BULLETIN OF THE DRYLANDS: PEOPLE, POLICIES, PROGRAMMES

HARAMATA

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Keeping an eye on decentralisation

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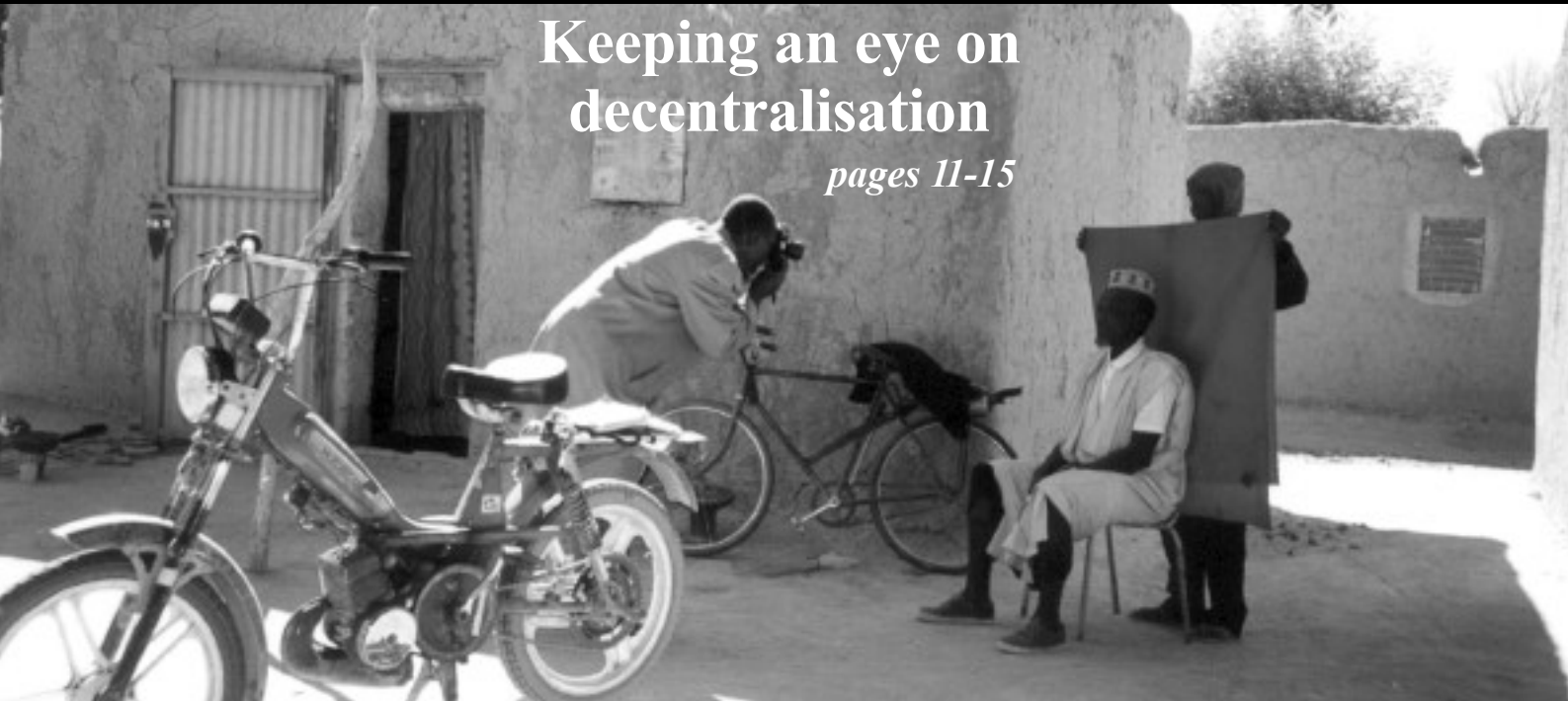

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Cover: Official government photographer capturing the portraits of newly elected councillors, rural Mali. Photo: Camilla Toulmin.

Editorial

Only One Earth – this path-breaking book was written by IIED's founder, Barbara Ward, in 1972. Its title should force us to think hard about how we manage global affairs. Our world makes up a single system, each part linked to the next, and to the whole in ways we do not fully comprehend.

No single country can cut itself off from the key challenges – such as global climate change – which we all face, whether we like it or not. The global atmosphere and our weather systems are no respectors of frontiers. Governments are also finding it hard to insulate their people from strong winds in favour of democratisation and civil rights. Equally, no state can cut its citizens off from the storm clouds and sunshine, the opportunities and disruptions, which the burgeoning global economy brings with it.

The stalling of climate change talks in the Hague last November shows how different countries seek to protect themselves and domestic interests from the need for change. But such behaviour is short-sighted and highly partial. While the US argues for limited action on climate change, it pushes other countries to open up their economies to trade and liberalisation.

