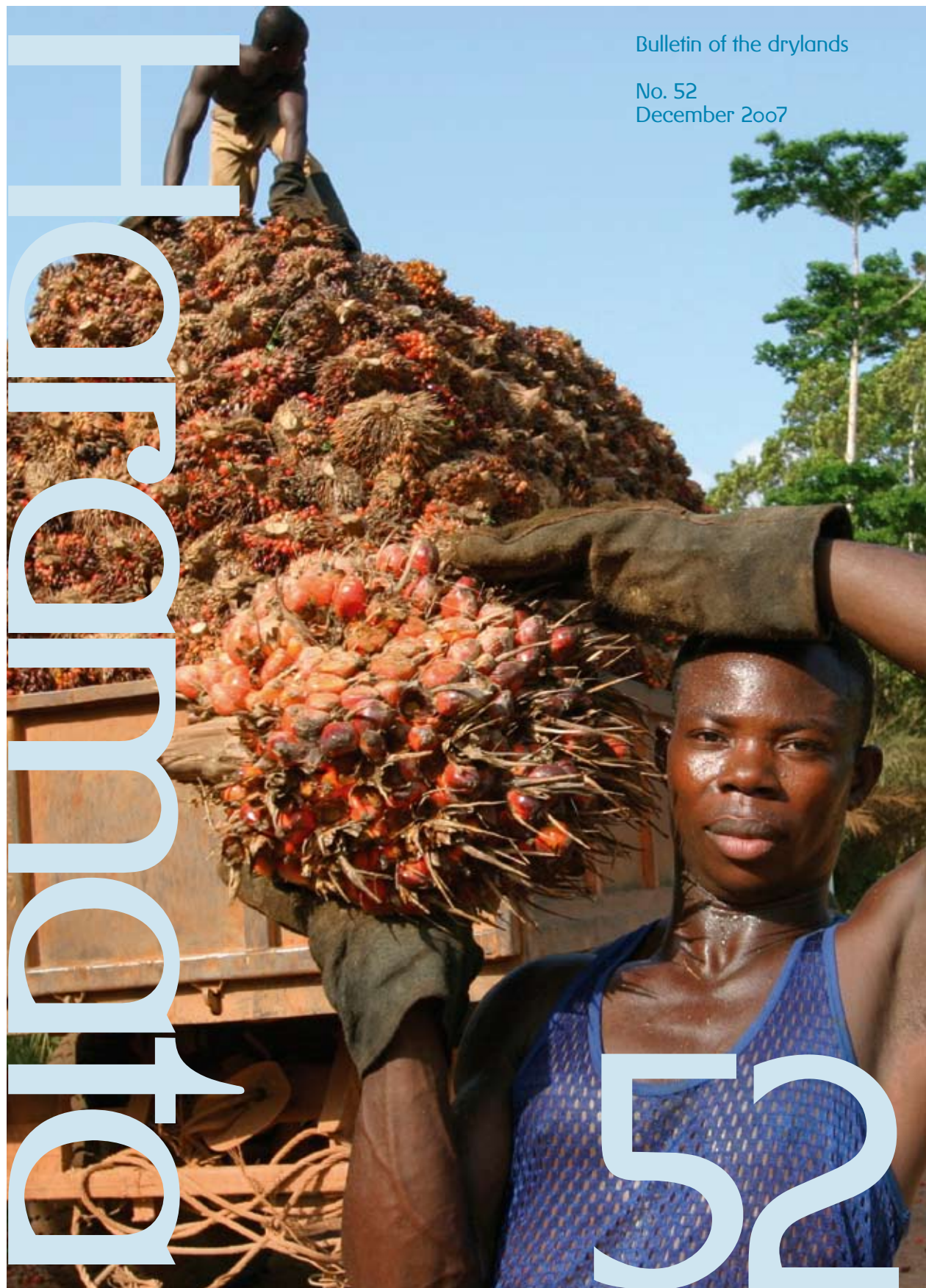


Bulletin of the drylands

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Cover photo: Harvested palm oil seeds are loaded on a truck,
Accra region, Ghana

Ron Gilling / Still Pictures

The precarious margin

Living in the drylands – whether of Africa or any other continent – would be your obvious first choice if that's where you've always belonged and if you could have a decent livelihood. But the 21st century prospects are not encouraging for people balancing their lives on the precarious margin between empty desert on one side and cut-throat competition for survival on the other.

Many factors conspire to make life hard in the world's arid zones, but one of the most disheartening is when a piece of good luck, which looks set to bring a lot of people more food and a better life – more happiness – evaporates before their eyes.

A news item in this issue (p.9) looks at the contrasting experience of hybrid rice in Africa and Asia in the last few years. In particular, the development of 18 varieties of NERICA ('New Rice for Africa') is, on the face of it, a very good news story. On closer examination, though, it's not half as good as it should be.

Why? Because farmers often can't get credit to buy seed and fertiliser. Because governments aren't investing enough in the

rural economy, so there aren't the needed roads or storage facilities for transporting and marketing crops. And because foreign aid for agriculture has declined dismally since the 1980s.

Who is to blame? Everyone except the farmers, who have suffered the most. And according to the Africa Rice Centre, farmers are sowing their new rice varieties on only five per cent of the land where they could thrive. In most places the infrastructure to inform them and provide technical support just doesn't exist.

Worryingly, all the trends today point towards greater extremes – of climate, of wealth, of opportunities – in the future. How can the people of the drylands, most of them with little material wealth, expect to have a fair share in that future if they are treated as disposable by the policy makers and denied the necessary resources?

We don't have the answer to these questions – but there are many in positions of power, in Africa and around the world, who should.

Issue Papers

Readers will notice that this edition of *Haramata* has not been accompanied by the usual Issue Papers. We are in the process of reorganising our distribution system, but normal service will be resumed in 2008. Don't forget to continue to send us your contributions to the series – the guidelines are enclosed.

'Climate change at the root of Darfur conflict'

WITH ANGER AND FRUSTRATION erupting in the refugee camps of Darfur after four years of misery and homelessness, more people are now being killed in inter-tribal clashes than in fighting between rebel groups and government forces or militias.

UN officials say more than 600 people have

died in tribal clashes this year and the situation could explode unless peace talks produce a speedy result. However, the peace talks which opened in Sirte, Libya, in October were effectively suspended after two days due to the refusal of two key Darfur rebel leaders to participate. One of them, Abdul el-Nur, leader of the Sudan Liberation Movement, said he would only join the talks once the promised UN peace-keeping force was in place, since only then would it be possible to enforce the terms of any peace deal. The UN force is due to take up duty in January, though with only weeks to go it was still lacking a commitment of helicopters, needed to police the skies.

Meanwhile, an 18-month study by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has concluded that the roots of the Darfur conflict lay in competition for shrinking resources as a result of reduced rainfall over the past 40 years. In that time, UNEP says rainfall has dropped by 16-30%. The result has been



Animals being taken to pasture, Kordofan Province, Sudan

Mark Edwards / Still Pictures

increasing tension between farmers and herders over disappearing pasture and water-holes, which threatens to reignite the long war between north and south Sudan.

The southern Nuba tribe are cited as an example. They have warned that they could re-start the war because Arab nomads – pushed southwards into their territory by drought – are cutting down trees to feed their camels.

In October, the North-South peace agreement of 2005 looked at risk of falling apart when the southerners suspended their co-operation in the government of national unity over unresolved disputes, including boundaries in the areas where there is oil (see *Haramata 50*, p.6).

① www.guardian.co.uk/world; the UNEP study, 'Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment', at www.unep.org/sudan

Rebels + uranium: a deadly mix

ARMED TUAREG REBELS in northern Mali and Niger have in recent months launched a new spate of attacks against government and military targets. Several dozen soldiers and Tuareg fighters have been killed and in September a US military plane flying food supplies to a northern garrison was hit by groundfire and had to return to Bamako.

