

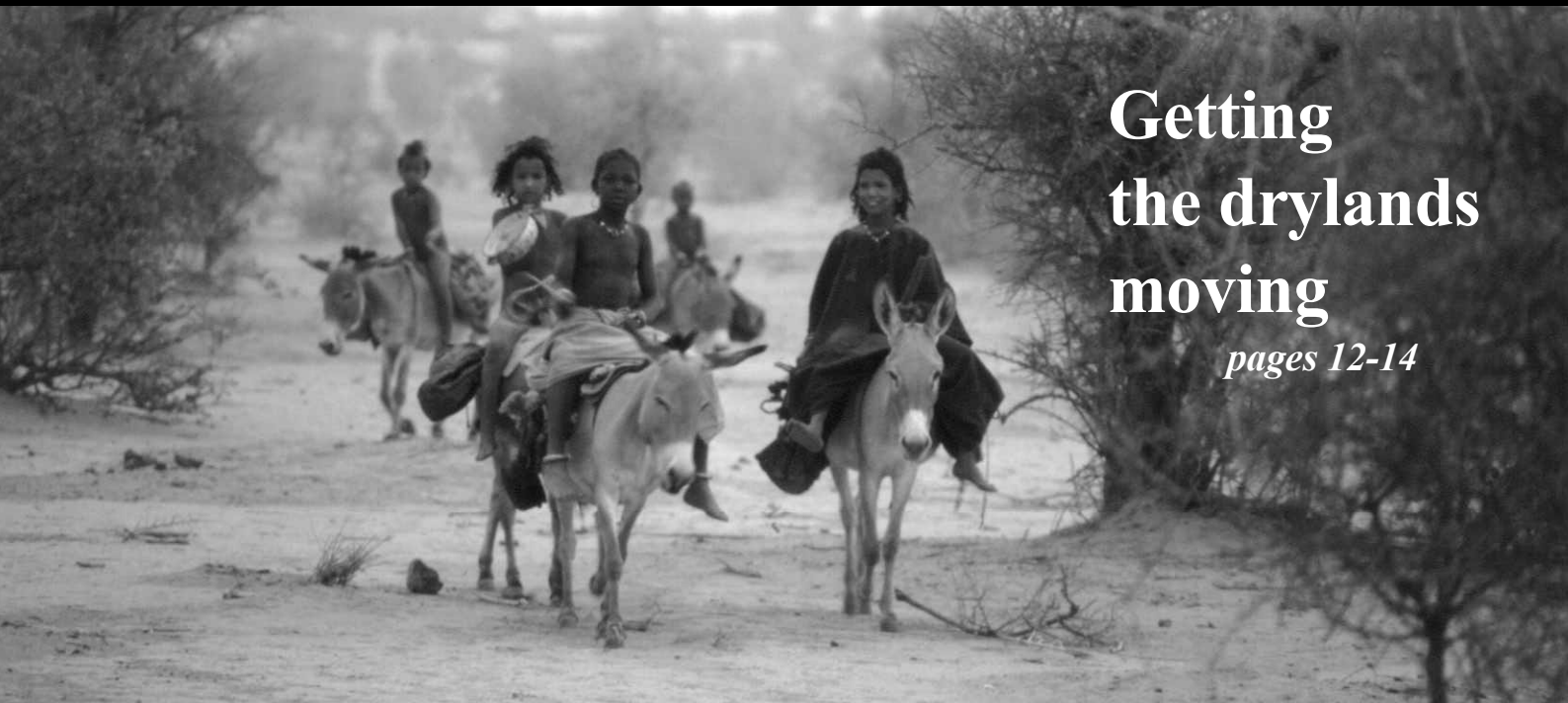
HARAMATA

Silhouettes of camels and riders are integrated into the large, stylized letters of the title 'HARAMATA'. The letters are thick and black, set against a white background. The silhouettes show a line of camels and riders moving from left to right, with the riders positioned within the loops and strokes of the letters.

No. 40, December 2001

Getting
the drylands
moving

pages 12-14





IN THIS ISSUE

No. 40 December 2001

-  **NEWS** 3
Getting hotter • Trade talks • Trouble with
TRIPS • 2020 Vision
-  **PROFILE** 6
Making decentralisation work
-  **RESEARCH AGENDAS** 8
Migrants and development • Against the
grain • Assessing pastures rapidly • Defending
pastoralists • A greener Sahel? • Common
sense with malaria
-  **FEATURE** 12
Getting the drylands moving
-  **LAND MATTERS** 15
Enabling pastoral self-determination • New
programme on pastoral land rights • What
status indigenous rights? • Reform too slow
-  **ISSUES AND PROGRAMMES** 19
Is there a future for family farming in
West Africa?

BOOKS 22 • RESOURCES 26

Cover: Children collecting water, northern Mali.
Photo: Ced Hesse.

Editorial

An ever closer web

As we reach the end of the year 2001, the bright promise of a new millennium appears heavily tarnished. The appalling events of September 11th and the subsequent military action have demonstrated for all the close connectedness of people and places around the world. It used to be said that the beating of a butterfly's wing in China could bring a tornado into being on the other side of the globe. We can see from the new report on global climate change how our inadvertent actions are bringing major shifts in weather patterns around the world. The African continent looks set to suffer significantly, with limited capacity to adapt. Now we know how and why climate change takes place, we have the responsibility to mend our ways, especially in the North where consumption levels over centuries have led to the heavy loading of carbon dioxide our global atmosphere now carries. Ignorance is no longer a refuge.

The trade agenda has been dominating much of this year, in the run-up to the new round of WTO negotiations. These have been held in Qatar to avoid the protesters and street battles which dogged previous global get-togethers. Trade is of huge importance to all countries, yet it is vital that the rules be transparent and fairly applied. If developing countries are to buy into globalisation, then they need to see how they might benefit from increased access to rich country markets. Yet rich countries always seem to manage to bend the rules in ways which suits their interests. Ever ready to impose stringent conditions on poorer neighbours, they are the first to scream and demand special protection when it comes to their own producers.

Collective action, mutual respect, joint decision-making – these fundamental principles need to underlie how we govern our world. They provide a constraint on the pursuit of individual interest which ultimately confers the protection we must seek for all the members of our world.

Getting hotter

The international group of scientists who have been monitoring the world's climate recently produced their 3rd assessment report. These reports by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have proved of enormous influence in informing debate about climate change. This latest publication describes the current understanding of the climate system, its projected evolution and the uncertainties associated with the various predictions.

The climate data show a clear increase in temperature, with the 1990s the hottest decade on record. Night-time temperature increases have been particularly marked, leading to shorter freezing periods, a decrease of 10% in snow cover since the late 60s, and a widespread retreat of mountain glaciers. Accompanying these changes has been a rise of 10 to 20 cms in sea levels.

Carbon dioxide levels have increased by more than 30% since 1750, at a rate of increase which is unprecedented during at least the last 20,000 years. Three quarters is likely due to burning of fossil fuels, while the remainder is the result of land use changes, especially deforestation. Even if we were to succeed in reducing CO₂ emissions, their prolonged impact would persist in the atmosphere for many decades.

Africa is particular vulnerable to climate change, and associated impacts on water availability, food production, human health, desertification, and coastal zones. There are particular concerns for coastal areas which are often heavily populated and vulnerable to sea level rise, as well as possible changes to ocean currents and fish stocks. Equally, given the high dependence on hydro-electric power, and current low water levels in lake storage and dams, the report predicts serious problems with electricity supply coming up. It is also reckoned that changes in temperature will have many negative side

effects, given increased risks of flooding and droughts, and higher incidence of water-borne diseases, such as cholera.

The report notes that there may be a few sources of hope, since new opportunities will also result from climate change. Technology transfer, carbon sequestration, and regional cooperation could provide possible means of coping. Gaining better access to international markets might also help economies diversify into new lines of activity which could increase food security. Overall, however, the picture is sombre and uncertain. The diversity of African climates, high rainfall variability and very sparse data mean it is difficult to predict what may happen in detail. Nevertheless, it is clear that governments must factor in climate change to any future policy analysis.

For more details contact the IPCC, fax: +41.22.730.8025, email: ipcc_sec@gateway.wmo.ch or visit their website from which the summary reports can be downloaded: www.ipcc.ch/

Trade talks

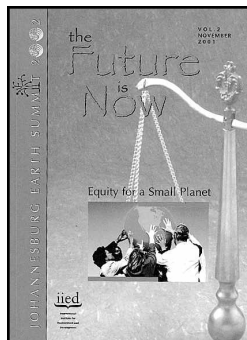
The World Trade Organisation's meeting in Doha in mid-November 2001 provided the first in a long round of negotiations between rich and poor countries regarding the rules underlying world trade. Attention was focused in particular on the launch of a new round of negotiations on agricultural goods. Poorer countries want to gain access to richer country markets for selling a range of produce, such as oil seeds, sugar, fruit and vegetables. At the same time, they would like to see the end of subsidies being paid to farmers in the North, since this makes it difficult for their produce to compete. Equally, it leads to over-production by developed countries and the dumping of surplus produce on markets around the world.