Let us hope that the blockage on talks to address global warming starts to shift, as people worldwide recognise this is our one unique, magnificent world which demands our joint stewardship.

Dams report launched

Nelson Mandela helped launch in November the report of the World Commission on Dams (see *Haramata* 35 for background). For the last two years, a group of twelve commissioners have been helping take evidence from major stakeholders around the world, to get their views on the pros and cons behind large scale dams.

The WCD was initiated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Bank, as a means to try and reach consensus on the way forward for future dam construction. It has aimed to listen to as many voices as possible, from the construction, and hydro-power generating companies to the activists fighting against loss of land to dam building. Some argue that there can be no consensus possible, because the environmental and social costs caused by dams is always so substantial that there is no means of paying adequate compensation. For others, it is less a question of whether large dams should be allowed to be built in future. The potential benefits from such infrastructure remain very positive, so long as proper preparation has ensured a fair and equitable settlement for those who are adversely affected by these projects. Equally, care must be paid to ways of minimising environmental impacts, while carrying out an assessment of alternatives to see whether a dam is actually the best and only way of gaining such benefits.

As ex-President Mandela told the audience 'the issue of dams and their benefits and impacts has become one of the battlegrounds in the sustainable development arena'. But the choices are hard. Major cities, such as Johannesburg, must find a large and assured water supply, as well as generating sufficient power, if hardship, poverty and unemployment are to be overcome.

There are several key points from the WCD report which are laid out to guide future investment in dams. All decisions regarding dams must follow a transparent, inclusive and co-operative process which respects the rights of all, and ensures that all risks are addressed. At the same time, it is vital to consider whether there may be other options which could provide the benefits sought from the dam in other ways. The approach put forward tries to take account of the legitimate claims of all those affected by such projects, and provide a means to understand impacts on environment, local communities, cultural values and livelihood options.

For copies of the report and further details, please contact: World Commission on Dams, PO Box 16002, Vlaeborg, 8018 Cape Town, South Africa. Fax: +27.21.426.0036. Email: info@dams.org or www.dams.org

Is the future GM?

The revolution in molecular biology provides the developing world with some important new tools for feeding and caring for its people. It will be critical to use the best science to make wise choices with respect to the application of these technologies. Thus is reviewed the new White Paper on Transgenic Plants and World Agriculture. This report has been put together by seven academies of science from Brazil, China, India, Mexico, UK and US as well as the Third World Academy of Sciences.

But as the report rightly notes, GM technology has not been developed with the needs of poor farmers in mind. Private profit and patent protection have been far more powerful forces than public philanthropy. Scientists are worried that the violent anti-GM protests witnessed in some countries could turn public opinion against GM crops and overshadow the potential benefits of biotechnology.

Private companies will need to demonstrate their interest and willingness to share technology with poor country farmers if they are to avoid hostile criticism. Consumer movements in developed countries have become powerful levers on corporate behaviour, given the great damage which can be caused by boycotting products.

Given that public investment in high tech research has lost place to that funded by private companies, the authors propose that a twofold approach be followed. This would involve more systematic partnerships between the public and private sectors, while also requiring stronger and better-resourced public sector research facilities. At the same time, the authors argue that research in this field should not be over-protected by intellectual property rights, such as patents.

Science, and the benefits it may bring, is not just about technology. It is also deeply enmeshed in who funds the research and the terms on which it is made available to others. Many scientists want to believe that GM technology will save the world from hunger, yet take little note of the power relations underlying their own profession.

The private and public sectors differ greatly in terms of behaviour and strategy. Private sector investment in technology generation demands that high returns be obtained, and as soon as possible. This brings an emphasis on patenting technologies and rapid dissemination to users. In the public sector, while questions of patent protection are not usually an issue, pressures to disseminate are also usually much lower. As a result, a lot of publically funded research remains 'on the shelf'. Certainly, public and private sector research could benefit from partnerships, but great care is needed to be sure that there is real mutual benefit, and that private companies do not use these mechanisms further to enrich themselves and their shareholders.

Transgenic Plants and World Agriculture *is available at: www.nap.edu/catalog/9889.html Otherwise please email:zjones@nas.edu*

Mali's cotton farmers go on strike

Cotton is an important cash crop for many farming families in West Africa, marketing of which has been undergoing major changes. In some cases, cotton marketing boards have been sold off to the private sector, while elsewhere, they remain in public-private partnership. Cotton companies generally also provide farmers with seeds, fertilisers and other agro-chemicals on credit, organise transport from village to factory, provide extension and other training services, etc. The prices at which cotton is bought and inputs sold are usually set by the company at the start of the growing season, although farmers are now demanding a larger share of the world market price.

Farmers are in a relatively weak position when dealing with these companies, even where they have representatives on management boards or where the government has a stake in the company. However, they have one ultimate and powerful weapon: refusing to deliver cotton to the ginneries or not planting cotton at all. While this strategy causes hardship for rural communities, no delivery of cotton creates major problems for running ginneries, squeezes turnover for the company and deprives the government of revenue from taxes and foreign exchange.