In the case of Niger, the government accuses Libya of fomenting the Tuareg attacks in the hopes of getting its hands on the uranium produced by French-run mines in the north of the country. Niger has recently broken the French monopoly by awarding exploration rights to Chinese and Canadian companies.

France has replied by increasing the price it pays for Niger's uranium from 41 to 61 euros a kilo, but that's still only half the world market price and may not keep Niamey happy for long.

In Mali, meanwhile, the government appealed for international help in September after a flurry of rebel raids on military targets. It prompted Senegal's President Wade to express "grave concern" over the armed conflict in his two neighbours to the east.

① <http://addax.wordpress.com>
www.kidal.info

Villagers forced out as dunes advance

WHILE CHINA HAS a massive programme of investment in Africa and buys its timber abroad to avoid more deforestation at home (see *China in Africa*, pp 18-24), the country faces a worsening problem of losing arable land to advancing sand dunes (desertification).

Recent satellite monitoring has shown that the Kumtag and Taklamakan deserts, hitherto well separated, are creeping closer together, while two others across Inner Mongolia and Gansu provinces have already merged. The Kumtag desert, in the western province of Xinjiang, is reported to be expanding because the nearby River Shule has been dammed so much that its waters are shrinking.

China's response over the past five years has been to throw money at the problem; spending over US\$7 billion to plant billions of trees and preserve grasslands. But the deserts are still advancing by almost 1,000 square miles a year, according to official figures, and thousands of villages have had to

be abandoned to the advancing dunes. The reasons for this are unclear though declining rainfall is surely a major reason.

With this agricultural retreat and large areas of land being assigned to industry and housing, the ratio of farmland to population is being seriously squeezed. Rising food prices have pushed China's inflation rate to a 10-year high. China needs to rethink its policies if increasing aridity is going to continue because of global climate change. Planting trees clearly is not the solution.

 www.timesonline.co.uk/china;
www.csmonitor.com



Villagers use straw to try to stop the encroachment of sand dunes near their homes in Waixi Village, in Minqin County, in northwest China's Gansu province, July 2007

AP/PA Photos Limited

Trade talks: Juggling up to the deadline

EUROPEAN TRADE Commissioner Peter Mandelson is juggling with four wobbly balls as he tries to get four sub-regions of Africa (West, Central, East and Southern and SADC) to sign up to Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) by the end of the year.

Six weeks before the deadline of December 31 his chances of catching them all looked less than certain, with a lot of unhappy governments – not to mention some very sceptical NGOs – trying hard to jog his elbow.

At stake is the whole future of trade between Europe and Africa. The EPAs are intended to cover not just trade in goods but also the liberalisation of services, investment and bidding for government contracts, so that big European companies would be allowed to compete for work alongside their smaller, less experienced African counterparts. Without some handicapping to create a level playing field (e.g. tariff protection on the African side) it's pretty clear that the EPAs, holding high the flag of "free trade", will be a licence for Europe to grab a large chunk of African business and wealth, especially the natural resources the continent desperately needs to keep for its own development.

The EU's approach to the negotiations has been to put forward unacceptable terms, listen to the howls of protest from African

capitals and then shrug its shoulders, saying 'take it or leave it'. But Africa's negotiators are, for the most part, standing firmer than ever before in defence of their vital interests.

Seeking a final settlement for the Saharawi

THE UNITED STATES has upset some African countries by indicating its support for a new Moroccan proposal to grant Western Sahara "wide ranging autonomy" in return for being granted sovereignty over the disputed territory.

The issue arose at the UN Security Council in October before it agreed to extend the mandate of the UN Mission in Western Sahara for six months until April 2008. The short extension is designed to put pressure on Morocco and the Polisario Front to negotiate concretely on the future of the former Spanish colony. Two meetings earlier this year under UN auspices made little or no progress.

Back in 1975, when Spain ended its colonial rule, the International Court of Justice rejected claims to the territory by Morocco and Mauritania. Spain then made an agreement giving Morocco two-thirds and Mauritania and rest. Two years earlier, however, the Polisario Front had been formed, claiming to be the sole



John Thorne/AP/PA Photos

A Saharawi slum in Laayoune, Western Sahara, with Moroccan administration buildings in the distance, June 2007

representative of the Saharawi people. After Mauritania renounced its claim, Polisario pursued a guerilla war against Moroccan forces until 1991 when the UN intervened, brought about a ceasefire and aimed to broker a final peace plan.

Polisario has insisted that the territory's final status should be decided by a referendum, with independence being one of the options, but agreement on the terms for a referendum has proved impossible.

The United States is believed to favour the new Moroccan proposals because they would be more likely to assist its campaign against Islamic militancy in North Africa. But South Africa has objected, saying that a majority

of countries in the Security Council believe it should not be taking sides.

Diplomats in New York say it is hoped the Morocco-Polisario talks will resume before the end of the year. If a settlement is achieved, the 100,000 refugees still living in Polisario's camps across the border in Algeria would finally be able to go home.

Morocco annexed the former Spanish colony of 260,000 people after Madrid withdrew its armed forces in 1975, but no country recognises Moroccan sovereignty. Algeria allowed Saharawi refugees to settle in its southern town of Tindouf, where Polisario still has its main base.

Nice rice – or suicide seeds?



James Hill/ NYT

Women returning from work in the rice fields to their village of Kamara, Guinea

RICE PRODUCTION in Africa has increased for the sixth year in a row, reaching more than 21 million tons in 2006, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports. And this increase is attributed largely to farmers' steady adoption of the 'New Rice for Africa' (NERICA) developed by the African Rice Centre and its partners.

Substantial gains in rice output were recorded last year in Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The advantages of the 18 NERICA varieties are numerous: high yielding, early maturing (75-100 days), weed resistant, drought tolerant and resistant to Africa's major pests and diseases.

Most of these NERICA varieties have been introduced in the last three years. Using conventional and molecular biology techniques, the scientists managed to cross African and Asian rice varieties and to overcome the frequent problem of hybrids being sterile. The Nericas are unpatented and can be grown by anyone. The only downside is that while scientists have reduced the breeding process from six or seven years to two or less, they are in seriously short supply.

But this positive experience in Africa is in contrast with what's been happening in Asia, where China has long been in the forefront

of hybrid rice development. In China itself, according to an Asian non-governmental rice network, the take-up of hybrid rice by farmers has waned over the past decade, and in the Philippines farmers are rejecting it.

The food research group, GRAIN, says there is now "a relentless push" by international seed companies for a hybrid rice variety that is essentially sterile – "suicide seeds, so to speak". The reason, it says, is that the only way the seed industry can make big money is by forcing farmers to buy new seed ever year. "They talk of higher yields and big profits for farmers," GRAIN adds, "but if you look at the situation in the fields, none of that turns out to be true."

For once, it seems, African agriculture has the good news story.

i Africa Rice Center (WARDA), 01 BP 2031, Cotonou, Benin. www.warda.org. Also, GRAIN at www.grain.org/hybridrice

Imported ideas on gender don't work, a new study shows, so the challenge now is...

Anchoring gender issues in African realities

by Senorina Wendoh

In the last two *Haramata* editions, Adam Thiam and Mariame Dem offered insightful discussions on women's advancement and the need for vigilance in ensuring that 'African women's participation and leadership' is not hijacked. Both writers concur that while strides have been made, we still have a long way to go to be treated, in Dem's words, 'as full members of the human race'.

