influence, in a crucial way, their current situation. This paper explores the impact of changing access to livelihood resources on current conflict between Tuareg and the governments of Mali, Niger and Algeria. It will be argued that the processes that influenced the conflict are deeply entrenched in history, and in the composite relations between Tuareg and the environment as well as the policies and institutional context. These are expressed in a range of ways, including natural resource management, land tenure security, climate change and humanitarian intervention. Further, polarisation of Libya and policies of levelling of social hierarchies and sedentrisation initiated by Algeria, as well as the international processes of exclusion, have all contributed to the vulnerability of Tuareg and the intensification of the conflict. Boiled-over dissatisfaction of Tuareg has provoked violent response by popular uprising and government violent response.

The conflicts that have developed involve both regular armies and militias and armed Tuareg groups. They have centred on areas rich in resources (gold, uranium, land and water), creating a whole economy based on violence. Restoring the livelihood system, it will be argued, requires a long-term perspective that rethinks the root causes of the problem and the entanglement of livelihoods, power and resources. At the heart of such understanding is the process through which the conflict has resorted to arms and the role of different actors in fuelling the conflict and allowing it to persist.

Understanding of this conflict is varied. This paper examines this issue from the perspective of changing the livelihood system and the vulnerability of Tuareg. An adapted version of the sustainable livelihood framework (used by M Abdalla, 2008) will be used to guide the

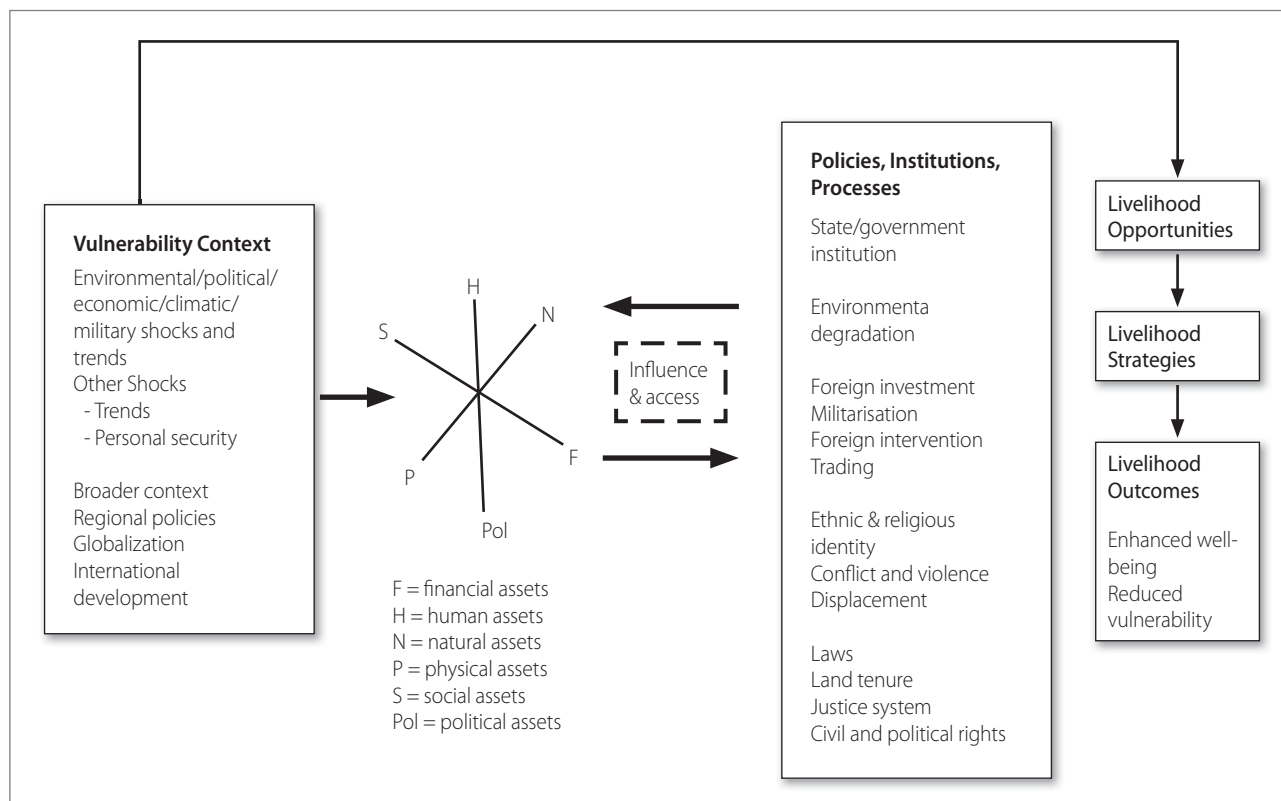
analysis.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that information on this topic is rather scant. Data for this paper was gathered from a wide range of published and unpublished materials, including field research by the author.

## SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS FRAMEWORK

The sustainable livelihood framework (SLF) is a configuration of opportunities and assets available to people in both peaceful and conflict situations, as well as details of the sources of their vulnerability. It also includes the important dimension of formal and informal institutions, and processes and policies that constrain their efforts. These issues are illustrated in five core principles that guide the analyses (see Fig 1). These are capital assets, the vulnerability context, the possible livelihood strategies, the policy, institutions and processes that influence the livelihood and access to resources, and the livelihood outcomes.

Sustainable livelihoods (SL) frameworks encompass the means, activities, entitlements and assets through which people maintain a living. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets – including both material and social resources – and activities required for a means of living.<sup>2</sup> The sustainability of livelihoods of Tuareg will depend on how they are able to mobilise their asset portfolios (or opportunity) in the long term.<sup>3</sup> Until recently, SLF was used mostly in peacetime, it has now been adapted for use in conflict situations and in complex humanitarian emergencies.<sup>4</sup> The framework recognises that livelihood activities in conflict situations are dynamic and context-specific. Accordingly, this paper will explore the vulnerability of the Tuareg resulting from unexpected shocks, long-term trends and seasonal stress. These factors make up the vulnerability context and directly influence Tuareg's asset status and the options available to them to pursue successful livelihood outcomes.

**Figure 1** Sustainable livelihood in situations of conflict – The Analytical Framework



## GLOBALISATION AND NATURAL RESOURCE CONFLICT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Changes at global level in the post-cold war period have underlined the delegitimisation of the existing socialist model, offering in its place a liberal concept of politics, with the ‘opening up’ of economies and societies. In the process, political conditionality transmitted through global institutions, has led to the breakdown or collapse of state authority and the erosion of national sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> This new type of power relations has influenced access to resources and conflict impetus for different groups in Africa. The state becomes detached and less accountable to its citizens than to global politics.

Increasingly, national governments are becoming powerless in the face of global governance, economic integration and neoliberal deregulation.<sup>6</sup> Although African economies have always been global, some authors suggest that the intensity of the phenomenon has increased during the last two decades.<sup>7</sup> The rapidly growing scope of economic integration has directed attention towards the linkages between the international economy and the security concerns in various countries.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, there are many examples of conflict in mineral-rich countries, notably Niger, Mali, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone. Two major trends are becoming apparent in these conflicts: state actors’ role has become less significant and non-state

actors, including rebel movements, militias and warlords, have become much stronger. This has contributed to prolonging, factionalising and fragmenting conflicts to the extent that they become long-term components of the political environment.<sup>9</sup>

Multinational corporations (MNCs), foreign nations, rebel groups or governments that compete to gain control over the lucrative profits, by fair means or foul, often inflict harm on the population and the environment of the resource-rich areas. But the distribution of harm and risk usually vary considerably along several dimensions, including ethnicity, culture, religion, location and type of resources, and the major actors involved.<sup>10</sup> Whilst acknowledging that global economic incentives surrounding precious natural resources can derive and influence conflicts, it has been argued that conflict-ridden nations often demonstrate some form of horizontal inequality, including inequality of access to resources essential for livelihoods.<sup>11</sup> A major problem in Africa today is the conflict that emerges from the exclusion of minority groups. Some authors have argued for analytical connections between processes of globalisation and social exclusion. According to De Haan, with globalisation ‘... the diversity in prosperity and welfare between and within countries has increased. It is still an inherent part of the development process that some groups are included and others are excluded’.<sup>12</sup> In this kind of environment there is a critical need for a viable social contract based on the rule of law, addressing inequality of access to resources

for all citizens and genuinely working towards a peaceful settlement of grievances.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT DRIVERS

There are said to be several million Tuareg, but there are no accurate figures. Tuareg themselves estimate their number to be more than three million<sup>13</sup>, whilst others put the figure at around 1,5 to 2 million. Most live in Mali and Niger<sup>14</sup>, primarily in Algeria, north-eastern Mali and central and northern Niger, Libya, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. Tuareg are predominantly Muslims but generally follow a moderate and unconventional version of Islam. As a group, Tuareg is made up of several tribes, including Kel-Air, Kel-Gress, Iwilli-Minden and Immouzourak. Tuareg society is conventionally feudal, including nobles, clergy, vassals and artisans, and labourers (ex-slaves). Today, this stratification with its defined roles and functions is no longer as rigid as it used to be.

Historically Tuareg managed trans-Saharan trade routes dealing in gold, ivory, salt and slaves. However, the development of the European maritime trade in the 16th century weakened the trans-Saharan commercial routes and led to the collapse of trading hubs such as Djenne, Gao and Timbuktu. Consequently, Tuareg had to abandon trading and pursue nomadism, pastoralism and limited scale agriculture as alternative means of livelihood. They also shared a symbiotic relationship with settled farmers. Conflict has always existed among different strata of Tuareg and between nomads and sedentary groups. Pre-colonial rivalry and conflicts occurred over various issues, including struggle for political power and over some defined geographic area, struggle to gain access to grazing and water resources, and for control of trans-Saharan trade routes.<sup>15</sup> These conflicts have continued to varying extents after independence.