At previous trade negotiations, many poorer countries have complained bitterly about being pushed to the sidelines, and having few possibilities of making their voices heard. Some of this criticism has

been taken on board by the WTO and provision is now being made for capacity building in developing countries, so that trade negotiators are better prepared to handle these complex issues. The Doha meeting also followed a somewhat more participatory process of discussion and decision-making than on previous occasions. However, a number of African delegates report of intimidation by richer countries, who threaten withdrawal of aid money and debt relief unless they follow behind the big four (or 'quad' group of nations – US, Japan, EU and Canada).

Is it realistic to hope for a fairer system of global governance, in which the voices of all nations count, regardless of their commercial and military might? Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there was a better system of global checks and balances, and a wider range of economic and political models to follow. In the current crisis, our global architecture needs a fresh look to be sure it can protect all the world's inhabitants from hazards and extremes. Ethical concerns should temper the steely resolve of market advocates. Exclusion and marginalisation bring despair and a strong sense of injustice – these must be acknowledged and addressed. Sustainable development represents a set of principles and approaches which could provide a solid foundation for renewed global institutions.

Change needs to be profound – the Preamble to the Agreement establishing the WTO already commits the organisation to achieving trade liberalisation that is consistent with the objective of sustainable development. In practice, this has had little impact on the way the institution functions or the values it supports. In 2002, the World



Summit on Sustainable Development and the UN Conference on Financing for Development offer timely opportunities to review the plans for our global institutions and redesign their architecture in ways that give greater consideration to the needs of the poor.

IIED's programme on the World Summit for Sustainable Development has recently published the second in its series – The Future is Now. For copies please email: wssd@iied.org or fax: Tom Bigg at IIED: +44.207.388.2826. www.iied.org/wssd. See also www.wto.org

2020 Vision

A major conference was held in Bonn, September 4-6th, to examine the prospects for global food security, in preparation for the FAO World Food Summit, due in November 2001 but now postponed until 2002. Organised by the International Food Policy Research Institute IFPRI, it brought together several hundred people to discuss how the major challenges lying ahead might be faced, the differing scenarios for world hunger to the year 2020, and the sort of measures governments need to take now, if poverty and malnutrition are not to worsen further.

IFPRI began its 20-20 vision exercise in 1993. It has since generated a very significant series of papers highlighting major issues and findings from the food security debate in different parts of the world. This is backed up by a detailed quantitative model to test out different scenarios regarding food production increases, changes to trading patterns, and access to food. While many factors contribute to the very slow improvements in food security and nutrition in poorer nations, IFPRI argue that one consistent factor has been the lack of political will by governments to place the elimination of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition at the top of the policy agenda. Lack of access to productive assets, such as land, is a major

contributor to poverty as is the very limited availability of farm inputs, appropriate technology and easy access to markets.

Over the next 20 years, the developing world's urban population is likely to double, placing further pressures on food availability. While urban and peri-urban agriculture may provide a significant source of food, there are associated problems with contamination of soils and water in urban areas. Urbanisation and income growth are also generating significant changes in diets. Furthermore HIV/AIDS will increasingly damage farming systems and food supplies in Africa and in many other parts of the developing world. Hence, IFPRI paint a picture of the future which looks uncertain and difficult.

For more information, contact Rajul Pandya-Lorch, IFPRI, fax: +1.202.467.4439, email: R.Pandya-Lorch@cgiar.org

Trouble with TRIPS

The Africa Trade Policy Working Group (ATPWG) has launched an initiative to support African farmers' rights. Current trends in global trade regulations put smallholder farmers in Africa – and the developing world generally – at risk of losing control of their seeds, crops and other agricultural resources to international business interests. The patenting of plant and crop materials threatens community control of local food systems.

In line with its market-oriented approach, the policies of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) work to give transnational corporations access to developing country economies and markets, allowing foreign corporations the same rights as local citizens and enterprises, and supporting the privatisation of natural resources. One way this happens is through Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), a mechanism that allows the global patenting of seeds, plants and animals and the functions they perform.

Africa has taken a lead role in resisting efforts to cede control of

its biological and agricultural resources through privatisation, as exemplified by the work of the Africa Group at the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Organization of African Unity (OAU) has developed 'African Model Legislation for the Protection of the Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders, and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources'. The model legislation is particularly directed towards the US government to support the interests of African smallholder farmers in US trade policy, and at the WTO. The OAU also urges individual African governments to enact the model legislation into national law.

The main principles of the model legislation are:

- Recognition of the rights of local communities over their biological resources, traditional knowledge and technologies as being of a collective nature, taking precedence over rights based on individual or corporate control.
- African states and local people have the right to ensure the conservation, evaluation and sustainable use of their biological resources, knowledge and technologies and to govern access to them.
- Local communities have the inalienable right to access, use, exchange or share their biological resources in sustaining their livelihood systems as regulated by their own customary practices and laws.
- African states and their people have the right to protect farmers' rights and community intellectual property rights to biological resources according to customary law and practice.
- The patenting of life in any of its forms violates these rights.

The initiative has already received support from a number of civil society organisations from around the world. To endorse the declaration of support you can email gri@afjn.org or fax +1.202.832.9051 or visit <http://afjn.cua.edu> for more information.

Making decentralisation work

This ambitious title – Making Decentralisation Work (MDW) – refers to a new policy oriented research and capacity building programme recently begun by IIED's Drylands programme. The primary objectives are to provide support to the decentralisation processes currently underway in the Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, with a view to promoting more equitable, sustainable, and effective management and use of natural resources, on which so many drylands people continue to rely. The programme aims to add value to a broad range of ongoing initiatives through building alliances, strengthening of networks, and identifying gaps where IIED and its West African collaborators can make significant impact.

With generous funding from the Danish and Swedish governments, the first nine months of the MDW programme have been spent in a series of preparatory activities, consultation exercises, a sub-regional workshop on influencing the policy process, and national workshops in each of the four countries, from which plans for the forthcoming year have been developed.

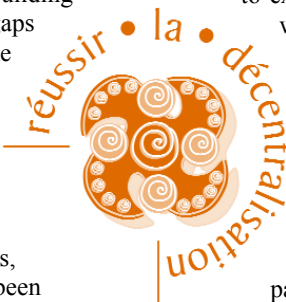
The work programme consists of three main activities. The first – *Empowering local people* – builds on the extensive experience of Senegalese NGO Associates for Research in Education for Development (ARED) in the domain of adult literacy. Over the past six years, ARED has designed and tested training materials in the Pulaar language on a broad range of topics which provide local communities with the skills and confidence to participate in a more informed and effective manner in the decentralisation process in Senegal. Within the context of the MDW programme, ARED will

focus on two areas of work:

- consolidating its experience in Senegal by developing specific training materials to help marginal communities (e.g. pastoral groups) participate more fully in the processes that have an impact on their livelihoods, and
- initiating a process for the spread of these methods to other Sahelian countries.

The second activity – *Building participatory institutions* – builds on the work carried out over the last three years in Senegal and Burkina Faso on the setting up and strengthening of learning groups to examine the barriers to participatory natural management within governmental and non-governmental organisations. Learning groups working at local and district level have initiated and supported research and training activities, as well as stimulated dialogue and exchange between the many different actors working at these levels. Strong collaborative links have been built with other institutions involved in participatory natural management and decentralisation, in order to facilitate joint learning and the emergence of stronger partnerships between a range of different groups. Specific activities of these groups include setting up mechanisms for greater participation by farmer organisations in the decentralisation process, developing the planning and negotiation capacities of local communities in order to strengthen their power to influence policies, and finding ways to support greater involvement by women in local decision-making. IIED Sahel is coordinating this programme of work.

The third activity – *Action-research informing policy* – was launched with the sub-regional workshop 'Strengthening the capacity for analysis and influencing policy on decentralisation and



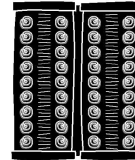
natural resource management in the Sahel held in November 2000 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. This workshop focused on learning lessons regarding how policy is made in the field of decentralisation and NRM, how such policies can be influenced, and ways of increasing the voice of less powerful groups within such processes of decision-making. Discussion of proposals for work in this field of activity has been the primary objective for the national consultation workshops held in each of the four countries.

There is much commonality between the four countries in terms of the priority issues identified, although evidently the context and opportunities faced by groups in each country are fairly diverse. Key themes found in all countries included:

- important political dynamics between customary leaders, other significant economic actors and the decentralisation process;
- the need to develop indicators for monitoring decentralisation in ways which are relevant and applicable by local people;
- a clearer understanding of how the policy process works, to identify ways of informing and influencing decision making;
- how to deal with the lack of fit between administrative and social, economic, and environmental systems, such as where there are common resources which span several communes.

There was also the widespread feeling that a major failing in much of the legislation regarding decentralisation and NRM was due to the lack of opportunities which ordinary people have to make their voices and perspectives heard. Thus, practice on the ground is not much used in formulating government strategies. Advisory groups have been set up in each country to help guide choice of priority areas of work and shaping of activities. A focal point has been nominated in each country who can be contacted for more information. Finally, the programme has a monthly newsletter, *Seg Taaba*, which is published by IIED Sahel.