Tensions between farmers and companies have been growing in much of West Africa, exacerbated by the fall in world market prices for cotton in 1999, although prices now seem to be picking up again. Farmers in Ivory Coast, for example, refused at the end of 1999 to sell their cotton as they considered the price offered of 150 FCFA/kg by the newly privatised companies as far too low. The conflict was partly solved by the government stepping in with subsidies for farmers.

In Mali, the majority of farmers have refused to grow any cotton at all in 2000. The local cotton company (Compagnie Malienne pour

Source: Profil d'environnement Mali-Sud

Preparing for sale at the local cotton growers group

le Développement des Textiles) had refused to increase the price offered of 150 FCFA/kg, which represented a reduction of almost 20% compared with the previous year, despite the cost of inputs remaining high. Farmers' own calculations showed that they would not break even at these prices, and for those with outstanding debts, their position would worsen further.

The dispute in Mali has also been fuelled by a major financial scandal within the CMDT, which erupted in 1999. At the same time, many farmers have fallen into debt, following the expansion of rural credit programmes, using the cotton harvest as collateral. The cotton growers'union (SYCOV) has lost credibility amongst many farmers who think it has sold out to the company. The CMDT and the government seemed ill-prepared to recognise the anger and legitimacy of the farmers' position. Nobody took the farmers' determination very seriously, until a few weeks before the start of the rains. Meetings with farmers were then organised and they were told that they had a responsibility towards the country to grow cotton. But this did not impress the farmers. A last minute intervention by the President of the Republic resulted in a promise of debt relief, but no increase in cotton price.

Officially, the farmers'organisations called off the strike but the majority of farmers decided not to grow cotton anyway. Instead, they have sown their former cotton fields with grains, such as sorghum and millet which benefit from the effects of the previous year's fertiliser. This large increase in cereals harvested in former cotton areas may go someway to bridge the overall grain deficit as a result of this year's poor rainfall. The prediction is that Mali will produce less than half of last year's cotton crop. But the strike of 2000 is likely to have more long lasting effects. While agreement has now been reached on a price increase to 170F/kg for 2001, cotton farmers have learned how effective they can be when they act with solidarity. The union has learned that it cannot take its members'loyalty for granted, and government has been forced to recognise that prices matter more than patriotic exhortations. Given high levels of dependence on cotton, farmers have picked up new ideas about how they might diversify.

Global talks fail

Talks on addressing global warming and climate change have hit the rocks. No compromise was reached between the European and US positions in November's conference in the Netherlands. The arrival of the new US President does not augur well, since many of his advisors don't believe in global warming.

Those countries currently emitting a large amount of CO_2 – such as the US and Australia – want to address the threat of global warming by developing 'carbon sinks'around the world, rather than tackle the politically more difficult task of getting their population and industries to cut back on energy consumption. The huge demonstrations held across Europe in September, by lorry drivers protesting against high fuel taxes, gave ample evidence of domestic opposition to further charges on energy use.

So what's a 'carbon sink'? It's a means by which additional carbon is absorbed from the atmosphere, into vegetation, or some other

form, such as plankton in the oceans. By these means, it is hoped to reduce the impact of continued carbon emissions. The process of photosynthesis enables plants to take in CO_2 and convert this to carbohydrates within their tissues, and emit oxygen as a by-product. It is thought that a considerable amount of carbon could be taken out of the atmosphere by encouraging much greater plant growth around the world.

Major differences in view have emerged between European countries, where environmental groups have greater political power, and the US. European countries are aiming for continued cuts in domestic energy use. High CO_2 emitters would rather carry on normal business, and pay poorer countries to establish carbon sinks to offset their emissions. But the science of carbon sinks is poorly understood, as yet. What indicators could be used to monitor changes in carbon sinks? Can establishment of sinks be made compatible with social, economic and equity concerns? How much will the US and other high emitters be prepared to pay others to absorb their carbon wastes? Lots of unanswered questions remain if, and when the talks restart.

For updates on the Convention on Climate Change, visit www.unccc.de, and www.iisd.ca/links Just a lot of hot air? A close look at the Climate Change Convention. Panos, London. Fax: +44.207.278.0345. panos@panoslondon.org.uk

Family farms at risk

Globalisation: Who wins – who loses? Proponents say it will make everyone better-off, over time. Those against see the damage and hurt wreaked by global economic forces on jobs, society and environment, as well as people's cultural integrity and sense of self-worth. One recent example concerns the decision by the European Commission to agree that manufacturers need only use 28% of cocoa solids in their 'chocolate', a move which has further worsened the global downwards spiral in cocoa prices.