Competition over diminishing resources has sparked internal conflicts between different groups and between these groups and the governments of Niger and Mali

Although Tuareg represents a huge spectrum of populations with different interest and goals, the nature of their grievance is broadly the same. Tuareg rose in rebellions

in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to resist French colonisation. In the subsequent revolts, particularly since the 1990s, gaining an independent state of traditional Tuareg territories in Mali and Niger become a cornerstone of the struggle. Whilst their demand for a separate state is attributed to long-term negligence and exclusion by various governments, their dream of independent state was first sown when the colonialists issued the Act of Law 57-7-27 of the Common Organisation of Saharan Regions (OCRS) with the aim of creating an entity to accommodate nomads, particularly Tuareg. Although the project did not materialise, it planted the seed of an independent state in Mali, Niger and Mauritania.

When independence came, Tuareg were scattered over different states. In each state they felt marginalised, with less power and wealth than other citizens. In particular, land reform after independence was seen to jeopardise and exclude Tuareg. This has been one of the most important factors in initiating attacks by Tuareg on the post-independence governments of Mali and Niger.

In 1970s and 1980s, Tuareg territories were affected by severe droughts leading to human and environmental disasters. Tuareg felt that they were ignored and excluded from humanitarian assistance. Large numbers fled rural areas for cities, and others migrated to neighbouring Algeria and Libya. These events and others have sparked internal conflicts among Tuareg for diminishing resources, between Tuareg and non-Tuareg farmers, and between groups of Tuareg and the governments of Niger and Mali.

Tuareg dissatisfaction with social conditions and the governments' policies gave rise to government violence and the popular uprising. Certain factors have taken the conflict further in the years leading to 2009. These include the military training some Tuareg received while in exile<sup>16</sup>, extensive mineral exploration and the proliferation of weapons and small arms and their free flow across the borders, which also accentuated internal conflict and spread it across borders. Further, exploitation of resources such as uranium and gold has degraded the natural resources essential for livelihood activities and had displaced Tuareg from their homeland. Increasing scarcity of resources, driven by rising exploration, exacerbates such conflicts.

Currently, several Tuareg groups are engaged in armed conflicts with governments and with each other. The governments and the international community are taking extreme stands driven by their particular interests and general perceptions of the situation. Attempts to resolve the conflict have not been successful. While conflict is intensifying Tuareg are less able to deal with it due to the loss of their traditional mechanisms for negotiation and conflict resolution and due to the strong existence of many parties in the conflict

## ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

The Tuareg region in the Sahel is prone to environmental challenges, including drought, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion and insufficient supply of potable water. The climate is characterised by frequent droughts, which vary in severity from one year to the next. Agriculture is principally rain-fed and depends on three to four months of summer rainfall, which make harvests of food and other crops highly uncertain. The majority of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture and livestock as primary sources of employment.<sup>17</sup> Past generations did not overexploit their only source of survival, knowing that their lives were dependent on their ability to preserve and sustain resources. But as climate change has escalated desertification, farmers and herders on the southern fringe of the Sahara Desert struggle to survive in a hostile environment. They have had no option but to disregard traditional means of coping, such as leaving the land fallow for a number of years to replenish nutrients and rotate grazing. These measures simply have been sacrificed in the quest for mere survival. No helping hand was extended in their struggle with the environment and they have become active agents in land degradation.

Environmental disasters that eroded the ability to make a living perhaps had more to do with the general lack of preparedness than climate variability. During the 1950s and 1960s, colonialists and the newly independent Sahelian government invested heavily in cash crops such as cotton and groundnuts, sacrificing the cereal crops that were the staple food of the rural populations. When the region experienced severe drought people dependent on land could not cope. Nor could the governments and people find themselves alone in the fight for survival.<sup>18</sup>

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In the past people were able to survive these harsh conditions using their traditional mechanisms. But when the harsh environment culminated in an environmental crisis between 1972 and 1974 and 1984 and 1985 Tuareg were overwhelmed. Although familiar with and expert in

surviving and managing the hostile desert environment for centuries, their means of survival were ineffective this time. The famine of 1973 killed thousands of Tuareg and their livestock, agriculture was no longer able to support the needs of the population, and the extreme shortage of water for farmers and pastoralists, threatened the survival of the nomads in particular. The drought created deep bitterness among Tuareg for the government, as they felt they had been ignored and that neither foreign aid, nor local assistance was distributed equitably. Large number of Tuareg fled the rural areas for cities, while others migrated to neighbouring Algeria and Libya.