The MDW programme actively seeks collaboration with other actors. So, please do get in touch with one of the contact points named below.



Burkina Faso

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Migrants and development

The Kayes Region of western Mali has known high levels of migration for several generations. Until 1960, young men mostly went to large coastal African cities, such as Dakar. Since then, France has been the primary destination. In recent years, most migrants have planned a long term stay, rather than just working for a couple of seasons and then returning home.

Many migrants have formed associations in France which group together those from the same part of the Kayes region. With the arrival of many women come to join their husbands in France, they also have come together to work to improve conditions both where they live in France and back home. These associations mobilise substantial amounts of money for investment back in their home towns and villages.

The decentralisation process and establishment of elected communes in Mali have changed the picture by providing a firmer basis for partnership between migrants and their home area. Increasingly, the members of communal councils in Mali are seeking advice and support from their compatriots living and working in France, and looking to them for help in identifying other possible organisations which might help their development. Equally, associations of migrants from a given commune are starting to federate into larger groups in order to respond to the communes' needs.

See: Les associations villageoises de migrants dans le développement communal, by Eric Force, GRDR. Traverses No 10, Groupe Initiatives, 2001. For more information, contact GRDR (Groupe de Recherche et de réalisations pour le Développement Rural dans le tiers-monde), 20 rue Voltaire, 93100 Montreuil, France. Fax: +33 1 48 57 59 75. Email: grdr@wanadoo.fr

Against the grain

Cuban agriculture presents interesting lessons for those seeking an alternative path. Cuba faced a major crisis in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the loss of markets for its sugar cane which had been traded for petrol and fertiliser. The trade embargo imposed by the USA has for long presented Cuba with major barriers to economic development, as it represents a huge potential market on its doorstep. But, such challenges have also helped Cuba develop a rather different pattern of agricultural development which others would do well to learn from.

Cuban agriculture has had to shift from reliance on external inputs, such as tractors, pesticides and fertilisers towards an organic farming system, using animal traction for ploughing. The government has imposed ceilings on the size of land holdings, while also stimulating the setting up of farmers' markets. Although calorie levels remain a little below the WHO recommendations, nevertheless access to food is relatively equitable. Focusing on domestic needs rather than production for trade has enabled Cuba to feed its people in a reasonably fair manner.

Other research on *Policies for the Poor* argues that trade liberalisation is essential for growth, which provides the basis for reduction in poverty. However it notes that the impacts of trade liberalisation



Vegetable production more than quadrupled over the past five years

are usually very country specific, and there are bound to be people who win and others who lose from the associated shift in prices and economic opportunities.

Complementary measures will thus be needed to ensure a broad spread of benefits from opening up trade, such as investment in infrastructure, and strengthening markets for credit, inputs and services. For developing countries, trade in manufactured goods remains subject to considerable barriers imposed by richer nations. Equally, trade in agricultural commodities are finding a new raft of controls being imposed on imported foodstuffs linked to phyto-sanitary controls. At the same time, the pay-out of subsidies on much farm produce in the EU and North America continues to wreck opportunities for African farmers to compete on fair terms.

Going Against the Grain *can be accessed at www.oxfamamerica.org/cuba. For printed copies, contact: info@oxfamamerica.org. Trade Liberalisation – A tool to Alleviate Poverty? *can be obtained from c.gorman@ids.ac.uk, IDS, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK.**

Assessing pastures rapidly

Rapid Veld Assessment (RVA) provides a quick visual method to assess grazing conditions, while at the same time achieving a certain degree of standardisation. The method was developed as part of the Hoanib River Catchment Study (HRCS) in Namibia, to provide local people with a simple method to help manage their land better and move their livestock according to changes in grazing conditions.

The RVA method does not aim to identify different grass species, but rather looks to assess the overall abundance of vegetation cover in an area. No expensive measuring equipment is required for its field use. Over a period of 18 months the HRCS team established a library of 44 photographs representative of the seasonal changes in

grazing in the Hoanib River catchment. These were categorised into six main types:

- Category 0: Bare Ground (no grass)
- Category 1: Extremely Poor Veld (large sections of bare ground, very little grass)
- Category 2: Poor Veld (small sections of bare ground, little grass)
- Category 3: Moderate Veld (less bare ground, more grass)
- Category 4: Good Veld (little observable bare ground, abundant grass)
- Category 5: Excellent Veld (no observable bare ground, abundant grass)



Examples of Category 5: Excellent Veld

The method was tested in the field by six local community researchers over a period of six months. Fixed survey points were established which were then assessed monthly by the community researchers by categorising the veld condition in the immediate vicinity, according to one or several of the photographs on the category sheets. This routine assessment was facilitated by developing simple recording sheets.

Nevertheless, it can be concluded that some degree of standardisation

of veld assessment has been achieved, especially when the assessment of certain fixed points is conducted by the same person on a regular basis.

During the field testing, the RVA proved to offer a relatively consistent method for quick assessment of grazing conditions. Furthermore, it was confirmed to be simple and practical in the field. All six community researchers mastered the RVA after minimal training. It should, therefore, be easily applicable in any field situation by a great variety of people (community members, farmers, ecologists, etc.) after a short introduction with only basic materials. The RVA method appeared to have the potential of becoming a valuable tool for local communities in long-term veld assessment and monitoring.

One problem encountered during field-testing in the HRC was the vast size of the area with its various environments and topography, which made it difficult to choose photos representing the entire area. It is therefore, recommended that local versions of the category sheets be developed. The method can easily be duplicated, as it is only a matter of taking photographs of varying veld conditions throughout the seasons.

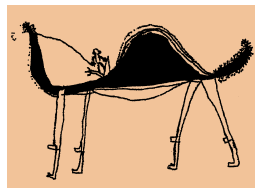
The RVA could be made even easier to apply by reducing the number of categories used. It can be assumed that a more consistent assessment of the observed grazing conditions could be achieved by using only four categories, such as poor, moderate, good and excellent veld. The success of the RVA method will be dependent on continual monitoring and evaluation. While training on how to use the assessment method is essential, what is more important is the evaluation of the results once they have been obtained. It is then the responsibility of the farmer or committee to implement appropriate grazing management based on the observed seasonal variability in grass cover abundance, e.g. allocate seasonal grazing areas and move domestic stock accordingly. It is important that those who use

the RVA method take ownership of it in order to achieve long-term success.

This article is based on a paper by Stephanie Schneider. For more information, please contact the author at stephanies@drfn.org

Defending pastoralists

This doctoral thesis on Tuareg pastoral society represents a weighty, in-depth description of patterns of political control and development in north east Mali. It argues strongly that there is plenty of energy left in pastoral nomadism as a way of life and means of existence. Taking an historical approach, the thesis examines the impacts of drought and rebellion which have scarred the region. Yet social exchanges and fundamental beliefs have remained remarkably unchanged.



The thesis starts with a valuable description of methods and documentation, before turning to the impacts of ecology and history. It goes on to describe questions of social identity and personality within the broader context of family and household structures. The pattern of daily life and sharing of food and animals establish a web of social exchange which continues to provide the backbone of Tuareg life. Despite many attempts to settle them, nomadism remains a vital strategy which allows pastoralists to adapt to new economic possibilities.

In Defence of Pastoralism: Form and Flux among Tuaregs in Northern Mali, by Gunnvor Berge. Thesis 2/2000. Centre for Development & the Environment, PO Box 1116-Blindern, Oslo, Norway. Fax: +47.22.858920.



A greener Sahel?

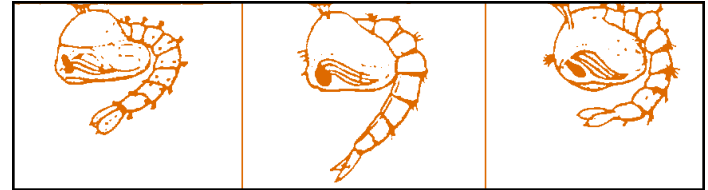
New satellite images for the Sahel region show an unexpected improvement since 1984 in vegetation cover in several parts of the region. Using NOAA satellite data series, it can be seen that there a number of patches where vegetation seems to have increased significantly over the last 15 years. These patches can be seen in southern Mauritania, northern Burkina Faso, north-western Niger, central Chad, western Sudan, parts of Kordofan in Sudan and parts of Eritrea.

There are four possible reasons for this: increased rainfall, change in the composition of vegetation cover with a shift from trees to grass, soil effects, and land use changes. A first analysis shows no particular link between rainfall and this recovery in vegetation. The most plausible answer seems to lie in changing patterns of land use. It is notable that many of these areas coincide with areas that are predominantly pastoral, sometimes combined with regions experiencing unrest. However, the Kordofan patch is in an area where rainfed farming is dominant. A series of workshops and in-depth analysis of the satellite images is underway in order to understand better where such changes stem from and how they might be explained.