Farmers in Europe are now becoming more concerned with the global changes underway. Many do not like the changes in agricultural trade policy agreed through the WTO. This will bring reduced protection with many smaller, more marginal farmers going out of business. Save Family Farms is a UK based organisation which argues that globalisation risks shifting power into the hands of a small number of giant international corporations. Shorter supply lines are needed between farmers and consumers, to cut costs of transport, energy and packaging.

But what would such an approach bring for family farms in developing countries? Family farms in Africa also need consideration and protection. Can the interests of European farmers and those in the developing world be brought in line, or will one group's gain be the other's loss? Farmers in Africa could certainly gain greatly if protection of European farmers were reduced, since this would open up new markets. But here are worries that while tariff barriers might come down, European governments will introduce many other forms of controls – such as on grounds of health – which will limit access by African farmers to EU markets in practice. Meanwhile, some farmers have been successfully getting into high value niche food markets, where there is no direct competition, such as organic dried mango slices from Burkina Faso, and fair-trade chocolate from Ghana. Calls for greater protection of Europe's farmers, while understandable, must think how best to build alliances with family farms in poorer parts of the world, so that globalisation is made to work in favour – not against – the least powerful.

Contact: Farmers' World network (FWn) at www.fwn.org.uk Email: fwn@ fwn.org.uk Fax: 44.24.7641.4808.

More fertiliser needed

'Recent agricultural trends indicate that yields for many cereals are not rising as quickly as they did in the 1960s and 70s. Part of the explanation for such a decline in yield growth is the mismanagement of nutrients and soil fertility.' So concludes the study undertaken by IFPRI on current issues and future challenges in the field of sustainable agriculture.

They argue that continued and concerted efforts must be made to ensure the availability in sufficient quantities of soil nutrients to make sure that food production can keep up with projected rates of population growth, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Currently, they argue, problems associated with heavy rates of mineral fertiliser use are confined to developed countries with only a few sites in developing countries where there is a significant problem to be addressed. Increased use of chemical fertilisers in association with organic materials could bring environmental benefits, argue the authors.

Hence, effort is needed to increase the spread and use of chemical fertilisers. Other techniques for improving soil fertility should complement these inputs, particularly by addressing possible shortages of micro-nutrients. Here, soil testing and plant analysis have a valuable role to play. Government needs to promote policies which contribute to more sustainable resource management, through support to research and extension, as well as improving the marketing opportunities for purchase of inputs and sale of produce. Currently, one kg of mineral fertiliser can cost the average African farmer as much as 6 to 11 kg of grain, compared with 2-3 kg of grain equivalent in Asia.

Integrated nutrient management, soil fertility, and sustainable agriculture: Current issues and future challenges. By Peter Gruhn et al. IFPRI discussion paper no. 32, September 2000. Fax: +1.202.467.4439. Email: ifpri@cgiar.org Website: www.ifpri.org

Tackling land reform

The South African elections of 1994 brought to power a government committed to addressing the highly unequal pattern of land ownership in the country, whereby 87% of the land was held by the white population, making up only 12.6% of the country's peoples. Six years later, the figure has shifted to 86%, with only a marginal change in ownership patterns effected. Why has it been so difficult to achieve the progress hoped for? Has donor support been a help or a hindrance? Given the government's commitment to get 15m hectares transferred from white to black farmers over the next 5 years, how might this possibly be carried out?

Experience with the South African land reform programme has generated lively and difficult debate between the different actors involved. The 1994 government came in with land reform identified as the central driving force behind their programme for rural development. It was to address the historic injustices imposed on millions of black people, as well as to provide secure tenure for those in rural and urban areas. At the same time, given the importance of the agricultural economy for incomes, employment and exports, land reform was hoped to improve incomes and productivity, and address rural poverty.

Looking back at the last six years, in a new book – *Breaking ground* – Adams provides a sensitive analysis based on in-depth insights into the processes of land reform. He notes the need for political commitment at the highest level if the difficult challenges and risks associated with land reform are to

get attention. He describes the very large effort needed to train and build capacity amongst both government and civil society. Lack of skills led to a great shortfall in what could be achieved within the timeframe of the first five year government. However, much essential groundwork has been laid on which to take forward reforms in future.

However, as Adams notes, the new government elected in 1999 has opted for a different set of priorities regarding the land reform programme, with the shelving of the Land Rights Bill, due to be approved by government for implementation. Instead, the Department of Land Affairs is due to distribute land to black commercial farmers, rather than the landless. Equally, the role of traditional chiefs in the management of local affairs and the administration of land allocations is to be strengthened. Such a move was heavily criticised by many observers, since it moves away from commitment to establishing elected, local government, which might be more accountable to the electorate than customary authorities.