Upon their return home to Mali and Niger, they found that much of their land had been taken by sedentary farmers and they clashed with these farmers. To complicate matters, Tuareg homeland areas have vast natural resources including substantial uranium and gold reserves. Many countries have mining permits to explore for uranium gold and oil. Among them are France, China, India, Britain, South Africa, America, Canada and Australia. Extensive exploration and industry of uranium has diminished and degraded Tuareg grazing lands and led to the depletion of water and exacerbated the rate of desertification. Extensive exploration coupled by climate change has led to jeopardizing Tuareg's ability to maintain their livelihoods.<sup>19</sup> Over the last few decades, absence of lucid environmental policies and development priorities, combined with population growth, land degradation, erratic rainfall has exacerbated the vulnerability of the population and left them to compete for the scarce resources that were left. Though these are the common causes of conflict, but the specific factors that led Tuareg to take up arm and the way such revolts are handled vary from one country to the other.

## DEVELOPMENT OF EVENTS AND CURRENT SITUATION: MALI

Mali is the main Tuareg country. It has a diverse ethnic population with around six distinct ethnolinguistic groups. Tuareg, numbering about 621 000, make up around 1,7 per cent of Mali's total population. They live mostly in the northern part of Mali and are primarily pastoralists. Challenges to Tuareg of Mali arise from the country's ecology and composition of the population. Mali's climate spans the transition zone between arid Sahelian savannah and the Sahara Desert. The region is prone to severe periodic drought. Mali is currently among the poorest countries in the world and remains heavily dependent on foreign aid.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is endowed with rich natural resources including gold, copper, diamonds, iron, kaolin, manganese, phosphates, silver, uranium and zinc. Some of these resources are being exploited, whilst others remain unexploited. Gold mining accounted

for 12,7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004. Currently, the country is involved in large-scale gold mining, which is encroaching on a large tract of land formerly used by pastoralists or farmers. With the opening of several new mines, including Morila and Yatela in 2001, Mali has become Africa's third largest gold producer.<sup>21</sup> Exploration operations concentrate on the southwestern and southern parts of the country and are undertaken by several foreign companies, including Randgold Resources, Anglo Gold and IAMGold. However, this industrial boom is not reflected in the wellbeing of the citizens. The majority of the Malian population lives below the poverty line, and the country ranks 173 out of 177 countries on the United Nation's human development index.<sup>22</sup>

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The conflict involving Tuareg has strong roots in the control over natural resources, especially land. As in the rest of Africa, the pre-colonial customary system of land tenure in Mali was based more or less on collective ownership. Although this collectivity did not imply an automatic equal right to land for everyone, the system worked since it was adequately flexible and resourceful for both pastoralist and farmer livelihoods.<sup>23</sup> During colonial time the French state pursued a policy of land registration and accordingly many Tuareg lost their right to the land they used to live in. In 1959 legislation was passed allowing Mali to use land owned through traditional tenure rights for development projects. Vast tracts of land were considered public property, and land was increasingly lost due to the encroachment of commercial agriculture. As a result, Tuareg became among the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Policies pursued by the successive post-colonial governments continued to marginalise Tuareg from mainstream national development. At independence in 1960, the socialistic policies saw wide nationalisation of industry, commerce and land. Tuareg access to land was further eroded. Over the years, there has been a strong trend towards overlooking the needs of pastoralists and

small farmers and the gradual eradication of pastoralism mode of life altogether. The pastoral land tenure reform and resource management ('terroir' approach) applied in Mali in 1990/91 involves extensive demarcation of rigid boundaries for pastoralists, legal titling of individual and collective lands and the reallocation of land to different uses. The approach contributed to the loss of mobility of Tuareg and their animals and disturbed their adaptation to the conditions of dry-land Sahel. Coupled with the erosion of access to land, Tuareg experienced increased material hardship and had to compete for diminishing resources. Conflict erupted not only between Tuareg and the Malian government but also within the different Tuareg groups and pastoralist society.

When Mali gained its independence from France in 1960, Tuareg were marginalised and excluded from positions of power in the national government, whilst southern ethnic groups were preferred. Whilst this event sowed the seed of resentment, the intensification of the conflict and its progression into a war was sparked by land reform policies introduced by the Malian national government. Many Tuareg lost their source of livelihoods and had to try new means. Some Tuareg leaders felt that the reform was an attempt to destroy their culture and social cohesion.<sup>24</sup>