Even as we count the gains we have made, women still suffer oppression and violence, and a growing number of African feminist thinkers signal the need for continued interrogation of gender inequity.¹

Research conducted by the Transform Network² found that some of the obstacles to gender equity lie in the contested language of gender and its concepts, which are evidently seen as alien to African realities but also as 'something favouring women at the expense of men'. The research showed that these challenges lie partly in gender ideas and frameworks that are fashioned elsewhere, in different contexts, transported to Africa and then regurgitated in many African NGOs and communities. These concepts are viewed as alien and resisted – because they have not been developed in collaboration with those

who implement them. That some of these concepts and frameworks come bound up in aid packages – ('to secure donor funding we have to include a gender component in our proposal') – causes conflict in those charged with implementing them.

We found gender messages problematic – for example, 'gender equals women wanting to take power from men', 'gender equals 50-50', 'what men can do, women can do' and so on. These misconceptions were propagated in the early days through TV captions, local government workers and 'technical experts', and they led to resistance, with many men viewing them as threatening to traditional power bases. And apart from the men, many poor and vulnerable women, bound by strict social norms, dependent on their husband's family, were fearful that 'becoming empowered' would lead to their expulsion from safe extended families.

Beneath the success record of women's advancement, the Transform research found that in some areas, grassroots women's positions were still very dependent on the good-will of the extended family. One woman told of how she had to buy back land from her husband who was selling it, so that they



Marie Morinart

Gender means men and women working together. Halimatou Sotbar, leader of a women's group in Menaka, Mali talks to the men in Inagar village

could still have a place to stay. How, one might ask, can this happen, when there are laws to protect women in matters to do with land? Could it be, perhaps, that approaches to gender equity do not cover the complex realities, social norms and fabrics faced by women and men on the ground? Even after reclaiming the land, the woman in question would still have to live among the people – likely her husband's relatives. So how to address the legislation on behalf of women on the one hand, and to provide the family-social networks that they all need? The stories of these women abound in many of our communities.

Grandes Dames or Big Men of Development?

Returning to Thiam's graphic representation of the 'pitfalls and progress' in women's advance, the Transform research team encountered

many (predominantly men, although not exclusively) who dismissed efforts by educated African women as self-centred and lacking in empathy for poor women. These generalisations stereotype women and do not help the case for their empowerment.

So let us challenge the negative traits represented by the '*grand dames*' and 'big men' of development, but let us lend our support to transforming women's lives through supporting rather than belittling women's leadership.

To address these challenges, we need to begin by fashioning a definition of gender that draws from our varied local realities, then foster a sense of ownership through participation across the board. 'The solutions to our problems,' asserts Wangari Maathai, 'lie within us'. In adding to this discussion, one might ask what in fact is 'gender'? How is it viewed in Africa by Africans? Why is there so much resistance to 'gender'? In some



Marie Morimant

Not all women's interests are the same. They vary according to age and ethnicity and many other factors. Safiatou Diallo talks to an older women about her concerns in Pagan Bobo, Mali

countries the Ministry of Gender is called 'The Women's Ministry', while in others, gender activism is viewed largely as a way for 'self-advancement by rich, educated, urban women, who use poor women as a pawn in their game.'

We must give agency to poor women. We veil and silence them within development discourse when we persist in representing them as victims, as helpless dependants reliant on others to speak for them. Yet we know this is not exactly true: Liberia's now famous peace protesters, indeed African women across the continent – educated or otherwise – have been active movers in reclaiming justice and sustainable peace. Many women, in the face of adversity (and largely

uneducated because we have traditionally favoured the boy child), have shown great resilience and resourcefulness, as we saw more recently during the conflicts, in Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone.³

As Dem has suggested, if one of the ways in which poor women can have agency is through their educated sisters' representing their stories, then it serves the purpose for which it is intended, i.e. that women are telling their own stories. Lessons from the Transform exercise showed us that women can work as allies with men of whatever age, faith, social status, etc., to achieve the twin goals of gender equity and women's empowerment. It is a challenge that we can work to achieve in all areas.

Transformative gender work calls for concerted effort and a readiness to invest in much-needed time and resources. Donor conditionalities that call for quick-fix solutions do not tally with the slow, careful work required to bring changes in behaviour such as early and forced marriages, teenage pregnancies, preferential treatment of boys and girls, circumcision of women, sexual and domestic violence – the list is distressingly long.

If people understand why things are the way they are, (why they are poor, why and how inequalities persist, invisible manifestations of power), *then they will not only change but they will become agents of that change.*

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1. See Obioma Nnaemeka, ed. *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, Africa World Press, 1998.
2. For more information visit www.transformafrica.org
3. Their untold stories abound, in Kenya these women resorted to the final taboo – stripping to indicate both their metaphorical but also physical nakedness, but also their power to change the cause of history.

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How one group of women have dealt with male abuse

The UMOJA UASO Women's Group, in Samburu district, Northern Kenya was founded with the mission to improve the livelihood of its members and the Samburu community through education and poverty alleviation. In this way, the group helps fight the many inequalities faced by Samburu women. Thus empowered, these women are securing their livelihoods, while providing greater opportunities for their children's futures.

Samburu women are among the most marginalized groups in Kenya. Development has been slow to reach the area and education is often not easily accessible. Furthermore, women have a low status in the community and are the last to receive the few resources available. Within this context, many women are subject to severe mistreatment by their husbands. Faced with continual abuse, these women opt to leave their husbands. Another example of the discrimination and ill-treatment that Samburu women have faced is the alleged rape of approximately 1,400 Samburu women during the 1980s and 1990s by British soldiers from training bases in the area. Many of these women were subsequently shunned by their husbands. Whether they leave their husbands or are abandoned by them, the women are left as sole providers for themselves and their children.

In 1990, 15 women formed the Umoja Uaso Women's Group to address these issues. They started by selling beadwork and other goods. After facing threats from men jealous of their success, the members decided to found a women-only village and reside together, thus providing collective security and cooperation. The group also dedicated itself to informing women about their rights, their health (for example, by encouraging pregnant Umoja residents to receive prenatal care), and helped them start income-generating activities. Lastly, Umoja cooperated with UK human rights lawyer Martyn Day to have the rape cases investigated and brought to trial. These investigations are ongoing.

As the group's members have prospered, more and more women joined. UUWG now has 48 members, and continues to strive to achieve its goals.

www.umojawomen.org/index.htm

Unrecognised success stories in Africa's drylands

A spectacular case of regeneration in Niger

by Chris Reij

THE GENERAL CONSENSUS is that Africa's drylands continue to degrade and that the large sums of money invested in agriculture and natural resource management during the last 30 years have produced little or no impact. Some recent studies in Burkina Faso¹ and Niger show a very different picture.

One reason why impacts of investments are underestimated is that we do not adequately measure impacts. When economists calculate the costs and benefits of investments in soil and water conservation they tend to limit the benefits to impacts on crop yields and ignore, for instance, impacts on groundwater recharge and on vegetation. If such impacts were also expressed in monetary terms then the cost-benefit calculations would change dramatically.

Niger is a particularly interesting case to consider, because this country went through a major environmental crisis in the 1970s and 1980s and a major economic and political crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. Everyone will also remember the images shown by BBC and CNN in August 2005 of thousands of women and starving children in feeding centres.

In August 2005 a team of national researchers began a study on long-term trends in agriculture and environment in Niger and they also tried to identify the multiple impacts of

Re-greening the Sahel

The experience with farmer-managed natural regeneration in Niger has sparked an initiative to re-green the Sahel. The activities will be based on grassroots success stories across the region. On September 27 and 28 this year a number of NGOs met in London to discuss this initiative and to take the first steps towards building an international alliance of NGOs and research institutions to promote farmer-managed natural regeneration. Steps are also being taken to build national alliances of NGOs, research institutions and projects in each participating country.

For more information, contact the author of this article.

investments in natural resource management. The preliminary results of this study show that Niger and its technical and financial partners have invested substantially in the rehabilitation of strongly degraded land. Since the middle of the 1980s about 250,000 ha has been rehabilitated. Dry season cultivation has been expanded considerably.