For more details, please contact Professors Olsson and Warren: lennart.olsson@miclu.lu.se and a.warren@geog.ucl.ac.uk

Common sense with malaria

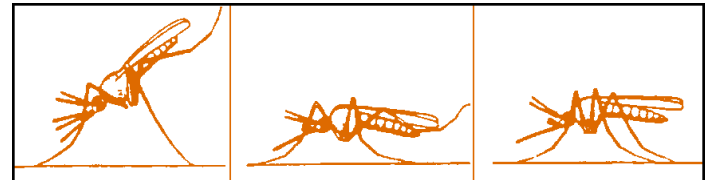
Malaria's resurgence in recent years seems to be associated with an expansion in irrigated agriculture, which provides an ideal breeding ground for the mosquitoes that carry the malaria parasite. It had been thought in the 1950s and 60s that a mixture of drugs and



insecticides could keep malaria in check, but the parasite has gained immunity to the drugs and mosquitoes are increasingly able to withstand chemical control measures.

Now attention is turning to ways of controlling breeding grounds, through more careful environmental management. For example, rice farmers in China let the water in their paddy fields run dry from time to time. Fitting mosquito screens to houses, and promoting the use of bed nets can also help people avoid infection. The System Wide Initiative on Malaria and Agriculture (SIMA), coordinated by the International Water Management Institute in Nairobi, aims to bring together expertise in different fields to help develop best practice to reduce malaria infection around irrigated farming areas. Until an effective vaccine is developed, using common-sense approaches to reduce risks of infection may offer the best value for money.

Contact: s.carriger@cgiar.org, or m.devlin@cgiar.org, or visit www.futureharvest.org



Source: *The Prescriber*, Number 18

Strategies for the sustainable development of the drylands

Much effort is currently invested in the development of strategies for poverty reduction, sustainable development, conservation of biodiversity and adaptation to climate change. Where do drylands issues lie in these emerging themes? A consortium of organisations dedicated to drylands development – the Global Drylands Partnership¹ – has recently produced a series of papers to look at these four major questions in relation to the drylands.

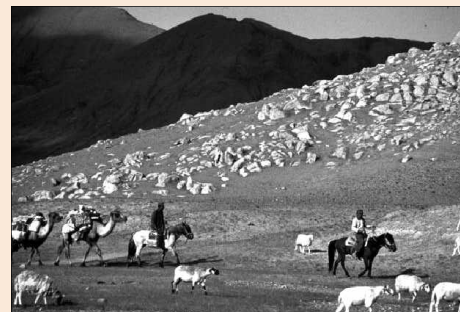
The purpose of these papers is to challenge existing myths and current presumptions of dryland areas, thereby changing the conventional perceptions of the drylands and providing decision-makers with a reliable source of information. Most of the discourse on drylands development is pessimistic, yet there is overwhelming evidence that drylands can be productive and are great sources of biodiversity. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought (CCD) was formulated to increase attention and support to the drylands of the world. Unfortunately, since its adoption, its implementation has been generally poor. These Challenge Papers are intended to cast new light on how we view and work in the drylands. They are meant to question many of the underlying assumptions that frequently inform programme designs and interventions in the drylands. By highlighting these critical challenges, the Global Drylands Partnership hopes to encourage a revival of national efforts in addressing drylands development while building on the synergies between the major global conventions.

¹ This partnership includes: The Canadian International Development Agency, The United Nations Development Programme's Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO), UNDP/Global Environmental Facility, the International Institute for Environment and Development, the World Wildlife Fund, The World Conservation Union and the Near East Foundation.

In this article, Haramata presents a summary of one of the four Challenge Papers looking at which strategies would be best suited for the sustainable development of the drylands.

One of the ironies of the stock market is that the best returns often come from the most neglected stocks. Shares in out-of-favour companies can move dramatically on good news. A similar argument can be made for the relative merits of development assistance in the drylands. It may well be that in the coming decades, the best return for development dollars will come from regions that policy makers have previously shunned.

For decades, drylands have been the neglected stepchild of development because of the harsh, but compelling logic that investments in wetter agricultural areas with richer soils would yield greater returns. By this reasoning, dryland



Managing herds and livelihoods in Mongolia

residents could still benefit from trickle-down effects of investment elsewhere in the form of cheaper food, larger markets and opportunities to migrate to better jobs elsewhere. The result is that many high potential areas, particularly in India and China, have already benefited from green revolution technology and other investments, but now face diminishing returns. The logic for investing in high potential areas is far less compelling today than it was in 1960.

By contrast, research in India and China has demonstrated that investments in drylands can produce high returns, even if yields will

never rival those of wetter regions with richer soils. Apart from direct improvements to rural incomes, such investments yield a host of social and environmental returns that are more difficult to quantify, but nonetheless real.

Investment choices in drylands need to take account of diversity and risk. While a farmer in the Punjab might enjoy a comfortable return on investment growing high yield wheat, the dryland farmer who invests in fertilizer stands a good chance of losing everything through drought, market uncertainties, or the high costs of transport. Dryland regions would benefit from crop research in areas such as drought tolerance, pest resistance, and the ability to improve yields in the face of scarce nutrients, but the place to begin improvements lies with basic factors such as soil and water. Natural resource management techniques to improve soil depth, organic matter, fertility and moisture content, are a necessary first step to set the stage for appropriate use of fertilizers and new varieties.

Instead of the high input approach favoured for rich lands, a more appropriate perspective for drylands would be to search for technologies and adaptations that require low external inputs. This involves some delicate trade-offs since low input technologies (e.g. building vegetative barriers to contain soil erosion and harvest water) tend to be more labour intensive. Similarly, if the use of green manure is going to be encouraged, the pressure to find alternative energy sources can put added pressure on shrubs and trees. Trade-offs also apply to the search for higher yielding varieties of crops, since farmers (and nature) favour robustness over yield in harsh and risky growing conditions.

Where appropriate, a shift to higher value agricultural products and non-farm activities can significantly boost incomes. Livestock, agroforestry and even horticulture can often prosper in areas with dry climatic conditions. Depending on the circumstances, conversion to non-farm activities such as agroprocessing or eco-tourism

might hold potential (although this path carries with it the dangers of disruption and inequities in the distribution of new wealth).

As with any initiative, new ideas should be weighed against their potential to disrupt traditional ways of managing risks and coping with regular droughts. One common strategy in many dryland communities is establishing a portfolio of incomes and assets by which means to hedge exposure to drought, such as by planting a diverse range of crops, keeping different types of animal, and seeking out new opportunities. Another de facto hedging strategy involves building strong social networks and kinship links that provide a safety net in bad times. Pursuit of individual entrepreneurship may risk disrupting these ties, exacerbating suffering during drought.

There may be common elements to dryland problems and risk management strategies, but policy makers must resist the temptation to assume that one set of development tools can be applied across the



The terracing of the Loess plateau, China, turned dusty land into maize fields



Growing tobacco in a well manured garden, Mali

Jim Suttle

Camilia Toulmin

Getting the drylands moving

Ced Hesse



Milk sales booming in Djenne, Mali!

board. Though united by water stress, drylands are remarkably diverse, and each dryland household has its own risk/reward calculation when it comes to investing labour and choosing crops. Vegetative barriers, which find ready acceptance as a means of saving water and soil in the Machakos region of Kenya, were rejected in parts of Burkina Faso in favour of stone bunds because these required a one-time investment of off-season labour.

Given these trade-offs, sensitivities and constraints, how best might governments and donors invest in drylands? Governments should be judicious in the way in which they introduce market reforms. Unless accompanied by public investment in infrastructure, market reforms could destroy rather than encourage developments in drylands. In poorer regions of Africa, for example, market reforms have often raised the price of fertilizer and reduced its availability.

Strengthening public institutions is important, including research and extension. Governments need to recognise the rights and responsibilities of local people to manage their land by giving official recognition to the tenure arrangements drawn up between different user groups.

Perhaps the best way to encourage sustainable farming and investment in the future is to assure farmers of long-term access to the land. Indigenous tenure systems often provide this. As population pressures and commercialisation encourage a shift towards individualisation of plots, governments can facilitate such adaptation. This is beginning to occur in certain parts of West Africa. NGO's can help too, by providing expertise to local communities, in collective management of resources, and provision of technical support.

With these adjustments and investments, dryland regions could face a better future. Recent research in rural areas of India and China show that some public investments in dryland areas have brought greater returns at the margin than comparable investments in irrigated areas, and the impact on poverty alleviation has been far more significant.

Without question, investment in the drylands poses more challenges than investment in high potential areas. Population densities are low, but the people themselves are a major resource, both in terms of motivation and their skills. If, as in the world of business, investors bet on people and their resourcefulness, then the drylands are a good wager.

Based on the summary article by UNSO of the Challenge Paper "Strategies for the Sustainable Development of Drylands Areas" by Peter Hazell (IFPRI). For more information on the Global Drylands Partnership, go to <http://www.undp.org/seed/unsop/gdp/intro.html>. The complete version of the four Challenge Papers are download-able from this site.