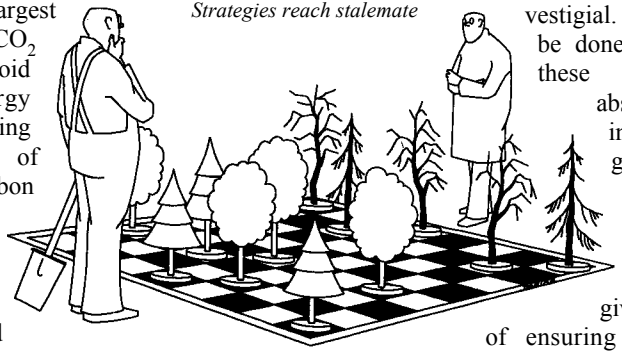
Politicians and decision-makers in South Africa are looking over their shoulders at Zimbabwe. They know they must not follow a similar route as that of President Mugabe and yet they will have to make much faster progress in redressing the highly skewed ownership of land in favour of black people. Otherwise, risks of illegal land invasions and rural conflict are likely to escalate.

Breaking ground: Development aid for land reform, by Martin Adams. Overseas Development Institute, London. ISBN: 0 85003 500 7. Fax: +44.207.922.0399 Website: www.odi.org.uk/publications

Thinking through carbon sinks

The stalled climate change negotiations (see NEWS, page 3) showed the enormous importance now being given to establishing carbon sinks, as a means to absorb carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere. Those countries responsible for the largest emissions of CO_2 want to avoid cuts in energy use by investing in ways of trapping carbon from the atmosphere, know as carbon 'sinks'. These could include changing methods of farming to increase levels of organic matter in soils, minimum tillage methods, and increasing tree plantations. Countries such as the US hope to persuade poorer countries to accept cash in exchange for a commitment to increase their capacity to absorb carbon, through such measures. The US could then avoid having to take difficult decisions and by-pass the major domestic political battles likely if they have to cut their own use of energy.

Regardless of when the climate talks restart, carbon sinks, or offsets are likely here to stay. There are already more than 150 carbon offsets schemes around the world, with more to come. Yet the science behind such schemes is sketchy, and indicators for monitoring their operation vestigial. Much needs to be done to ensure that these systems for absorbing and storing carbon are going to behave as expected. Equally, there has been very little thought given to ways of ensuring such schemes



Strategies reach stalemate

Miroslav Bartak

promote rural incomes, livelihoods and welfare. There are risks that governments will receive money for carbon fixing activities and ride roughshod over local interests and priorities.

Can rural people benefit from carbon offsets? This is the key question underlying recent research described in the report listed below. The authors argue that brokers will be needed to help local actors gain access to the opportunities presented by emerging markets for carbon. Careful scrutiny will be need of potential investments to avoid those which have taken no account of rural livelihood issues. Poor levels of organisation amongst the rural poor will limit their ability to take advantage of these schemes, while small scale, complex land use systems may hamper their ability to get involved. This will need capacity development at local, national and global levels to ensure that the global benefits from increased carbon storage are not gained at the expense of the poor, small holders of the developing world.

Rural livelihoods and carbon management, by Steve Bass et al. March 2000. 94pp. For more details, contact: Steve.Bass@iied.org For copies of the report, get in touch with bookshop@iied.org Fax: +44.207.388.2826.

Modelling Africa's changing climate

A new review of temperature and rainfall data for Africa provides the basis for modelling likely future climate trends. The researchers have aimed to see whether their models can explain the recent changes in rainfall and temperature experienced by different parts of the continent. The aim is then to consider how further changes in global CO_2 and sea-level rise are likely to impact on different regions of Africa. The study notes, however, that there are great difficulties in building models which adequately represent the various processes involved. The impact of the El Niño climate variation needs to be included and yet is difficult to handle. Equally, account must be taken of the high levels of dust in the atmosphere, as well as changes in vegetation and land cover patterns, both of which play important roles in affecting rainfall levels and temperature patterns. Given such difficulties, the researchers argue that today, attention might best be paid to monitoring weather patterns and ensuring effective early warning systems, to be sure that countries are well-prepared in the event of a major drought, or flood. Nevertheless, strategic investment decisions that affect long-lived infrastructures and institutions, must increasingly take into account the risks of further changes in climate in the African region induced by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases. Although these risks may not yet be formally quantified, the range within which change is likely can be defined and should be considered alongside other uncertain, yet equally far-reaching, constraints.

African climate change: 1900-2100, by Mike Hulme et al. Climate Research *to be published early 2001.*

The *Office du Niger* in Mali falls victim to its own success

Created in 1932 to grow cotton and then rice, this vast irrigated area on the western edge of the Inner Niger Delta is falling victim to its own success. Recent improvements in water management, better prices, and more productive technologies have allowed farmers to raise yields and thus their incomes. The profits farmers make are being invested in livestock, particularly cattle, as few alternatives exist which offer similar rates of return. As a result, the cattle herd in the area is growing rapidly. Even in

1993, a study by Haidara[1] showed average annual herd growth to be 17.6% a year, which implies a doubling of herd numbers every 5 to 6 years. Given favourable price trends for rice since 1993, this figure is likely to have been maintained. Although the total number of animals in the area is not accurately known, these high rates of growth in livestock numbers bring their own problems.