Since the middle of the 1980s farmers in the most densely populated parts of



Chris Reij

A new agroforestry parkland in Niger's Zinder region (Kantché department). High density stands of *Faidherbia albida* improve soil fertility

Niger have begun to protect and manage young trees and bushes regenerating on their cultivated fields. It has become clear that this is happening on at least 5 million hectares, which is a spectacular scale, unique for the Sahel and probably even unique for Africa.

This positive change (more people, more trees) seems to have been largely unobserved. This re-greening is stimulated by some years of good rainfall, but changes in human management appear to have been a more decisive factor than rainfall. Twenty years ago all trees belonged to the State, but the perception of farmers now is that they have exclusive rights to the trees on their fields. Many villages have more trees than 20 years ago; indeed, an analysis of satellite images and aerial photos shows that some villages have 10 to 20 times more trees now than in 1975.²

The study mentioned above shows that rural producers in Niger are remarkably successful and have created more complex and more productive farming systems by integrating agriculture, forestry and livestock.

They have achieved this under unfavourable macro conditions.

There is an urgent need to look at long-term trends in Africa's drylands³ and to draw lessons from success stories for policy and practice as well as for upscaling of successes. Some of the doom and gloom stories about Africa's drylands are not based on facts: they reveal a disconnect between field realities and the development bureaucracies.

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2. Gray Tappan, USGS Data Center for EROS, South Dakota
3. Like Michael Mortimore and colleagues have done for regions in Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Kenya (see www.drylandsresearch.org.uk).

Chris Reij is based at the Center for International Cooperation of the VU University Amsterdam. He is a human geographer, who began working in the Sahel in 1978 and as a regional planner in Burkina Faso from 1978 – 1982. Since then he has worked on participatory approaches to soil and water conservation, indigenous knowledge and farmer innovation in African agriculture. Since 2001 he has stimulated research on long-term trends in agriculture and environment in the Sahel.
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Over 150 nomadic pastoralists from 37 countries, representing every continent in the world, met in Spain in September 2007 to discuss the key obstacles they face in pursuing their pastoral livelihoods. Deliberations were held in country and regional groups, and at times with everyone together, in tents and under the trees in the dryland oak forest of La Granja. The analysis from every group identified one of these three root causes as the main barriers to pastoral livelihoods:

1. Globalisation, and its impact on the marketing of meat and animal products.
2. Laws and policies that obstruct nomadic pastoral livelihoods.
3. The loss of self-respect and dignity resulting from domination and colonialism.

Debajo de la sombra de los robles


Under the shade of a Spanish oak forest





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 The images on these pages are by Sue Cavanna, Director of SOS Sahel International UK. Over her many years of work in Africa, Sue has used photography to reflect the vibrancy of the people who live there.

China in Africa

Getting to know the super-power with many different faces

by James Keeley

THE CHINA AFRICA SUMMIT in Beijing in November 2006, attended by 48 African heads of state, heralded a new era of strategic cooperation between China and the African continent. In addition to launching an Africa policy, China promised US\$5 billion of loans and credits, and announced plans to increase trade to US\$100 billion by 2010. Alongside this, a substantially expanded aid programme promises technical exchange and technology transfer, the creation of 10 agricultural development centres in Africa, and the training of new cadres of African experts. In these pages we look at a few of the different dimensions of China's deepening engagement with Africa.

Even apart from Europeans and Americans with geopolitical or economic axes to grind, many commentators inside and outside Africa express concern at China's rapidly evolving relationships with the African continent. To some they can seem like a tidal wave.

China's great demand for raw materials and energy are driving massive programmes of investment in Africa. One quarter of China's oil imports come from Africa. China has invested more than US\$ 8 billion in oil exploration in the Sudan. Chinese oil giant Sinopec is constructing

a 1500 kilometre pipeline to Port Sudan on the Red Sea. Deals worth US\$ 9 billion have also been struck with Angola (Rocha, 2007)*.

In some quarters there are fears that African nations are becoming locked into a new form of one-sided development based on commodity exports and the import of manufactures. Textile manufacturing, for example, has been badly affected by Chinese imports in several southern African countries.

Governance and migration

In terms of Chinese investments in Africa, particularly in forestry and minerals, there are worries that Chinese entrepreneurs are taking advantage of poor governance arrangements to effectively strip assets (see the article on forestry in Mozambique in this issue). At the same time, questions are posed about present and future patterns of migration, including a plan to settle three million Chinese in Angola (see Alden, 2007, reviewed in this issue on page 34). Finally, many worry that China's policy of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs will translate into the kind of uncritical support for repressive regimes that caused so much damage by other foreign powers in the past.



Damien Glez

More optimistically, China offers African governments a welcome alternative to existing relationships with G8 nations. China is clearly making an important contribution to the building of much-needed infrastructure. New sources of finance are also giving more options to African states, while investment is creating jobs and new economic vibrancy in many places. Low-cost consumer goods are also appreciated, with mobile phone technologies helping to create new business opportunities in areas where limited access to market information has been a problem. Nevertheless, in countries such as Senegal there are both costs and benefits associated with the arrival of Chinese small traders, as the following article by Awa Faly Ba makes clear. Opportunities are being created for some local entrepreneurs, and more goods are available, but the imports migrants make

available can also challenge local industry and the livelihoods of local craftspeople.

China's engagement in Africa defies any simple assessment. There are many different relationships and they play out in many ways. So what does this mean in practice?

Many actors

Firstly, it is important to recognise the diversity of Chinese institutions engaging with Africa. China is not a single actor. Small-scale businesses and entrepreneurs – not the government – are responsible for some of the most undesirable practices, such as unsustainable logging. Sometimes these are Chinese who have stayed on in Africa after the end of a government contract – and it is not clear that the Chinese government can easily influence their behaviour. Chinese multinationals are more susceptible to government influence, but even where firms



Sunday Alamba/AP Photo

Chinese women talk business with local women at a shop in Lagos, Nigeria

have links to the Chinese state they are often provincial-level companies, making it difficult for Beijing to control their actions. For the time being, understandings by Africans and others of intra-Chinese relationships are poor; this is partly because of a lack of transparency (China's aid figures, for example, are not published).

Secondly, within many African states the new engagement with China is changing political dynamics. In the recent Zambian election, for example, conflicting perceptions of Chinese investments in the mining sector was a key issue. Policy makers, practitioners and others need to develop sensitive understandings of the interests of different African stakeholders in relation to Chinese investment, trade and migration.

Thirdly, Chinese politicians are more aware of the limitations of the official policy of non-interference in domestic politics overseas. China in the past has used this to justify engagement with the governments of Sudan and Zimbabwe. African citizens now demand good governance, not only western donors. This fact, combined

with external pressure, is gradually modifying Chinese behaviour.

Events show that Chinese institutions and actors are increasingly waking up to the complexities of their involvement in Africa. There is scope for donors, aid recipient governments and others to encourage relationships to evolve in ways that contribute to sustainable development objectives. However, supporting positive trends will require informed, imaginative and robust engagement by all parties.

* John Rocha, 2007. 'A New Frontier in the Exploitation of Africa's Natural Resources: the emergence of China', *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks (eds). Fahamu: Cape Town, Oxford, Nairobi.



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‘Made in China’ – it’s a fact of life!

by Awa Faly Ba

THE ANNUAL CELEBRATIONS marking Senegal's independence are traditionally held on the widest avenue through the centre of the capital, the imposing Boulevard du Général de Gaulle. Despite the whiff of grandeur conjured by its name, this two-kilometre stretch of highway through the heart of Dakar is today, in reality, a buzzing market powered by Chinese vendors selling all kinds of cheap goods.