Enabling pastoral self-determination

Why is it that pastoral development across much of Africa has had such a chequered history? Why is it that pastoral people do not seem to respond to efforts to bring them improved health, education and livelihood opportunities? Part of the problem is that many of the policies designed to improve pastoral livelihoods often have had the opposite effect, and are thus quite reasonably shunned by them. Poor understanding of the dynamics and rationale of pastoralism is partly the problem. Pastoralists are perceived to pursue archaic, unproductive and environmentally damaging forms of land use, that need to be brought into line with “progressive and modern development”. Yet, paradoxically, over the past thirty years an enormous amount of research has been carried out that provides sound scientific evidence that pastoralism is a viable system, well adapted to the unstable environmental conditions of dryland Africa. But much of this research has not filtered down to those who most need it and, as a consequence, policies continue to be made which either ignore or, worse, undermine the ability of pastoral people to respond to change.

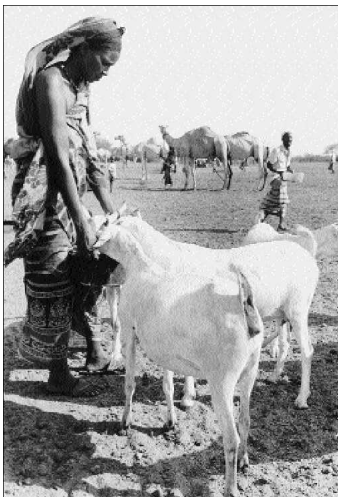
There are also strong political and economic factors that underlie the marginalisation of pastoral people and the areas in which they live. First, they represent a “minority vote”. Pastoralists are relatively few in number, are not well organised and do not represent a significant political force. They also



occupy land considered to be marginal and of low agricultural potential, which is either left as ‘wasteland’, or appropriated for other purposes, such as military bases, conservation areas, etc.

The design of pastoral development policy cannot be left to policy makers alone. Pastoral people need to seize the initiative and find ways of making government ready to take account of their needs. But this is not an easy task, given the reality in which most pastoral people live today, combined with limited budgets and short term political horizons.

Helping pastoral people to fight their own cause is the subject of an excellent book that has just been published by Oxfam: *Perspectives on Pastoral Development. A casebook from Kenya* by Izzy Birch and Halima Shuria. The book traces the history of Oxfam’s involvement in helping Somali pastoralists in the District of Wajir (northern Kenya) to develop pastoral associations to represent and defend their own interests. The Wajir Pastoral Development Project (WPDP) recognised from the outset that creating the conditions whereby local people can take charge of their own destiny is a delicate task. In a context such as Wajir this is particularly difficult, since pastoralists are dispersed and often divided by clan hostility, and many face acute poverty and insecurity. Self-determination cannot be provided from outside by well-meaning development organisations. It has to be developed from within by pastoral citizens through their institutions and organisations.

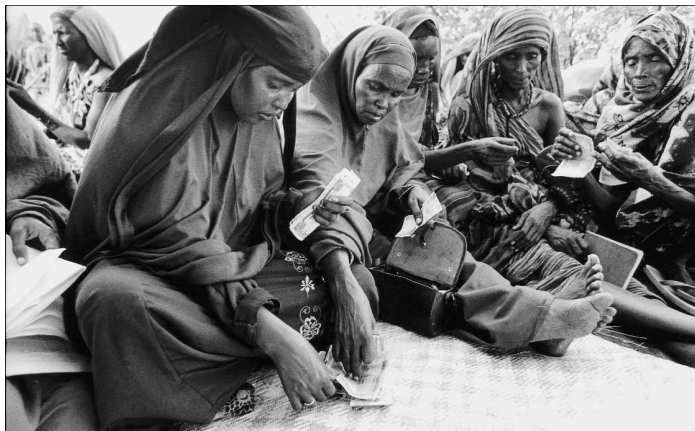


Woman watering her goats at Kutulo borehole, Wajir District

Geoff Syper

LAND MATTERS

Simon Barnister



Members of a women's credit group in Wajir town

External help is critical in this process but it has to be done with care. The WPDP offers some very valuable lessons in this area which are clearly highlighted by Birch and Shuria in their publication.

A key feature of the approach used by Oxfam has been the ability to reconcile a “service delivery” approach with a more strategic agenda of empowerment. Pastoral people cannot organise on empty stomachs or when their children or animals are sick. Responding to pastoralists’ immediate needs is essential if they are to be in a position to subscribe to more intangible issues such as “empowerment”. Another strength of the Wajir Pastoral Development Programme is the delicate issue of promoting a more equitable society from “outside”. All too often NGOs want to eradicate discriminatory practices and attitudes towards women and other social groups. Unfortunately this assumption of the moral high ground does little to improve the situation and can lead to hardening of attitudes. WPDP’s experience

of encouraging internal processes of democratisation, particularly for women in what is a male-dominated society, is salutary and is allowing for the slow but certain emergence of a strong, representative and accountable pastoral civil society movement in Wajir.

The authors are scrupulously honest in their assessment of the project’s successes and failures. One area requiring significant improvement is the strengthening of the District Pastoralist Association’s ability to influence policy particularly at national level. There are also important questions of financial sustainability and what will happen once Oxfam pulls out as is planned in a few years time. Extending the project’s success in helping pastoral groups address issues of equity and gender to the broader Somali society in Wajir and beyond is another major challenge.

The book is a pleasing mixture of analysis backed by moving testimonies from pastoral citizens, project staff and others living in Wajir as well as detailed case studies to illustrate key points. There are few, if any, books of this nature particularly on pastoral institutional building in dryland Africa and it fills a much-needed gap in the literature. It merits being translated into Somali and other pastoral languages as well into French so as to inspire pastoral people in other parts of the continent.

The authors’ account of the pastoral association movement in Wajir highlights how self-determination is a long term generational process that needs to be nurtured until it comes of age and is strong enough to defend itself. But they have also shown how in Wajir local people know where they are going and have already started on their journey.

Perspectives on Pastoral Development: A casebook from Kenya. I. Birch & H. A. O. Shuria. Oxfam Publication. 146pp. ISBN: 085598-467-8. Price: £7.95 + p&p. To order, please contact BEBC Distribution. Fax: +44.1202.712.930. Email: Oxfam@bebc.co.uk

New programme on pastoral land rights

The Regional Pastoral Land Rights Programme was launched last September in Naivasha, Kenya, at the closure of the conference Pastoral Land Rights in Eastern Africa: Implications for the Development of Pastoral Areas hosted jointly by Landnet East Africa and RECONCILE. The programme will be implemented by this East African network in collaboration with RECONCILE and other member organisations and will focus on:

- action on cross-border pastoral issues, such as conflict, development and the management of livestock and livestock diseases;
- documentation and awareness-raising on the development and implementation of legislation, impact assessment, pastoral participation in land use planning, land use conflicts between pastoralism and wildlife conservation, and engagement with policy processes such as PRSPs.

Landnet East Africa will promote greater networking on issues touching on pastoralism and pastoral land rights, in collaboration with national and sub-regional bodies. It will work in partnership with member organizations, and aim to reinforce the capacity of pastoral groups to advocate for their interests at national and sub-regional levels. Efforts will be made to help harmonise donor initiatives on pastoral land rights in the sub-region. To facilitate the sharing of information and experience, the network will develop pastoral profiles of the member countries and create a database and resource centre on pastoral land rights.

Landnet East-Africa launched

The East African sub-regional component of *Landnet Africa* was formally launched at Naivasha, Kenya in September 2001, marking the culmination of a process that started in February 1999 when the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) hosted a conference on land policy and development in Sub-Saharan Africa at Sunningdale, outside London. That conference brought together land policy practitioners and experts from all over Sub-Saharan Africa as well as Northern experts and donor representatives interested in land issues in Africa. A key recommendation of the conference was the establishment of a networking framework that would facilitate the exchange of information and the sharing of expertise between African land policy practitioners. At the inaugural General Assembly of *Landnet East Africa*, the constitution of the network was adopted and RECONCILE was designated to be the secretariat. A steering committee of three representatives from each of the member countries was duly elected. Over the coming months, the secretariat will develop a strategic plan and funding proposal for presentation to donors by the end of the year. The members expect the network to spearhead the sharing of experience and building of capacity for land policy development and administration within the four countries, and between them and other countries of Africa and the world. The challenges facing these countries with respect to the administration of land and natural resources are many and varied. All four countries are in the process of policy development relative to land and there is an obvious need to facilitate the participation of people in government and civil society in policy debate.

For further details, please contact: Michael Ochieng Odhiambo, Coordinator, Landnet East Africa, c/o RECONCILE, Printing House Road, P.O. Box 7150, Nakuru, Kenya. Fax: +254.37.214.835. Email: ekmoo@africaonline.co.ke or reconcile@net2000ke.com

What status indigenous rights?

A federal judge's ruling in Malaysia has helped strengthen the rights of indigenous groups over land, rivers and forests. After a two year case, the judge upheld the rights of the Iban village of Rumah Nor that the Borneo Paper & Pulp company did not have the right to clear and destroy the village's rainforest. Prior to this ruling, only farmland being actively cultivated could be considered native customary lands.