Opposition to government policies had developed into an arm rebellion in 1963. Military revolts of Tuareg have been organised more around goals of legal autonomy, equality and fair share of wealth. The formation of Tuareg movements in different countries provided an important impetus to the rebellions.<sup>25</sup> The movement called for the independence of three northern regions, Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao, and the formation of a Tuareg state. Many groups were formed since then, splintered, disappeared or fought each other. In particular, early movements were characterised by confusion and factionalism<sup>26</sup>, which have persisted as Tuareg movements maintain internal divergence and engaged in open violence against each other. During the 1960s, the rebels were far from organised, and lacked coherence, a clear and coordinated strategy and modern means of warfare. They adopted a hit-and-run approach against several government targets, but could not inflict much damage. Coercive measures were used by the Malian government and both rebel- and non-rebel Tuareg were targeted.<sup>27</sup> The rebellion was crushed by 1964 and many Tuareg had to flee to the neighbouring countries. The events had created an atmosphere of distrust and hate, which the peace agreements that followed did little to change. Environmental stress and the resultant resource scarcity further sharpened the conflicts. During the 1970s and 1980s, Tuareg's areas in Mali were severely affected by drought and desertification. Tuareg accused the government of neglecting them and excluding them from humanitarian assistance.<sup>28</sup> The revolts that followed

included attacks by 'armed bandits' on urban centres that led to the killing and displacement of large numbers of people.

An agreement signed in April 1992 between the government and Tuareg rebel forces helped restore stability in the north for a while. The new administrative region of Kidal was created, Tuareg fighters were integrated in the armed forces, the north was demilitarised and the government of Mali vowed to apply greater economic and political equality. However, there was no end to the violent conflicts. A huge rupture has already occurred in the social and economic fabric of various ethnic groups in the country. Arab minority groups demanded social justice and equality with other groups. Sedentary black communities, who also felt alienated and became a target of Tuareg rebel attacks with no protection, armed themselves and formed the Gandakoy Movement in May 1994 with members from Mali, Mauritania and Niger.<sup>29</sup> Inter-community conflicts developed rapidly between Gandakoy and the Islamic Arab front of Azawagh (IAFA<sup>30</sup>), leading to many casualties.

A Tuareg rebellion broke out in early 2006. Mali sought Algerian mediation in late 2006, and despite criticism from the Malian elites, the Alger Peace Accord that was signed halted the violence for a while. The leaders of the Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC) were allowed to form the forum of Kidal (in 2007) and some of them were elected as deputies in the July 2007 general election.<sup>31</sup>

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But Tuareg rose up again and the 2006 agreement was dead and buried.<sup>32</sup> The 23 May 2006 formation of the ADC (fr Alliance Démocratique du 23 mai pour le Changement) gave the conflict renewed momentum. The movement's members include Malian Tuareg, particularly those who were instrumental in the 1990s uprising. The group splintered in 2007, but retained its name. Ag Bahanga's faction of the ADC is currently the most powerful group and staged several strong attacks in northern Mali. In July 2008, Algeria brokered a new

deal between the Ag Bahanga group and the Malian government. However, towards the end of 2008 the group objected to some of the terms of the accord and fled to Libya, launching its attacks from there. This group is now called Alliance Touareg Nord Mali Pour Le Changement (ATNMC). The Malian government dismisses the new movement as a gold digger, insignificant in the conflict, and having no popular base among the Tuareg community. Sporadic attacks by the ATNMC and others continued up to early April 2009. Libya has brokered an agreement between the government of Mali and the ATNMC, but it is not expected to last.

Previous peace agreements have done little to change the situation on the ground and some say they have helped to spread the rebellion into cities beyond the north.<sup>33</sup> The declared good intentions of the government could not be transformed into realistic policies due to lack of resources, will and support from the international community. Most importantly, the strength of different parties with different interests has played a negative role in the conflict. Natural resources played a very significant role in fuelling and sustaining the conflict. Resource scarcity is increasing, due to the combination of climate change, population growth and corporate control.

## DEVELOPMENT OF EVENTS AND CURRENT SITUATION: NIGER

Niger is a landlocked sub-Saharan nation much of which falls in the Sahara Desert belt. Since independence, Niger has been governed militarily and has suffered severe political instability. The first free elections were held in 1993. The economy centres on subsistence crops, herding and informal economic activities. The country remains one of the poorest in the world<sup>34</sup> despite having some of the world's largest uranium deposits. Niger had hardly benefited from the 100 000 tonnes of uranium extracted over the past four decades.<sup>35</sup> Uranium is basically explored by France's Areva nuclear-power company. Around 90 per cent of France's electrical energy generation comes from nuclear power plants almost totally reliant on uranium from Niger. Recently, other multinational companies have obtained exploitation licences in northern Niger, including China Nuclear International Uranium Corporation (SinoU), India Taurian Resources Pvt Ltd and Rio Tinto, but Areva remains the main partner of the government of Niger.