Once a tiny minority, the numbers of Chinese swelled after the two countries re-established diplomatic relations in 2004. One year later Yan Jun, president of the Chinese traders' association in Senegal, noted that "There are over 150 of us here now, compared with just six in 2000". An official count at that time put the number of Chinese nationals in Senegal at around 300, and while it is extremely difficult to obtain precise figures, doubtless there are many more now. Some 95 per cent of the shops on the boulevard are Chinese-owned.

The fact that the arrival of the Chinese might threaten local businesses and affect the national economy has done little to dampen shoppers' enthusiasm for their wares. Given their lack of purchasing power, it's not hard to see why the vast majority of Dakar's inhabitants are keen to take advantage of the knock-down prices asked by the Chinese,

who seem able to cater to their every need. From life-size portraits of *marabouts* to skimpy thongs and every kind of textile product in between, the latest items of clothing, shoes and household goods can be found on their stalls. Faced with this winning combination of unbeatably low prices and sensitivity to local demand, consumers are unlikely to heed any calls to "Buy Senegalese".

And so it is that a once respectable residential area has been transformed into the country's main marketplace. The neighbourhood's middle-class but economically vulnerable families have been saved by the arrival of these traders, and its once peaceful streets are now home to a new breed of middlemen doing a brisk trade reselling the latest container-load of goods.

Because very few Chinese traders speak French, let alone any local languages, lucrative new opportunities have opened up for intermediaries who can bargain with clients on behalf of the Chinese stallholders, and for young entrepreneurs who buy in bulk and resell their wares in the hurly-burly outside. This arrangement may be bad news for local industries and craftsmen, but it works well for both the Chinese traders (who are starting to diversify into their own fast-food outlets) and the young jobseekers and poorer households in the locality.



Awa Faly Ba

A stall in Dakar's Chinatown selling Chinese goods

This Senegalese Chinatown is only the tip of the iceberg, the most visible aspect of an influence that has gradually percolated through the entire national economy, from fishing and crafts to industry and public works. The first industrial fishing agreements were drawn up in 1989 – facilitating construction of the Léopold Sedar Senghor Olympic stadium for the 1992 Africa World Cup, but also, according to some ecologists, triggering over-fishing due to the powers ascribed to shark fins and certain shellfish. Since then, various major companies like the Henan China Group and Jean Lefebvre (Talix Group) have been awarded contracts to construct the toll motorway between Dakar and Diamniadio (34km).

The Chinese presence in Senegal and every major capital in the sub-region is a sign of the times, an inescapable fact of life that has both positive and negative aspects. The Chinese have found a niche and are constantly expanding it by adapting to local demand. The question is, what can economic actors and national enterprise do to respond to this challenge? What can be done in the short- and medium-term to help our already weak

trade sector deal with such fierce competition, and to prevent the Chinese presence from snuffing out the spirit of enterprise among our young? Will the Senegalese economy be able to get the best out of these new actors without jeopardising its modest achievements? And will the Chinese have the same (or an even greater) effect on the Senegalese economy as the inequitable trade with America and Europe had in the past and continues to have even now?

One positive aspect of these issues is that it forces us to focus on concrete, local responses that will enable us to engage with and survive in today's globalised world.

Thanks to Yathénara Ndoye for collecting the data for this article.



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Corruption skims profits from China-Mozambique timber trade

Mozambican authorities swooped on the northern port of Nacala in October to seize over 500 containers of logs awaiting illegal export to China. More often, as the following report shows, the illegal trade goes ahead unhindered – in large measure because the export price for raw logs is 60 per cent higher than for sawn timber. China's timber imports have grown massively since 1998, when 2,500 people died in floods along the Yangtze River, which were blamed on deforestation and led to a logging ban

by Simon Norfolk

A REPORT IN Mozambique's *Noticias* newspaper in July described the illegal shipment of 1,248 ironwood and leadwood timber logs from the northern port of Nacala. By the time the report appeared, however, the logs were already loaded and the ship had sailed for China.

For many observers in Mozambique, this report was just the latest in a prolonged history of violations of the national forestry laws. It was also further proof that illegality in the forestry trade is being driven by the rising demand for timber exports to China and is mostly being committed by Chinese-owned companies.

The forestry industry has grown rapidly during the past 10 years. Improvements to the rural road network and the fact that the country possesses several ports on the Indian Ocean have fuelled the rapidly increasing

exploitation of tropical hardwoods throughout the north of the country. Lorries loaded with logs travel day and night from the forest areas to the coast, where the timber is loaded onto ships bound for the Chinese market.

The dominance of the export market to China is undeniable. According to recent research, China and Hong Kong absorbed more than 85 percent of the estimated 430,000 m³ of logs officially exported from Mozambique during 2000-2005. Estimates from an FAO report in 2003, however, suggest the clandestine production and export of timber in Mozambique may represent an additional 50 to 70 per cent of the total licensed production. In volume, this would mean between 90,000 and 140,000 m³ of unauthorised production per year, with a gross value in the region of US\$15-24 million.

The timber industry represents therefore

an important contributor to the Mozambican economy at the same time as being the source of significant losses to government revenue. A large part of the problem relates to the nature of the export trade to China. Since 2002, China has cut its import tariffs, contributing to a dramatic increase in its raw log imports. This conflicts with the Mozambican government's attempt to promote domestic value-added production.

The value of a log exported in round form is now approximately 60% more than the value of the exported sawn timber that can be obtained from that log. Such a disparity means that legislation prohibiting log exports of certain species is regularly violated and that the fiscal incentives for domestic processing are ineffective.

The Mozambican government, however, must also share responsibility for this state of affairs. After four years on the statute books, the right of local community groups to receive a percentage of forest industry royalties has not been implemented. Members of these communities, faced with few alternatives, are easily co-opted by unscrupulous operators and have every incentive to encourage rather than prevent the illegal logging of the forests around them.

The Mozambican government is not merely guilty of inaction. Its response to criticism has consistently been to downplay the severity of the problem. Even in the face of contrary evidence from its own institutions, the government maintains that exploitation rates are within sustainable levels. More worryingly, the government-aligned media has published several articles labelling the calls for reform as part of an 'anti-Chinese conspiracy' orchestrated by 'foreign hands'.

This reaction reveals the unholy alliance that arises between corrupt operators and corrupt civil servants and politicians in the context of a weak and inequitable society. If laws were



A Chinese logging truck taking timber out of the Quirimbas National Park in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique

properly enforced, if poverty were not so harsh and if wealth and power were more equitably distributed in Mozambican society, the impact of the Chinese forest operators would not be so debilitating to the economy and would not so effectively undermine its institutions. Unfortunately, political influence and power in Mozambique are regularly used to override legislation.

It would appear that only the intervention of China itself, as a true development partner of Mozambique, could potentially play a role in improving the impact of the relationship. However, given that Mozambique provides an infinitesimal share (0.12%) of China's total timber imports, it is doubtful that the Chinese government has much strategic interest in ensuring the sustainability of this supply.



Simon Norfolk is Director of Terra Firma, a Mozambican consultancy company specialising in research and policy work related to land and natural resource management in Mozambique and the Africa region. He has previously worked as a technical assistant on the South African land reform programme, for FAO in the Sudan and for a number of NGOs specialising in advocacy work on land tenure rights in Africa. Email: simon@terrafirma.co.mz

So why don't they plan for drought in pastoral areas?