Two years ago, the company was granted a licence by Sarawak's Land and Survey department to create a one million hectare plantation of fast growing trees, and they began cutting down forests claimed by the Iban community. Villagers then sued to stop the logging and claim damages. The paper company is appealing against the judge's decision but, if it stands, his ruling could have important consequences for those seeking firmer indigenous rights over resources. Legal precedents from British Commonwealth countries like Malaysia can be used in other Commonwealth countries as providing a basis for subsequent cases.

Without official recognition, indigenous people are often treated like squatters on their own land by loggers or plantation developers who have gained government backing for their plans. The judge's ruling has reversed this situation so that the common presumption is that villagers are owners of the land, with the burden on other claimants to prove that they are not. Maps provided an important part of the case. This 'map' had been developed in collaboration with an NGO that has been supporting villagers to understand and defend their legal rights. While the paper company argued that the map was not sufficiently well-executed to act as evidence, the judge replied that perfection was not necessary to prove who owned the area in question. *For more details, see: www.ecoworld.com/home*

Reform too slow

Land reform in South Africa: Is it meeting the challenge? This is the first in a series of policy briefs aimed at debating land reform and rural development in South Africa. It sets out the main challenges facing land reform and argues for an accelerated programme to fight poverty and inequality. Seven years after the return to democracy, many of the hopes of substantial reform remain unfulfilled, with over 13 million people crowded into homelands, where rights to land are unclear and contested. On private farms, millions of workers and their families face high levels of insecurity and lack of basic facilities. While in the cities, peri-urban settlements have expanded enormously, beset with crime, poverty and economic crisis.

Recent changes in policy have shifted the focus from redistribution of land to large numbers of landless, towards targeting suitably qualified male farmers, with capital of their own, to establish larger scale commercial farms. As a result, the programme is excluding the poorer, more marginalised members of society. A new vision of land reform is needed which tackles areas of greatest need in both urban and rural areas, accompanied by much fuller public debate about where the priorities should lie. This will require a more interventionist approach by the state, and a level of financial support and mechanism for implementation which goes far beyond what has been tried out so far. The author argues that the best way to get this done would be through decentralisation of decision-making and land use planning to local government structures.

For copies of this Policy Brief, please visit: www.uwc.ac.za/plaas or write to: PLAAS, University of the Western Cape, Private bag x17, Bellville, Cape Town 7535. Fax: +27.21.959.3732



Is there a future for family farming in West Africa?

There is growing concern about the risks to small-scale family farms in West Africa associated with current strategies for trade liberalisation and agricultural development. Over the next ten years, West Africa will have to face up to increased competition from international trade both in traditional commodities (cotton, cocoa, coffee, oilseeds), and for domestic food crops. For those countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, where the national currency floats freely, greater protection from imports is possible. But for the many countries of the CFA Franc zone, it may be much harder to provide the agricultural sector with protection from cheap imports of meat, rice, maize and other crops grown on an industrial scale in south America and Asia. At the same time, continued agricultural subsidies paid to farmers in rich countries make it impossible for West African farmers to gain access to markets in the North.

The long term scenario painted by the OECD's West Africa Long Term Perspective Study report (1998) predicts major changes to the agricultural sector over the next 20 years. Overall, it is viewed likely that a small number of large, commercial farm operators will emerge, able to invest in new technology, sell into world markets and compete with imports from elsewhere. Much of this agricultural intensification will take place close to urban markets and good infrastructural networks. Elsewhere, and particularly in drier, lower potential areas, patterns of farming and levels of productivity will change less markedly, with increasing diversification into a range of off-farm sources of income, including migration. Such a vision of the likely changes to the West African farming sector is further emphasized by the World Bank's recent report – African Poverty at

the Millennium, which considers *'there must be real doubts about the long-term sustainability of smallholder agriculture in the face of globalisation and agricultural liberalisation. This has huge implications for the rural poor. Africa's agricultural future is almost certainly bound up with accelerated commercialisation and development of larger farms, with greater use of modern know-how and lower unit costs.'* (World Bank, 2001).

However, such a vision is not accepted by everyone as inevitable. Past experience with cash crop development in many parts of the region has shown the enormous dynamism and flexibility of the West African smallholder, whether it be in cocoa development in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, the cotton farmers of southern Mali, irrigated rice production in the *Office du Niger*, or market gardening activities around every major town and city. Equally, the 'traditional' livestock sector has continued to supply much of West Africa's meat markets with cattle and small stock. The 'traditional' small farmer has been remarkably adaptable and able to exploit new economic opportunities, despite the threats caused by dumping of cheap rice and frozen beef, which have disrupted their markets.

The debate about the future of the small family farm raises a number of important questions:

- Is such a shift in the agricultural sector inevitable and necessary? What would be the consequences for key social, economic, political and environmental parameters – such as distribution of land holdings, access to income, levels of poverty and vulnerability, social organisation and values, local politics, rural settlement and service provision, environmental management, and food security?
- Does it make economic, social and political sense to promote a few large holdings and generate substantial landlessness? How might such a policy conflict with broader objectives, such as

democracy, decentralisation, equitable economic growth, and addressing poverty?

- Do West African governments and society have any room for manoeuvre, to identify the vision they would wish to promote of agricultural development in future and its contribution to broader rural development, livelihoods and society?
- What is the evidence for larger farm size being more efficient, and competitive? Is there converse evidence which shows the multiple advantages associated with family farming?
- Can West African agriculture 'modernise' and become competitive while opting for the family farm as a major element of its agricultural and rural development strategy? What are the implications for related policy measures? How far does current farm policy discriminate in favour of larger farm holdings?

So far, the emerging debate has raised more questions than it has answered. There are different visions of how far the state should actively intervene to shape the sector, and the extent to which economic liberalisation should be pursued at all cost. While governments may have relatively little room for manoeuvre, given constraints on government expenditure and the regulations surrounding trade, they may nonetheless find ways of ensuring smallholders face a more level playing field when it comes to accessing markets, inputs, advice, credit and so on.

Small farms are more productive

Recent economic research points to a positive relationship between more equitably distributed land assets, and economic growth (Deininger & Squire 1997). Work from Egypt also points to the positive impact of land re-distribution on subsequent rates of economic growth (quoted in Quan, 2000). This contrasts with earlier work which had suggested that in the early stages of economic develop-

ment, inequality was likely to become more marked. Such an adverse shift was even seen as a necessary part of the economic growth process, whereby increased investment could be generated from the incomes of richer groups and higher levels of growth established.

Research has also investigated differences in productivity between small and large farm size, with the consensus being reached that, except for very tiny plots, there tends to be an inverse relationship between holding size and levels of productivity. There may be exceptional circumstances where this relationship does not hold, such as where substantial economies of scale exist, or where access to certain inputs is limited to larger farmers, such as in the apartheid era in South Africa. But in general, it would seem that maintaining a smallholder farming sector, which has access to necessary inputs and markets is good not only for economic growth, but also for poverty reduction.

Given that poverty eradication now forms the central plank of all development aid agencies, it becomes less clear why many observers assume that a shift to fewer larger farms is a necessary evil, essential for generating agricultural growth, especially given the



Working together: young men harvesting fonio, Mali

associated adverse implications for social equity, poverty, distribution of wealth, as well as risks of generating conflict. As Quan argues *'the greater and more secure farmers' sense of ownership over small, family-run farms, the greater will be the labour input, and the higher the resulting land productivity. Promoting labour intensive growth, including the encouragement of small farms, and more egalitarian land relations is likely to have a more significant impact on reducing poverty than more capital intensive growth which marginalises small producers and undermines their land rights'* (2000: 42). It is also worth asking – who is pushing the argument in favour of larger commercial farms? What is their particular interest? Are they hoping to benefit from preferential access to land, credit, agricultural inputs, and marketing opportunities?

Seeking evidence to support small holders

There is ongoing debate in the West African region to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different choices for agricultural policy. A continued central role for small-scale family farms is argued on several grounds:

- The strong integration of social and cultural values they provide which are of great significance to survival in high risk, drought prone areas;
- The need for diverse land use practices to address the multiple niches found within dryland ecosystems, more easily attained by smallholder producers;
- Small farms are usually combined with a range of off-farm incomes, providing livelihood diversification, and broader patterns of local economic development than where land ownership is more concentrated;
- The farm household and village community as institutions provide a means to mediate between individual and collective needs.

Overall, more attention needs to be paid to ways of making the small family farm competitive and able to cope with the winds swept in by changes to the global economy. At the same time, work needs to identify and synthesize information, literature, and evidence on relations between farm size, modernisation, economies of scale and access to inputs and markets to clarify the different arguments being put forward. If this material were written up in clear and simple form, it could support debate within the region, and in broader international arenas.

Strategies for using such information need to be developed, to campaign and lobby at national, sub-regional and international levels in favour of a broader vision for agricultural and trade development which considers the implications of different policy approaches and strategies. Lobbying at sub-regional level needs to link to debate within the WTO and OECD member states, since it is their trade and agricultural policies which have a major negative impact on opportunities for trade and agricultural development in the West African region.