Source : Sécheresse Vol. 10, Sept. 1999

Watering of the cattle near Markala, Office du Niger, December 1998

Foremost amongst these is the escalating level of conflict between Fulani herders and rice farmers. These herders are hired to manage the animals belonging to farmers of the *Office du Niger*. Farmers complain of the damage caused to irrigated rice fields by poorly controlled herds. Crop damage is a common problem throughout the Sahel and is largely due to the absence of well-defined mechanisms to regulate the competing demands of different land users. The *Office du Niger* is no exception to this rule.

Ever since its inception, there has been no livestock policy designed for the *Office du Niger*. The reforms of the 1980s were primarily aimed at reinforcing productivity of irrigated rice farming and market gardening with no attention given to accommodating the needs of this growing cattle population which, even then, was finding itself increasing squeezed for space and access to resources. The problem has been further exacerbated by the long run of drought years. Resources in the neighbouring dryland zones, which have traditionally provided pasture and water to the herds from the *Office du Niger*, particularly in the farming season, have become increasing scarce. This is partly a result of poor rainfall, but also because farmers in these areas are increasingly colonising former pasture lands to counteract decreasing yields on their village fields.

The *Office du Niger* is planning to bring much new land under irrigation, but does not appear to have recognised the importance of livestock in local people's livelihood strategies. Yet it is essential that this sector be recognised as an integral component of the farming system if these new developments are not to exacerbate conflict. A more regional and holistic approach has to be taken whereby the needs of both the irrigated zone and the dryland zone are considered not only in their own right, but also in the context of their respective roles in securing the overall production systems of local people.

Yet it would seem that the pastoral dimension of the *Office du Niger* and its surrounding areas remains ignored. There is a need for detailed research better to understand the pastoral system itself (numbers of livestock, pastoral management systems, transhumance routes, etc.), the role it plays in different people's livelihoods (herd structures, attitudes to investment, etc.), and its interactions with agriculture and other forms of land use.

For more details, see the article "A propos de la gestion du bétail dans le Macina, Office du Niger, Mali" by Florence Brondeau, Sécheresse *vol. 10, numéro 3, September 1999.*

[1] Y. 1993 *Etude sur la divagation des animaux dans la zone du Macina, Office du Niger. Niono.* URDOC

Challenges and lessons from institutional reform

Countries throughout Africa have been undertaking reforms aimed at decentralisation of certain administrative and other government functions, following a variety of different models. These processes are at various stages across the continent, some having started long ago, while others are still in the pipeline.

What is decentralisation?

Decentralisation in English, describes the general process involving the transfer of power from higher to lower levels of decision-making. In French-speaking countries it is defined more narrowly and refers to the definitive transfer of decision-making powers and executive authority from a higher to a lower authority, such as from central government to local level communes. *Deconcentration* describes a process whereby responsibility for certain administrative activities and provision of services is shifted from central to lower level structures within government, but with no transfer of decision-making powers involved. An example might be provided by the Ministry of Agriculture at central government level shifting certain functions to its regional offices. *Devolution* is a form of decentralisation which involves the transfer of power from a larger to a smaller unit, and may concern all, or a selection of powers.

In most African settings, decentralisation has involved the establishment of new forms of local government, such as district assemblies, rural communes or municipal authorities. These have usually been constituted by a combination of elected and appointed members, and have been allocated tasks devolved from above, and those transferred from below, such as customary structures at village and other levels.

The pressure in favour of decentralisation in Africa forms part of a broader global shift in favour of local participation. Adherence to a decentralised approach often stems from pressure exerted by donors, who argue that it should bring better governance. The need to clarify the rights and responsibilities of different local structures, as well as cutbacks to central government budgets have provided the broader context against which such reforms have taken place.

i *Good government and democratisation*. Establishing local government structures which are subject to periodic re-election is seen to be a means to create a more accountable and responsive system for providing basic services to the local population. Locating these structures at a relatively low level should permit easier contact between elected representatives and the electorate, and a greater responsiveness in terms of providing services than is possible through more centralised structures. It is also assumed that decentralisation should bring improved problem-solving capacity, generating measures and ideas which are better adapted to local conditions.

ii *Clarifying jurisdictions between different forms of local governance*. The drive by governments to do away with traditional structures has also been an important motive behind the decentralisation process. In some cases, setting up new political structures, on democratic principles, has created opportunities for a fresh class of political activists, often younger, educated people, not connected to traditional structures of power. Decentralisation may also provide a means for central government to increase its involvement in local affairs. In other cases, governments have sought to incorporate customary authorities within the new sys-

tem of local administration, such as the role allocated to traditional chiefs in Niger.

iii *Cutbacks to national budgets* have been seen by some as the major driving force behind the current interest in decentralisation, since government hopes thereby to shift certain costs and responsibilities away from central government. Establishing local government may also generate increased incentives for economic and social development, by demonstrating a close link between tax payment and delivery of services.