Livestock emergency interventions are often poorly designed, and delivered too late to be of lasting value. In emergency programmes, saving the lives of animals is not enough – they need to ‘save lives and livelihoods’. This requires attention to both immediate assistance for people and livestock, and support to the local services and markets needed to rebuild livestock assets.

by Cathy Watson

HUMANITARIAN CRISES in sub-Saharan Africa arise from both natural and man-made causes, including conflict, famine, drought and flood. Many of those affected depend to a greater or lesser extent on livestock for their livelihood. Over the last 20 years significant sums of money have been spent on livestock-related responses to disasters in sub-Saharan Africa – in some cases exceeding the amounts spent on livestock development work. Activities include:

- emergency veterinary programmes, providing vaccination against common diseases as well as treatment of livestock;
- market-based support (such as accelerated livestock offtake or commercial destocking);
- emergency purchase of livestock which may then be slaughtered for food distribution;
- supplementary feed and water provision; and
- restocking after the crisis.

Among the agencies involved there is growing concern about the quality of these

interventions. For example, emergency veterinary treatment often arrives in the affected area too late to have a significant impact. And, if it is also delivered as a free service, it undermines local services, which cannot resume after the crisis is over. Similarly, missed opportunities in destocking and livestock asset protection early on in an emergency lead to increased need for restocking afterwards.

These problems are compounded by the lack of livestock expertise within donor organisations and NGOs, so that livestock interventions may sometimes be designed with limited appropriate professional input or, in other cases, be completely overlooked in favour of food aid interventions.

As a result of these concerns, the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, USA, started consultations which led to the creation of the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) process with a multi-agency Steering Group comprising the Feinstein International Center, the UN Food and



Andy Carley

During drought the lack of feed for livestock exacerbates pre-existing parasitic diseases

Agriculture Organization, the International Committee for the Red Cross, African Union and VETAID, supported by a Coordinator.

The LEGS process draws on the experiences of The Sphere Project, which developed the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (www.sphereproject.org). Like the Sphere Guidelines, LEGS is founded on a rights-based approach with three livelihoods-based objectives: 1. to protect livelihoods through emergency livestock-based relief (i.e. cash or food derived from livestock) to crisis-affected communities; 2. to protect the key livestock-related assets of crisis-affected communities; and 3. to rebuild those assets.

To address these livelihood objectives LEGS covers the following technical areas:

- **Animal health** including vaccination campaigns and treatment; and policy issues such as disease surveillance and the licensing/recognition of community-based animal health workers;
- **Supplementary feeding** for animals, through the provision of hay or concentrates; improving fodder production; and the moving of stock to areas with more resources;
- **Water development** including water point rehabilitation and development; water trucking and moving stock to water, in

order to maintain livestock assets in times of drought

- **'Commercial' offtake** consisting of loans to commercial traders to enable them to buy livestock at fair prices; the establishment of feedlots and livestock fairs to relieve pressure on natural resources and provide fair cash inputs to livestock owners so they can invest in their remaining livestock as well as support their families;
- **Destocking**, which involves the purchase of livestock by outside agencies to provide cash to affected populations and meat for distribution as food aid, thus supporting livestock owners and relieving pressure on remaining livestock assets;
- **Shelter**, including the construction or rehabilitation of on-farm animal shelters;
- **Restocking**, including the provision of animals to livestock owners to enable them to rebuild their herds, and supplementary livestock provision to small-holder farmers.

Taking a livelihoods approach to emergency response also helps to harmonise relief and development initiatives, which have often been separate and at times contradictory. Relief efforts must take local development activities into account, particularly those which aim to strengthen local livelihoods. This is the premise on which LEGS is based.

i *The Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards will be published in 2008, following a broad consultation process and field testing which is currently underway. More information can be found at the website: www.livestock-emergency.net. To join the mailing list and receive regular updates about LEGS, contact the Coordinator: coordinator@livestock-emergency.net*



Cathy Watson works in Ethiopia as an independent pastoral development consultant and is currently Coordinator of the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards project.

A lesson from South Africa

Making land reform work for those who need it least

by Rick Rohde

THE NAMAQUALAND REGION of South Africa, in the northwest of the country bordering Namibia, is made up of 600 privately-owned commercial farms and six communal areas which were designated 'Coloured Reserves' under apartheid. The communal areas remain blighted by overcrowding, poverty and unemployment.

Like many other aspects of government policy in post-apartheid South Africa, land reform has proved a complex mixture of innovation and creativity but also slow delivery and unintended consequences. Recent research carried out by the Centre of African Studies at the University of Edinburgh and the Programme of Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape shows that participatory decision-making at the local level, which was intended to benefit the poorest and most disadvantaged communal farmers, has resulted in just the opposite in Namaqualand*.

Privately owned commercial farms have been bought under the land reform programme and added to existing communal areas, but instead of providing opportunities for impoverished livestock farmers, a small, well-connected and relatively wealthy elite have 'captured' this new resource. The communal areas remain peripheral to the broader national economy.

In Namaqualand, apartheid state interventions culminated in the 1980s with

attempts to privatise the commons, ostensibly in order to avert land degradation and to modernise agricultural production. Privatisation would have favoured only a small proportion of the wealthier residents, such as larger stockowners, shopkeepers, teachers, and migrant workers. However, a court action in the late 1980s averted this outcome and the commons remained open to all.

In the post-apartheid period, land reform has expanded the communal land-base in Namaqualand by over 25 per cent. This new land has been sub-divided and leased out to a small number of farmers and entrepreneurs for their exclusive use. Research into the management of these new land reform farms reveals that they have effectively been separated from the old communal areas and are now benefiting the same category of people who would have benefited under past privatisation initiatives.

This 'capture' of the new commons by a local elite has come about for a number of reasons:

- The land reform programme promotes a rigid conceptual model of sustainability, based on large-scale private commercial farming;
- As representatives charged with regulating the commons, the elite have aligned themselves with this model because it furthers their own interests;
- The elite retain and reinforce their positions



Sophia Vytjie Kloose, Paulshoek Community Photography Project, 1999

Situated in the rocky uplands, and adjacent to old fallow croplands, this setting is typical of many long-established stockposts in the old communal 'reserve' area of Leliefontein.

through their activism in local commonage institutions and through patronage;

- The municipal managers (who are responsible within municipalities for the newly acquired commons) lack the capacity to enforce rules of commonage management.

This situation is compounded by the emphasis placed on institutions, rules and regulations in relation to management of the commons. The municipal owners of the commons have failed to effectively mediate the existing diversity of interests, partly because of shared interests between key municipal officials and local elites.

This imbalance of power has been made worse by the setting-up of a commonage management committee to oversee all the different village lands. In forming this committee, the power of an emergent elite has effectively been concentrated, as the few wealthier individuals in each village have been brought together within this 'higher-level' structure. If the focus had instead been on building village-level sub-committees first and supporting the participation of the poor, local elites would have been outnumbered in their respective settlements.

If land reform is to play a part in the socio-economic transformation of Namaqualand's communal areas, it must be recognised that access to and management of communal land is patterned by deep cultural and historical roots. These roots find expression in ways that are often obscure to the NGO staff, range managers and lawyers involved in creating new property institutions. The elite know how to play the institutional game, but the fact that the voices of the majority of poorer communal farmers remain unheard or unheeded suggests that present policies will merely reproduce many of the mistakes of the past in a new context.

* See Lebert, T. & Rohde, R.F. (2007) 'Land reform and the new elite: exclusion of the poor from communal land in Namaqualand, South Africa'. *Journal of Arid Environments* 70(4): 818-833, from which this article is derived.



Rick Rohde is currently a research fellow at the Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh and a research associate at the University of Cape Town. His interest in historical ecology has focused primarily on dryland southern Africa and landscapes in the West Highlands of Scotland. Email: rick.rohde@ed.ac.uk

A forgotten but ancient technology for managing rivers

SPATE, according to the dictionary is a word of obscure origin meaning a flood or inundation or 'the swollen condition of water'. Hence, spate irrigation...

by Frank van Steenberg

SPATE IRRIGATION is an ancient form of water management unique to semi-arid environments. In spate irrigation sporadic floods from temporary rivers are diverted and spread over a large area to irrigate land and fill drinking water ponds.