The expansion of exploration in recent years has had implications for both the population and the environment. The exploration operations are all situated in the northern part of the country in Tuareg territory and where sizeable pastoral populations extract their living, such as the Tim Mersoï region and Air valley. This has revived old dissidence. Lately the country embarked on

extensive exploration of uranium and some of the most resourceful areas (the Takriza) were completely depleted.<sup>36</sup> In 2006 alone Niger exported 3 500 tons of uranium at \$135 per pound.<sup>37</sup> Massive expansion of uranium exploration and industry has diminished and degraded Tuareg grazing lands and has depleted water resources. The mining industry has adversely affected the health of Tuareg in the area as the groundwater has become contaminated with radioactive waste, causing myriad ailments including cancer, stillbirths and genetic defects.<sup>38</sup>

Climate change has also jeopardised Tuareg's ability to maintain their livelihood.<sup>39</sup> Tuareg of Niger were harshly hit by environmental crises during 1970s. As their Malian counterparts, they felt that they were largely ignored in relief and recovery efforts of the governments compared to other groups in the same situation. This has added to their previous discontent with the post-colonial government's policies of marginalisation and oppression.<sup>40</sup> In the early 1990s Nigerian's Tuareg rose in rebellion in an effort to create a separate trans-Saharan state. Accords signed during the mid-1990s brought to an end a period of open Tuareg insurgency and a decade of relative peace in the region.

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As in Mali, the Tuareg revolts in Niger have escalated since mid-2007 and have taken on a momentum of their own. Tuareg in Niger, apparently frustrated by continuing inequalities<sup>41</sup> and the encroachment of mining in their areas, formed their first organised armed movement, the Movement for Justice (MNJ), a militant group in northern Niger in conflict with the Niger government since 2007. The movement is fighting for greater economic development and a fair share of northern Niger's uranium wealth. The MNJ openly demands a 50 per cent share of the development companies' taxes for the benefit of local authorities.<sup>42</sup> The MNJ believes that exploration of uranium by both the government of Niger and foreign companies is leading to an imminent ecological disaster such as that seen in the uranium mining site of Arlit.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it is calling for the protection of the space

surrounding the mining operations to allow inhabitants to pursue their traditional livelihoods. The MNJ has also employed international declarations such as the UN's 14 September 2007 declaration which states that people cannot be removed from their land without their free and informed acceptance.<sup>44</sup> The MNJ has carried out a number of small military actions, including an attack on an Areva base.

In 2007, the MNJ split to form the Niger Patriotic Front (FPN), which carried out significant armed attacks in Niger's northern Saharan region. The Niger government responded by deploying 4 000 government troops and allocating more than \$60 million to the effort. Yet this did not halt the MNJ attacks especially on and around the exploration points in Arlit and on strategic targets in and around the regional capital of Agades. As of late-2008, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb started to make use of the insecurity in Niger, taking foreigners (UN personnel, employees of multinational companies and tourists) as hostages in exchange for the release of Muslims detained in Europe. This new trend has led to reinforced security measures in northern Niger. In August 2008, Niger's government declared a 'state of alert', placing the region under martial law, closing it off from the outside world and expelling international NGOs. In reality, it is spreading terror, arresting, torturing and abusing civilian.<sup>45</sup> An Amnesty International report of 2008 indicated that there were grave human rights abuses committed by government forces, such as extensive extrajudicial execution of Tuareg civilians.<sup>46</sup>

In early 2009, the FPN split from the MNJ and expressed willingness to negotiate with government. In April 2009, another peace deal was signed between the MNJ and the Niger government, in terms of which MNJ will lay down weapons and join a peace process and the government will grant greater rights to the Tuareg minority. However, to the contrary, the Niger government has granted less recognition to the Tuareg movement and dismissed most of their claims.<sup>47</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT OF EVENTS AND CURRENT SITUATION: ALGERIA

Algeria, in northern Africa, shares borders with Mali and Niger to the south, Tunisia and Libya to the east, and Morocco and Mauritania to the west. The population is predominantly Arab, but different groups dispute the country's exact identity as a nation. Some support an Islamic state, others a secular republic. Some see themselves as Arab, some as Berber and European.<sup>48</sup> The Berbers or Imazighen ('Free people'), which include Tuareg, are considered the most repressed ethnic group.<sup>49</sup> They are concentrated in southern Algeria in the massifs of Ajjer, Ahaggar and Kabyles region.