Photo: Camilla Toulmin

A meeting of the rural council in Mali

The consequences of decentralisation vary greatly depending on whether these new forms of local government can acquire a sense of legitimacy vis-à-vis local people and other sources of local governance (such as traditional chiefs), how far central government supports the process in practice, and the extent to which they can carry out the activities hoped of them. Since decentralisation in many countries is a relatively recent policy shift, it may take more than just a few years to see significant impacts from these institutional changes

Does decentralisation bring good governance, accountability, and the responsiveness of elected officials to local people? It is not clear how far, in practice, such capacity and willingness to listen and respond actually happen. A survey of several communes in Ivory Coast showed that there were no regular means by which elected councillors met with their constituents. Equally, the priority actions put forward by councillors for the commune to undertake were frequently considerably at odds with the expressed priorities of local people. Local councillors wanted to build town halls and secondary schools, while local people said they wanted roads, social infrastructure, markets, electricity and water.

A survey of several Sahelian countries confirms the weak communication links existing between local councillors and their electorate. In some cases, independent candidates are not allowed to stand for local election, thereby ensuring that all candidates have to be members of one of the main parties and subject to their discipline and control. This has led to the politicisation of rural council business, and a strong tendency for councillors to look upwards to their political masters rather than downwards to the local population.

Both the electorate and elected councillors needs training regarding their responsibilities, duties and expectations of the various parties. In Tanzania, a series of training events is underway aimed at introducing elected councillors to the four dimensions of their role: balancing the needs of various stakeholders (both local and national); the constitutional and legal requirements which define their areas of responsibility and power; technical skills such as financial management, strategic planning and running effective meetings; and leadership skills, to mobilise constituents, reflect the varied priorities of groups within the ward, and manage relationships with council staff.

Raising awareness within local community groups is another important task, given the need to ensure they understand the powers and mandate of new local government structures, and to provide checks on local government action. An example of this kind of activity can be seen from current work in Senegal being carried out by a couple of NGOs, which specialise in working on civic education with people newly literate in the local Fulfulde language. Communities are trained in local land use planning, conflict management and a wide range of skills of potential benefit to them (including financial management, and leadership skills). Local people and their elected officials are also trained in the legal and administrative provisions of the decentralisation process, in particular as it concerns natural resource management. These initiatives demonstrate the importance of strengthening capacity at village level, as a means to support the decentralisation process, while providing a means to balance the powers attributed to local government.

Lack of local infrastructure can also constitute a substantial hindrance to good governance. In South Africa, many settlements are often inaccessible, with little or no transport or telephone, while the poor remuneration of councillors makes it difficult to attract people of calibre. In Tanzania, local government staff face great difficulties in carrying out their jobs effectively, and miss many of the most basic office necessities. As a result, of those surveyed, many reckoned to gain only some 20% of their income from salary, and spent only 10% of their day actually in the workplace .

How to clarify jurisdictions between different forms of local governance? In many countries, the establishment of new district assemblies or councils has provided a means by which central government tries to bypass customary structures of authority, and break the power of traditional chiefs. Yet the legitimacy of new institutions and their ability to exercise power effectively take time to establish. Traditional ways of doing things cannot be changed over-night.

The role and powers of customary structures vary greatly between countries, and even between regions within given countries. In some cases, traditional structures of power appear to have lost their social legitimacy, as a result of failing in their customary responsibilities. Thus, for example, customary chiefs in Cameroon have started selling land which many people consider is not really theirs to sell, since it is held in trust for the larger clan. By contrast, in many parts of Ghana, Paramount chiefs have retained important formal powers so that all land transactions must continue to be registered and validated by the chief's Lands Secretariat.

Often, customary chiefs have been adept in ensuring that they acquire power within newly created structures of power, and manage to get themselves elected to local government. In Burkina Faso, it was found that the village committees for managing land were usually controlled by the family of notables; though often through an educated younger son, rather than by the elderly family head.

How will the rights and responsibilities of local government link to customary structures at village and other levels? In the case of Mali, the establishment of Rural Communes and their elected mayors and councillors constitute a new set of actors seeking power within an already crowded field, and with whom village leaders will have to negotiate a new set of roles. In many circumstances, local councils will have to rely for day to day management on village level structures. Where there are resources of considerable value, tensions are likely to develop between rural communes and local villages. For example, villages with a large area of land under fallow may find the commune eager to allocate these resources to others seeking farmland. Equally, villages with well-protected woodlands may find that the commune wishes to earn fees from sales of wood-cutting permits in what villagers have considered to be 'their' woodland.