This type of irrigation occurs in Yemen, the Horn of Africa and in North Africa, but the largest area is in Pakistan, on the lesser-known, western 'dry side of the Indus'. When the floods enter the plains they are diverted by earthen bunds up to 1km long or more, several meters high and up to 20m wide at the base. Close to mountains the bunds are used to divert part of the fast-flowing flood, but lower down they block the river and divert the entire flow. Water is then guided through a system of flood channels to the bunded fields, which are frequently as large as 15 hectares, though often sub-divided in sections.

In Pakistan the area under spate irrigation is substantial, estimated at 1.4 million hectares, or equivalent to 9% of the entire irrigated area of the country. This area, though, is

one with widespread poverty; probably more than anywhere else in Pakistan. This is related to the uncertainty that goes with spate irrigation: the absence of a reliable drinking water supply and the marginal location of spate areas in the country. Periods of drought are part of spate irrigation; they cause hardship and even the temporary depopulation of areas. The spate areas have high infant mortality, low literacy and school attendance, and tensions between landlords and (hereditary) tenants.

In spite of the large area under spate irrigation, it is very much neglected, both by government and civil society. In several places there has been a steady deterioration in water management, due to unauthorized water diversions, the silting up of the flood channels and the development of gullies distorting the hydraulics. In addition there has been a decline in forestry resources, rangelands and livestock productivity.

However, considerable opportunities exist to revive and improve the productivity of spate-irrigated crops. Yields of these crops in



Karim Nawaz

Earthen bund diverting spate flow in Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan

Pakistan (sorghum, millet, wheat, pulses) are low compared to international figures, but the spate areas are probably the most suitable in the country for the cultivation of oilseeds. In addition there are a number of other very promising crops, such as guar and sesame, truffle mushrooms and medicinal plants, and there is scope to improve forest production either along riverbanks or in fenced plots in the outwash areas. Livestock are an important source of income – especially for women – and spate areas support important species such as Bagh Nari, Sindhi Red Bull and Loghani Goat and Sheep. The productivity of these species could be improved.

Water management has been problematic. The introduction and subsequent withdrawal of free or subsidized earth-moving equipment has destroyed or weakened local institutional arrangements for the management of these areas. Water rights in the past were closely supervised by the local revenue officials, often using land and water records dating back a century. After decentralisation the 'magistrate powers' have been removed from the local

government, making it more difficult for them to mobilise communal labour.

The spate-irrigated areas in Pakistan are unfortunately forgotten, as all attention goes to the massive Indus canal irrigation system. Whatever happens seems to be fragmented and haphazard.

i *The International Spate Irrigation Network is in the process of setting up a special Pakistan network to raise attention and share experiences and information. For more please visit www.spate-irrigation.org*



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Getting paid when drought strikes

Index-based insurance could be a viable risk-management tool for the drylands

Imagine a situation when a pastoralist could insure the family herd against drought and receive compensation if animals die because there is not enough pasture to feed them. Wouldn't this reduce the risks of raising livestock in Africa's drylands?

by Harriet Matsaert and Andrew Mude

LAST YEAR the Ethiopian government, in partnership with the World Food Program, insured its farmers against rainfall failure. This meant that in return for a premium of US\$930,000, the insurance company would have paid out anything up to \$7.1 million in the case of severe drought.

To arrive at a ratio of premium-to-sum-insured acceptable to all parties, this innovative scheme assessed the weather risks in terms of expected loss of income by affected people in the rural areas. As it turned out, there was no severe drought and therefore no payout on the policy last year. If there had been, the money would have gone to the government of Ethiopia, on condition that it would be used for emergency relief and recovery. For the World Food Program, it means that when an emergency occurs they can rely on the insurance money to pay for their relief work, rather than having to depend on donations, which can entail long delays. And with the assurance of those funds arriving on time, people badly affected

Ethiopia: A better way to respond to disasters?

In 2006 the World Food Program insured a portion of its emergency assistance exposure to Ethiopia using a French reinsurer, AXA Re. Crop- and area-specific estimates were aggregated, mapped to income via price estimates, and then converted into a livelihood loss index. The contract covered the entire agricultural season, consisting of two rainy seasons, from March to October, and would have triggered payment by the end of the contract (in October) if data gathered throughout the contract period indicated that rainfall was significantly below historic averages. The potential for similar contracts seems extremely promising for international organizations.

Source: Christopher Barrett *et al.* (2007) *Financing Poverty Traps and Climate Risk*.

may be able to avoid destructive, last-resort measures such as selling their assets, cutting the use of crop nutrients, becoming refugees or turning to crime. Equally importantly, reducing risk exposure can give producers in dryland areas the confidence to invest in inputs and strategies that will potentially give them higher returns in other years.

Two different examples of index-based insurance come from Mongolia and Malawi.

Mongolia: Insurance for asset protection

Herders in Mongolia can be protected by two insurance products. The base insurance product (BIP) is a commercial policy sold and serviced by insurance companies. The product pays out when the mortality rates in their region (soum) exceed a specified trigger (7% in the initial year). The maximum payment for the BIP is at an agreed level (30%). If losses in the region exceed this level all herders (including those who don't buy private insurance) are compensated by the government's Disaster Response Product (DRP).

For example, take a herder who has 36 sheep, where the value of a sheep is 28,320 Tugrik (approx. US\$24). The herder decides to insure the total value: $28,320 \text{ Tg} \times 36 \text{ animals} = 1,019,520 \text{ Tg}$. The premium for the BIP is 1.4%, so the herder would pay $1.4\% \times 1,019,520 = 14,273 \text{ Tg}$ – the value of half a sheep.

If the animal mortality rate in the herder's soum (county) during a bad year equals 35%, the payment rate for the BIP equals $30\% - 7\% = 23\%$ and thus the BIP payment is $23\% \times 1,019,526 \text{ Tg} = 234,490 \text{ Tg}$. He would receive the other 5% under the government's DRP (50,976 Tg).

Source: Mahul O et Skees J (2006) "Piloting Index-Based Livestock Insurance in Mongolia," *Access Finance*.

Malawi: Making lending less risky

Agricultural lending is considered very risky by most financial institutions in Malawi. Drought is usually cited as the greatest risk to lenders as it has been shown that there is a very high correlation between drought and agricultural loan defaults. In a recent initiative, Opportunity International Bank of Malawi (OIBM) and Malawi Rural Finance Corporation (MRFC) agreed to give groundnut farmers loans for high-yielding certified seed, as long as these farmers agreed to buy weather insurance (provided by the Insurance Association of Malawi).

If there is a drought that triggers a payout, that money will be paid directly to the bank in order to pay off the farmer's loan. If there is no drought the farmer will benefit from selling the higher value production. This arrangement has allowed farmers in the pilot area to access finance that would not have been available otherwise.

Source : Weather Index Insurance Malawi.
www.microinsurancecentre.org

In Mongolia, herders can now buy private insurance to cover livestock losses up to a certain level (see Box 2). In Malawi, weather insurance for crops is making groundnut production less risky (Box 3).

For the first time in these and other countries, people who had no access to insurance in the past are being able to use this type of policy – called index-based insurance – to cover some of their risks. All these examples involve a relatively novel and innovative risk management tool: 'index-based insurance'.

What is index-based insurance?

Traditional insurance products are based on an individual's circumstances and losses. In dryland areas where infrastructure is not good, however, these services are



Index-based livestock insurance schemes tested in Mongolia may have a role in the drought-prone areas of eastern Ethiopia

generally unavailable because of the high cost of administering them. In contrast, index-based insurance is based on a fixed trigger mechanism not directly related to any individual farm. This could be calculated on average crop yields, area average livestock mortality rates, cumulative rainfall or even data from satellite imagery.