At the time of independence, Tuareg still claimed a large class of slaves ('Iklan'), often black African, darker than the generally light-skinned Tuareg.<sup>50</sup> Algeria had adopted the socialist ideology, Arabising the Berber, and had abolished slavery and settled Iklan in towns, where they would join the official economy. This led to conflicts between the freed slaves and their former masters.<sup>51</sup> There was also violent opposition to the Arabising of the Berber community, which the government contained by imprisoning of some Tuareg and the introduction of the sedentarisation policy.<sup>52</sup> Tuareg in Algeria (unlike in Mali and Niger) were eventually assimilated into the Algerian system, yet they were never completely Arabised and have preserved their language and culture.<sup>53</sup> Because of mistrust of Tuareg, the Algerian authorities resorted to extreme measures to assimilate them in the society.<sup>54</sup>

Poverty and exclusion of large groups of society, particularly Tuareg, from decision-making lead to frustration, which for some is released in crime, involvement in radical movements and violence. Algeria has a long history of struggle with Islamic extremist movements that committed numerous atrocities against Algerian citizens and the army. Although Tuareg were not known to be attracted to extremist movements, they suffered the repercussions. Tuareg fighters have long shared symbiotic relations with Algerian Islamic insurgents, the Salafist Group for Combat and Preaching (GSPC) in northern Mali, and they ran trans-Saharan smuggling routes into North Africa.<sup>55</sup> But the relationship soured when GSPC attempted to recruit Tuareg to the movement. Bitter fights erupted between the two and the hostility has not been contained to date. The transformation of the GSPC into Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) led to an upturn in violence from mid-2007.<sup>56</sup> Tuareg in Mali and Niger continued to have various military engagements with AQIM in their territories. Tuareg have no history of Islamic extremism and the link between this group and Tuareg fighters is still not very clear.<sup>57</sup> With AQIM in Tuareg territory in northern Mali and Niger, Algeria has reason to fight them and has sought the assistance of the US in fighting them within and outside Algeria. The US and Algeria have maintained good relations and have formed coalition against terrorism in the region.<sup>58</sup> The main losers in this fight are the Tuareg.

## DEVELOPMENT OF EVENTS AND CURRENT SITUATION: LIBYA

The population of Libya is primarily Arab, Berber and Tuareg, Tuareg being among the oldest inhabitants of the ancient region that is now Libya. When Colonel Qaddafi came to power, his ambition was to create a Saharan state to embrace all the Sahelo-Saharan countries, particularly those with territories of populations of the

Kel-Tamasheq. Consequently, in 1989, Mali, Niger and Chad were considered by Libya as Arab countries. Large numbers of Tuareg from these countries migrated to Libya. Since the early 1960s the revenue of petroleum and gas has financed the transformation of Libya from a poor nation to a rich one. Thousands of migrant workers were attracted to the country in search of new sources of livelihoods as theirs had been diminished as a result of drought. In 1980, Libya attempted to stir up sub-nationalist feelings among the Tuareg in Niger following a diplomatic rupture, and several Tuareg civil servants were attracted to Libya.<sup>59</sup> Young Tuareg were given military training and recruited in the so-called Islamic Legion, which had destabilised the regimes of Mali and Niger.<sup>60</sup> In the 1980s, the governments of Mali and Niger called upon their Tuareg populations in Libya and Algeria to return, promising them compensation and resettlement projects.<sup>61</sup> Tuareg returnees demanded greater autonomy and equal shares in power and wealth, but large numbers were arrested and prosecuted. But this time they were equipped with arms, rocket launchers and military training, which they put to use. By 1985, Tuareg were organised as a separate military force and launched several attacks on targets in Mali and Niger. In the mid-1990s, Colonel Gaddafi had to play down his support for Tuareg movements temporarily as his country faced increased political and economic crises. But he remained supportive of Tuareg and their movements. On different occasions, Gaddafi, proclaimed that Tuareg were Libyan Arab tribes facing genocide in other countries. He asked Tuareg to return to Libya, 'their original homeland'.<sup>62</sup> More than once, he brokered mediation between Tuareg rebel groups and the Sahelian governments. However, Libya was accused of backing the MNJ Tuareg movement and of instigating several attacks on Niger and Mali.<sup>63</sup> Currently Libya is hosting the anti-Malian government, Alliance Touareg Nord Mali Pour Le Changement (ATNMC). Furthermore, Libya continues to maintain territorial claims about 19 400 sq km of land in the northern part of Niger.

## INTERNATIONAL POLICIES

When Tuareg rose, they apparently had no intention of spreading terror in the region; rather their goals were a greater share in wealth and equity. It was the vulnerability of Tuareg's livelihoods that drove them to carry arms. However, they were dismissed both internally and internationally as terrorists or Islamic jihad, which justified suppression of their movements and populations. The US issued the Pan-Sahel Initiative in 2003, superseded in 2005 by the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) to support Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauritania in their fight against Islamic terrorists. The major alliances



for the US in this strategy have been Algeria, Niger and Mali, and together they executed combined military operations. These have intensified Tuareg rebellions and increased insecurity of the southern Sahara-Sahel region. The US has branded the northern parts of Mali and Niger 'terrorist zones', which has negatively affected the local tourism industry and related livelihoods, and has infuriated Tuareg populations in the region, hence many operations are directed against American targets.<sup>64</sup> Many were carried out by the 'terrorist' AQIM<sup>65</sup>, but the relationship between this group and Tuareg has not been established.