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Policies, properties and production in the West African Sahel: Understanding natural resource management. T.A. Benjaminson and C. Lund (eds.). 2001. The Nordic Africa Institute. ISBN: 91-7106-476-1. 333pp. US\$29.95 (or £18.95). The Nordic Africa Institute, PO Box 1703, SE-751 47 Uppsala, Sweden. Email: orders@nai.uu.se. On-line: <http://www.nai.uu.se/webbshop/ShopGB>

This book is a rich collection of case studies on natural resource management in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, which are the product of Norwegian and Danish social science research in this area. The research presented is the product of years of fieldwork, presenting a vision from below on how resource management is influenced by power struggles and politicisation linked to rights over land and resources. The book is divided in three sections: Politics, Property and Production. Various case studies deal with changes in the pastoral economy, tenure and resource management. The evolving political constellation in the Sahel, such as the repositioning of customary authorities in Burkina Faso or the advent of decentralisation in Mali establishing new actors in the countryside, is an other recurrent theme. The book has essays on political ecology in the Sahel, changing

property rights and agricultural productivity. It concludes that Sahelian people do take state policies and development projects into account when deciding on natural resource management, which is one aspect among many others in social life, but they do not necessarily wait for policies to be designed and implemented nor indeed abide by them.

Current land policy in Latin America: regulating land tenure under neo-liberalism A. Zoomers and G. van der Haar (eds.) 2000. ***Land and sustainable livelihoods in Latin America.*** A. Zoomers (ed.) 2001. KIT publishers, P.O. Box 95001, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Fax. +31.20.658.8286. Email: publishers@kit.nl

Rising interest in land policy is not limited to the African continent as demonstrated by these two newly published books, with over 30 case studies and essays on Latin American land issues. The first volume reflects on the shift away from distributive land reform policies towards privatisation and individualisation and its underlying assumptions. Special attention is paid to the functioning of land markets and their implications for equity. Latin America is a continent where statutory legislation dates back to the Spanish colonial occupation,

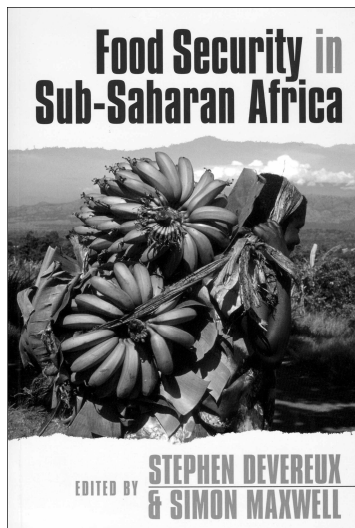
which has gone through many reviews. Revised legislation often does not take into account the actual dynamics in land tenure on the ground for which local rules have been developed. The result is a complex, layered system of land regulations, with many inconsistencies and gaps, overseen by an often inadequate judicial system which finds it difficult to cope with disputes, let alone the protection of rights of weaker members in society. In the second volume, the implications of changing land tenure regimes for land use and farmers' livelihood are analysed. Some questions asked concern whether gaining greater access to land is still a way to escape from poverty and how changing tenure affects prestige, identity and social relations. The authors hope that this type of research will inspire policy makers to do greater justice to the diversity and dynamics of rural life when formulating policies.

Food security in sub-Saharan Africa. Stephen Devereux & Simon Maxwell (eds.). 2001. ITDG Publishing. ISBN: 1-85339-523-4. 350 pp. £15.95. Contact ITDG Publishing, 103-105 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HL, UK. www.itdgpublishing.org.uk

Food security is receiving renewed



attention, as illustrated by the FAO conference on global food security which had been planned for the end of this year. This attention is much needed and particularly important for Africa, where poverty and hunger are getting worse compared with most other parts of the world, as is argued in this book. It discusses the evolution of thinking about food security and experience with targeted policy and planning. One sea change in approach has been the acceptance that lack of food is more a consequence of household level poverty than of inadequate production or availability. Policy and institutions are crucial for assuring food security, and fortunately there is room for optimism, with a series of West African countries improving greatly their performance. Dealing with food security essentially requires a multi-sectoral approach, in contrast to donor support programmes which are emphasising a sectoral approach. Most countries are now better



prepared logistically, to deal with disasters. Preventing food insecurity is, however, key and much still needs to be done while important challenges also lie ahead. Shocks to food supplies may become more severe if climate change starts to bring major changes to farming systems, and if violent conflict remains unchecked. The outcomes of globalisation and trade agreements for poorer, import dependent economies are uncertain, as are the effects of new technologies which may transform agriculture. Although agriculture will remain a core sector for food security, urban poverty is on the rise too, requiring a different approach. Effective solutions require policies that address the root causes of chronic food insecurity, which need to be based on evidence and understanding of poor people's livelihoods.

The Development Gateway has developed a useful site on food security with interactive features and searchable data by country: <http://developmentgateway.org/all-topics>

Agro-Silvo-Pastoral Land Use in Sahelian Villages. Advances in Geoecology 33. L. Stroosnijder and T. van Rheenen (eds.). 2001. Catena Verlag GMBH, Germany. ISBN: 3-923381-45-X. 408pp. To order, fax: +49.6408.64978 or email: catenaverl@aol.com

This book is a very important contribution to the on-going debate on the future of the Sahelian region, and whether its peoples and the livelihoods they pursue can adapt to declining rainfall and rising population levels. The popular perception of the Sahel by many policy makers, development workers and the wider community is of a region in continuing decline. Desertification and environmental degradation as a result of poor rainfall and inappropriate land use systems are widely believed to be irreversible, thus condemning the region to perpetual poverty and dependence on foreign assistance.

The results of ten years of detailed local level research in the Sahel and especially Burkina Faso by Wageningen University in partnership with the University of Ouagadougou within the *Antenne Sahélienne* programme challenges this doomsday view. The research sought to determine the conditions under which rural people are able and willing to improve the



productivity of their land use systems while respecting principles of sustainable use.

The research findings question the generally accepted idea that the natural resource base of the Sahel is in dramatic decline. Although degradation is happening it is localised and not irreversible. It is the exception rather than the rule. However, what is clear from the research is that the Sahelian environment is undergoing continuous evolution as a result of changing land use systems, themselves a consequence of shifting rainfall patterns and population densities. This is most evident in the Sudanian zone of the Sahel with the gradual conversion of former forest lands to farmland. To some observers, this is a sign of degradation. To others, it is development. The mere conversion of land from one form of use to another should not automatically be taken as a sign of degradation.

The potential for agricultural intensification in the face of rising population and limited resources is another key area addressed by the research. Findings from the case studies indicate that the potential for intensification over the Sahel as a whole is limited over the next ten years. More research is needed to determine where and when intensification makes sense. The research also addresses the question of what

are the options open to farmers in those areas where agricultural intensification is not a realistic or desirable prospect. Alternative crops, tourism and low-wage industry are tentatively advanced as sectors that might provide alternative livelihood opportunities for the people of the Sahel.

***Democracy and development in Mali.* R.J. Bingen, D. Robinson and J.M. Staatz (eds.). 2000. Michigan State University Press. ISBN: 0-87013-560-0. 352 pp., \$29.95. 2000. To order, fax: +1.517.432.2611 or visit: <http://www.msupress.msu.edu/african/mali.html>**

This book consists of a series of contributions first presented at a symposium on democracy and development in Mali, held in 1998 at Michigan State University. It reflects MSU research in Mali over the last 20 years and covers a wide range of subjects, from the cultural and historical setting, via economic and



agricultural policy reform, to political innovation. Most chapters are detailed case studies of political change and economic processes.

***Associational Life in African Cities: Popular Responses to the Urban Crisis.* Arne Tostensen, Inge Tvedten and Mariken Vaa (eds.). 2001. The Nordic Africa institute, Uppsala, Sweden. US\$ 24.95 (or GB£ 16.95). The Nordic Africa Institute, PO Box 1703, SE-751 47 Uppsala, Sweden. Email: order@city.akademibokhandeln.se. On-line: <http://www.nai.uu.se/webbshop/ShopGB>**

Africa is one of the least urbanised regions in the world, but its cities and towns are growing faster than anywhere else. These high rates are usually, and sometimes mistakenly, attributed to the inflow of rural migrants, although research indicates that on average two-thirds results from natural growth (as many migrants are young) or from changes in city boundaries. National governments have perceived the high rates of urban growth as deeply problematic and have seldom responded with appropriate policy measures. Most African cities are now in crisis, with failing services and inadequate local government structures, shortage of housing and jobs, severe



environmental problems, widespread poverty and increasing inequalities. Many researchers think that this is primarily a result of failures in government, including inappropriate institutional and legal frameworks or corruption.