Index-based insurance can be effectively delivered through a wide range of products (see Boxes). Government or international aid agencies can purchase famine insurance based on a weather index tied to the likelihood of droughts. Individual producers can purchase insurance privately from insurance providers, local banks, NGOs or some partnership of these. Insurance clauses can be folded into loan agreements whereby indexes triggered by adverse events relax the terms of the loan or pay it off. The potential applications are numerous.

Climate modellers in the World Bank's Commodity Risk Management Group and in universities around the world are pioneering contract design. Experience has shown that

these models can provide policies acceptable to both buyers and sellers.

In arid and semi-arid lands, the major constraint has been the limited availability of reliable and objective data. Now, the new-found interest in index-based insurance arises in part from the wider availability of high-precision, high-frequency, satellite-based climate data, an increasing number of weather stations and increased sophistication in the empirical tools for modelling and designing indexes. The International Livestock Research Institute, for one, is excited by the potential of index-based insurance to help pastoralists and agropastoralists reduce risk and protect their assets. ILRI is currently exploring the feasibility of a range of index-based risk finance products in East Africa.

i To learn more or to become involved, contact Andrew Mude (a.mude@cgiar.org), Ade Freeman (a.freeman@cgiar.org), or Harriet Matsaert (harriet@matsaert.net) at ILRI. The postal address is ILRI, Box 30709, Nairobi, Tel +254 20 422 3000. www.ilri.org

The China-Africa debate in context

This is an excellent overview of the China-Africa debate: a short and accessible book that covers most of the key dimensions. It opens with a description of the landmark China-Africa Summit of November 2006, when the streets of Beijing were festooned with huge posters of elephants and giraffes, and Africans in traditional dress. Amidst the colourful images, Alden tells us, one poster depicted feathered tribesmen from Papua New Guinea. His eye for such small details, which can complicate simplistic narratives of friendship or exploitation, is one of the strengths of this book.

Alden sets out to explore three differing views of China's expanding relationship with Africa. Is China a new development partner for Africa, an economic competitor or a new coloniser? The 'development partner' argument concentrates on China as a source of aid, investment, and strategic alliances, the 'economic competitor' view emphasises predatory exploitation of African natural resources (such as forests, oil and minerals) to fuel China's economic growth, while the 'new coloniser' perspective suggests that China is challenging the dominance of G8 nations in Africa and ultimately establishing a new form of control.

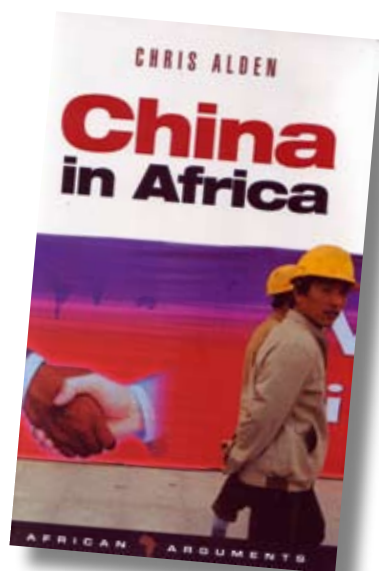
China in Africa sets China's Africa policy in historical context and provides an overview of the range of Chinese actors engaging with Africa: the relevant ministries, the key state-backed Chinese multinational corporations,

as well as smaller firms, migrants and entrepreneurs. Alden also usefully differentiates between diverse African states. China's relationship with Angola is not the same as with Zambia, for example, and China impacts on each in different ways.

The author does not give a clear-cut answer to the question of whether China is a partner, competitor, or colonialist. Each view contains element of the truth, he claims. The western world, he says, needs to face up to its own hypocrisy when it criticises China – and, for its part, China needs to respond to the call to be a responsible global stakeholder.

For anyone wanting to get up to speed quickly on the China-Africa debate, this book is a good place to start.

Reviewed by James Keeley



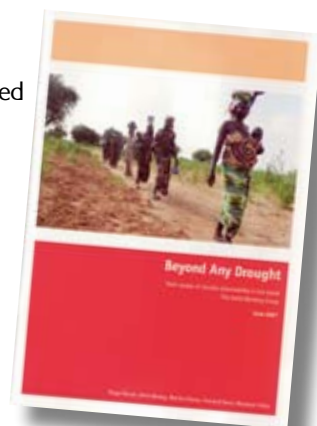
i Chris Alden, *China in Africa*, Zed Books African Arguments series, London, 2007, 157pp. Paperback: ISBN: 9781842778647, £12.99. Hardback: ISBN: 9781842778630, £45. Available from Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK. www.zedbooks.co.uk

The failures of aid to the Sahel

A blunt critique of the widespread failures of international aid in three countries of the francophone Sahel – Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso – has been published by a consortium of 10 non-governmental aid agencies including Oxfam, Care International and Save the Children-UK.

The report, by a team of experts from the region and from the donor community, says many aid initiatives are based on “shallow analyses” and the divide between emergency

and development work – as evidenced in the 2005 food crisis – has been a major barrier to success. It calls for a new, long-term strategy for the Sahel and budget allocations to support “new ways of working”.



i *The Sahel Working Group, Beyond Any Drought: Root causes of chronic vulnerability in the Sahel, SWG/IIED, London, 2007, 44pp. To download this report, go to www.careinternational.org.uk/livingontheedge or for a hard copy write to sahel@careinternational.org*

For a summary see also Living on the Edge: Vulnerability in the Sahel, published by IIED and the Sahel Working Group. Download at www.iied.org/pubs/display.php?o=17008IIED

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The Haramata takeaway

This is our fast food department – nuggets to give you a tasty reminder of the full menu inside and a sampling of stories we're cooking up for the next issue. If you can contribute something spicy, do let us know.

For Starters:

* Climate change, recently debated in Bali, heads our News reports. Decreasing and increasingly unpredictable rainfall in dryland Africa is reawakening old feuds between different groups of people over access to land and water in dryland Africa. As these critical resources shrink, the political and economic dimensions of climate change have to be understood if violent conflict is to be avoided. Your reactions please?

Main Courses:

* There are hopeful things happening, but this issue offers a litany of just about everything that can go wrong with drylands development. While we have a special feature on the impact of China in Africa (*pages 18-24*), most of the other articles constitute an object lesson for China on the kind of things to avoid. For example:

* Outsiders have botched the gender agenda in Africa, a new study finds (*Senorina Wendoh, p10*), and it will now be the job of African development workers to put it right. But Africans can also conspire to make a botch of land reform (*Rick Rohde, p27*). And when we do get it right (*Chris Reij, p14*) we often don't recognise a good thing that should be staring us in the face. In the Sahel,

however, too often the aid agencies get it wrong or tread on each other's toes, so an altogether new strategy is needed (*Sahel Working Group, p35*).

Dessert:

* Farmers and herders in drought-prone areas can now lick their lips at the prospect of insuring themselves against the loss of animals or crops in bad years. That sounds promising. So, next question: will we soon be able to insure dryland countries against the dodgy diktats of the World Bank/European Union?

And to follow:

> High on the menu for *Haramata 53* will be a look at 'carbon offset' schemes in Africa. In Uganda and elsewhere, these schemes acquire land and create tree plantations, whose carbon absorption they then sell to northern corporations or governments to offset their embarrassment at the amount of greenhouse gas they cause. We'll have two contrasting views on one such project.

> Having cast a wary eye on the *grandes dames* and the 'big men' of development, and also the local-level elites that can derail land reform, the next issue will question whether and how the pastoral elites of East Africa benefit from the continued marginalisation of their people.

Send comments or ideas for articles to: *Haramata*, Drylands Programme – IIED, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, UK, or email us at: drylands@iied.org