Multinational exploration companies are said to be involved in one way or another in the conflict. In Niger, the government has accused French and Chinese companies of taking side and supporting Tuareg rebels. In particular, Areva was accused by the Nigerian government of supporting Tuareg militia groups to deter competitors.<sup>66</sup> The MNJ has accused China of providing military backing to Niamey to crush rebellion in exchange for exploration permits.<sup>67</sup> It is clear that whilst the conflict involving Tuareg has developed locally, it has been enforced through various external actors.

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There is a need for a more comprehensive solution that takes into account the root cause of the problem in order to avoid having another Darfur in the region

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## PROSPECT OF PEACE

No practical solution has been offered for a peaceful settlement for all groups. None of the states involved has created and implemented enabling frameworks to negate and resolve the conflict. Furthermore, overlapping systems of resource exploitation and inability to deal with the issue of climate uncertainty remain at the root of the conflict. Neither Niger nor Mali is likely to grant the Tuareg legal autonomy, as Tuareg territory is a new home for gold and uranium (among others) exploration and production. Mali and Niger are expected to be very keen on ending the chain of Tuareg rebellions to ensure that intensive exploration by foreign corporations proceeds uninterrupted. To this end, the Nigerian government is likely to continue exerting military pressure on the rebels by tightening the grip on their territories and launching a series of attacks on their bases. The Malian government,

which has adopted a relatively softer approach, particularly in recent negotiations, will probably make some concessions and implement community development initiatives to win the ADC leadership over to its side.

On the other hand, Tuareg movements will remain fragmented and suffer continuous internal splintering, and penetrations and manipulations by external forces. Peace accords signed so far proved of little significance. Whilst some factions might accept the offerings, others will reject them and seek their own victory. The presence of international powers, whether as mineral explorers or as makers of influential policies towards the conflict will always serve to weaken these movements.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis has shown that persistent inequality in access to land and natural resources in the countries concerned have been at the heart of the conflict of Tuareg. The livelihoods of Tuareg and the opportunities available to them to achieve sustainable livelihoods in all their traditional territories are strongly connected to access to livelihoods resources, including water and pasture land. Changing access to resources amid current tensions and conflict reveals the role of various actors in supporting or hindering people's efforts to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

Tuareg resorted to armed struggle in response to changing access to livelihood resources. The situation was also influenced by the policies, institutions and processes that underline the vulnerability of Tuareg's means of livelihood. These include land reform after independence, sedentarisation, militarisation of Tuareg by governments of the region and their use in the counterinsurgency campaigns of Libya and Algeria.

As climate change and mining exploration accelerate desertification in the region, competition between herders and farmers for dwindling resources has escalated dramatically. The repercussions of drought were exacerbated by lack of government support to the affected population. Although the strategies adopted by Tuareg to cope with these events were not all positive, they have enabled them to survive with diminishing resources. In Niger and Mali, the governments' concern is to secure profits from resource exploitation of Tuareg-occupied land to maintain exports. To clear the fields, Tuareg have been labelled extremist or Islamic jihadists. Many times Tuareg were expelled from one country and found themselves on the doorstep of another.

Since the beginning of 2009 the conflict involving Tuareg has intensified as never before. The problem cannot be solved with broad-brush policies, because of the diversity of social actors and the diversity of political, economic and social factors within the countries

concerned. But as a first step there is a need for a more comprehensive solution that takes into account the root cause of the problem in order to avoid having another Darfur in the region. The challenges for states where Tuareg live included addressing the issue of the widespread poverty and exclusion of Tuareg from the main stream society need to be addressed. In that it is important to link rights-based approaches with livelihoods approaches, or to articulate the political economy of conflict as part of the process of forming the type of livelihood support required. Regional policies could be reversed in order to make a significant contribution to bringing peace to the region. By facilitating and supporting an enabling environment for resolving the conflict through a consensual process drawing on old traditions of conflict resolution. International response to the Tuareg should be guided by principles of human rights law, the right to dignity and non-discrimination. Furthermore, methods for managing conflicts over land, water, and other resources should be strengthened. Agreement after another did not last long and the conflict resumed again, as fierce as it could be. Current fragile peace, and fear of famine, poses a threat of more conflict. Sustainable conflict resolutions cannot be achieved unless all the parties to a conflict are included in the process of conflict transformation. It is imperative to assign equal weight to the interests of all the parties involved, but more importantly include those excluded sections of population involved in the process of finding a solution.

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## ABOUT THE PAPER

The paper highlights the process leading to the armed conflict of Tuareg and the role of different countries in the conflict.

In particular, it examines the way three dramatic events have shaped the livelihoods of Tuareg: the reorganisation of society in the post-independence period; the drought and desertification of 1970s, and 1980s, and the exploration and discovery of uranium and gold beneath their land in Mali and Niger. These events have created a hierarchy of rights to natural resources, with Tuareg being marginalised.

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