The seventeen chapters in this book are mostly case studies drawn from a diverse set of African cities. It provides a rich inside view into the multitude of associations that has emerged in African cities in recent years. The term 'associations' ranges from informal, neighbourhood-based networks to well-established, citywide NGOs. People may have come together to solve a commonly felt need or are bound by a shared place of origin, ideology and religion. Associations can play an important role in creating a new urban identity, becoming an integrative force. A central theme in the book is how economic decline, downgrading of the role of the state, and failing infrastructure and services have led to an upsurge of urban associations and the strengthening of networks. Mutual assistance helps to alleviate poverty but can also become a productive resource, often being at the heart of the extensive trading arrangements which span Africa. The strength of associations and their capacity to deliver depend in large part on the quality of lead-

ership, internal ways of working (such as accountability and transparency), a focus on clear and practical objectives, and a well-defined relation with government structures.

***Dynamics and diversity: Soil fertility and farming livelihoods in Africa.* Ian Scoones (ed.). 2001. Earthscan. ISBN: 1-85383-820-9. 244 pp. £16.95. To order, contact Earthscan Publications Ltd, 120 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JN, UK. Fax: +44.207.278.1142. Earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk. On-line bookshop: <http://www.earthscan.co.uk>**

The management of Africa's soils is one of the major challenges facing agriculture, food security and rural livelihoods on this continent. Governments, researchers and aid agencies have assumed that soils are being degraded on a large scale and that farmers are contributing to this degradation through 'over-cultivation' and a range of outmoded farming practices. Yet a closer look reveals that soils are being managed in often highly sophisticated ways, with farmers seeking to transfer nutrients from low to high potential farm plots, and use the landscape and its diversity to improve the overall productivity of their farms.

There is no such thing as an average

farmer – but a wide range of farming families with varied priorities and strategies. Socio-economic status and access to resources are important determinants of farming practice, and the extent to which soils can be kept in healthy condition. Farmers are also involved in a multitude of other activities, so investment of time and effort on the farm has to be judged against the returns which might be got from migration, off-farm incomes, and so on.

This detailed and well-argued book draws on a comparative review of farm level case studies from Ethiopia, Mali and Zimbabwe. It contrasts the narratives on soil fertility and the policies they have spawned with actual practice at farm level. It argues for an historical understanding of how environments and farming systems change, in response to various pressures, including changing access to markets, legal and policy changes. It concludes with a look forward, which would need to support a range of local level processes, that pays attention to institutional and policy settings, and which casts soil fertility issues within the broader landscape of livelihood options. It is essential reading for those involved not only in agricultural and rural development, but also in how ideas take root, and the need to contest received wisdom.



Cow up a tree. Knowing and learning for change in agriculture. Case studies from industrialised countries. M Cerf *et al.* (eds.). INRA Editions, Versailles, France. ISBN: 2-7380-0929-8. 492pp. Fax: +33.1.3083.3449

Contributors to this book argue that we need to understand and change how we learn. Case studies are presented from ten developed countries (including Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden and Greece) to explore ways in which knowledge is created and adaptations in practice achieved. The researchers make a powerful plea in favour of no longer standing on the theoretical sidelines but getting involved in 'doing', by engaging in the practice of what they are meant to be studying. Collective research and reflection which brings many actors together can generate new insights and challenge 'business as usual'. Lateral thinking can bring many benefits by helping researchers and do-ers look with new eyes at



the possibilities in front of them. This book outlines some of the ways in which our thinking about problems can be freed up to develop new solutions.

Seed Provision and Agricultural Development: The Institutions of Rural Change. Rob Tripp. 2001. Overseas Development Institute, UK. ISBN: 0-85255-420-6-192. pp. £14.95. Order from ODI: 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD, UK. Fax: +44.207.922.0399. Email: publications@odi.org.uk. Bookshop: <http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/order.html>

Many of the current controversies over globalisation, intellectual property protection, biotechnology and the future of farming are played out in seed provision. This book provides a detailed look at the strengths and weaknesses of seed management in traditional farming systems, reviews the history of formal plant breeding and the origins of seed trade, and examines contemporary seed systems of industrialised and developing countries. The book also describes the major types of aid interventions in developing country seed systems and explains why many of these have not been successful. Examples are drawn from original research in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as from an extensive review of the literature. The result is a comprehensive picture of seed provision that allows the reader to go beyond the oversimplified views that dominate debates about agricultural development.

Resource centre on pastoralism

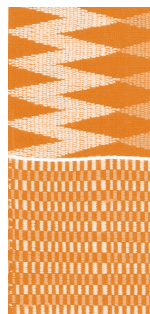
Eldis ('the gateway to development information') is collaborating with the Institute of Development Studies to create a web-based Resource Centre on pastoralism, which features:

- important articles pitched at policy-makers, grassroots organisations and NGOs, academics and researchers.
- a list of recent and on-going projects concerning pastoralists and pastoralism.
- a comprehensive database of researchers, organisations, NGOs, academics working in the arena of pastoralism.
- an interactive discussion forum to communicate with a large community of people involved in pastoral issues.
- on-line search facilities through a database of pastoral-related materials.

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/eldis/pastoralism/> For more information, please contact Marc Theuss, fax: +44 1273 621 202, email: m.theuss@ids.ac.uk

Development franglais

A programme of work on rural West Africa, jointly funded by the British and French governments has supported a number of collaborative studies focused on: strengthening linkages between agricultural research,



extension and producer organisations; land tenure and access to natural resources; and policies in the cocoa sector. Each study analysed current issues and trends, and identified national and sub-regional policy initiatives. They also provided lessons on capacity development within the region, and reflection on the concepts and approaches used by anglophone and francophone specialists in understanding rural development strategies.

“Franco-British-West African research and policy initiatives in West Africa: Relevance to rural development policies” *Funded jointly by DFID and the French Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Contact Karim Hussein at ODI (k.hussein@odi.org.uk) or visit www.odi.org.uk/publications/franco_british_westafrican.html*

Training in conflict management

Responding to Conflict are offering two forms of training in 2002:

Working with Conflict is a highly practical course designed for people active in the fields of relief, development, human rights and peace building. Four specific modules

take place over 10 weeks. Course fee: £3,100 excluding food and accommodation.

Strengthening Policy and Practice is a one week workshop designed for people with management and advisory responsibility for policy development and programme planning. Major topics include: conflict analysis, evaluating conflict impact, mediation and conflict transformation, integrating a conflict perspective in programme planning. Cost: £850 includes fees, full board and lodging.

Contact Alexandra Moore at RTC, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ, GB. Fax: +44 121 415 4119. Email: alex@respond.org



Collective thinking on CPRs

Each two years, the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP) meets. A call for papers has gone out for presentation at the 9th biennial conference, to be held at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe 17-21 June 2002. The major theme will be *The Commons in an age of globalisation*. People interested in speaking at the conference are urged to submit abstracts to iascp@cass.org.zw. Final papers will be required by April 1st, 2002.



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New rice for Africa

Rice consumption is growing dramatically in West Africa, partly fueled by population growth, partly by increasing consumer demand. Growth in local production is slow, so that production is falling ever further behind demand. The region is now importing about half its requirements, some 3.5 million tons, at a cost approaching one billion dollars per year.

However, the prospects for rice self-sufficiency are now looking much better. In recent years the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) has developed a family of new strains – known as the NERICA (New Rices for Africa) rices – that hold enormous promise of high yields under West African conditions. This success demonstrates that biotechnology has much to contribute where public funding ensures that the interests and needs of small poor farmers are made paramount.

WARDA has achieved the daunting task of crossing African rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) with the Asian species (*O. sativa*). The scientists have now fixed some 3,000 new rice lines, resulting from the crossing, backcrossing and subsequent selections of best performing plants. The rices share many of the characteristics of their African ancestors. They grow well in drought-prone, upland conditions and their early vigorous growth crowds out the

weeds that ordinarily consume vast amounts of labour for their removal. They are resistant to local pests and disease, and tolerant of poor nutrient conditions and mineral toxicity. But as they mature, they take on some of the characteristics of their Asian ancestors, producing more erect leaves and full panicles of non-shattering grain. And they are ready for harvesting in 90 – 100 days, which is 30 – 50 days earlier than current varieties. Under low inputs they yield up to 3 tons per hectare, and with high inputs up to 5 tons (current average yields in the region are barely above 1 ton).

WARDA has brilliantly combined the high science of biotechnology with an approach that creates a central role for farmer participation. Given the great diversity of African ecologies the traditional top-down extension approach is inappropriate. In seventeen countries farmers are conducting their own farm trials of over 300 of the new lines.

WARDA and others have been developing a strategy for involving farmers in the selection and evaluation of varieties, in several West African countries. Farmers evaluate the different strains and pass their judgment back to the breeders. Since seed supply can often be a major problem with new varieties, this is being organized through community-based seed systems, which builds on farmers' own seed saving practices. The spread of these varieties has been rapid, with 8,000 hectares planted in Guinea in 1997, and 90,000 in 2000. Plans are now underway to distribute these seeds throughout the region.

Haramata wishes to thank Gordon Conway and Toon Defoer for their contributions in preparing this article.

For more information, contact WARDA, 01 BP 2551, Bouaké 01, Côte d'Ivoire. Email: WARDA@cgiar.org. Website: <http://www.cgiar.org/warda>



Women harvesting rice