There is also the question of how powers are distributed within formal local government structures. In Tanzania, legislation does not clearly spell out the division of functions and responsibilities between councillors and officers, resulting in overlapping of functions. Other levels of government and party hierarchy continue to survive, so that there is considerable duplication of functions between councils, regional directorates, the party structure, and central government ministries. In several countries, rural councils can only play an advisory role, and require approval regarding the decisions they make from the government administrator at a higher level. When it comes to managing certain resources, such as forests, decision-making rests in the hands of state agents. This stems from an entrenched belief on the part of the government that it is too risky to hand over valuable resources to local people.

How can local government raise sufficient funds? Local councils must raise funds in order to implement their priorities. One of the factors underlying the decentralisation process has been the cutbacks in central government budgets consequent on structural adjustment programmes, and the desire to shift certain costs from central to local levels.

But, in practice, local government funding continues to rely heavily on central government grants, given the lack of any other options. In southern Africa, wildlife revenues can provide a significant source of revenue for particular district councils and villages which have the good fortune to be host to large animal populations. Under the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) set up in Zimbabwe, rural communities directly receive income related to use and management of wildlife. In some cases, Rural District Councils have held on to revenue and management rights, rather than devolving these to lower ward level.

However, there are few resources on which tax revenue can be raised. Hence, local communes find themselves seriously constrained in terms of what they can undertake. Where funds continue to come mainly from central government, local councils remain firmly indebted to national political concerns, with very limited autonomy. Elected officials are likely to take most heed from the places and people from which they gain their funds, further weakening the link between them and the local electorate. Even where 'taxes'are being levied against provision of a service, such as water for livestock in Senegal, bore-hole committees experience great difficulties in both raising revenue from water users and then ensuring that the funds received are allocated for bore-hole maintenance and upgrading.

Land taxes have been proposed by some as providing a basis for increased local government revenue. In the case of Senegal, rural councils face difficulty in raising much money. Local councillors are caught in a bind, being reluctant to press their electors for tax payments while, equally, wanting resources to build social infrastructure and carry out development projects. There is a marked contrast in tax raising performance between the traditional levies which continue to be paid by many land users, such as the tithe and fees to the land chief and, on the other, government imposed taxes.

Impacts of decentralisation on land allocation Reforms to decentralise have usually been undertaken for political or administrative purposes and have not had questions of land tenure and natural resource management as central objectives. However, the establishment of these new structures and the associated changes in the distribution of responsibilities between different levels of government have inevitably had impacts on how land is managed, the allocation of rights and the distribution of powers.

Various models have been developed for managing the allocation of land at local government level. In some cases, the elected local government body has powers of land allocation, amongst other mandates (as happens in Senegal). In other cases, the administration of

land is dealt with by a separate body, such as a Land Board, often constituted partly from elected and partly from appointed members (as in Botswana). In yet other circumstances, decentralised local government may sit alongside a continued, formal role for customary chiefs in the administration of land (such as in Ghana). There are differing consequences for the effective and transparent management of land associated with each of these models.

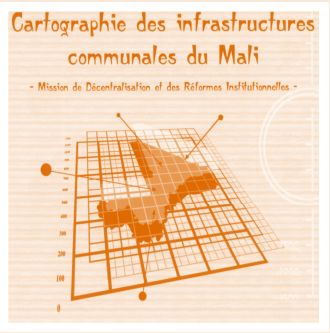
A key question concerns the extent to which there is a clear separation of powers between the local council and the land administration body. This separation is recognised by many as critically important in reducing possibilities for corrupt behaviour, as where elected officials use their powers to allocate land to reward political allies. Another issue concerns the need to match the new legal provisions with capacity on the ground to ensure they are both understood and implemented.

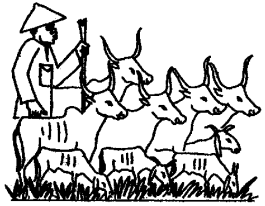
Decentralisation in Mali Mali has been preparing for decentralisation for more than five years. In June 1999, the population went to vote for their first rural communes. Decentralisation has been given very high level political support in Mali, as well as considerable financial support from the donor community. There are a large number of training programmes to ensure that elected officials understand clearly what is expected of them, how to draw up a budget, and assess tax payments. Anational fund has been established to provide funds for communes needing support for their development plan. Typically, these involve providing new schools, better health services, improved water supplies, and developing income-generating opportunities for women. Communes are also due to draw up commune-wide land use plans, to establish more effective management systems for key resources, such as woodlands, grazing and water.

Many questions remain concerning the likely impacts of decentralisation on different aspects of rural and urban life. Each commune has its particular mix of options and constraints, its history, mix of peoples, and local political tensions. Some communes are fortunate in having a source of revenue they can exploit, such as a gravel quarry, or large market. Others find themselves with far fewer choices and are actively seeking partnerships with donors and NGOs, to gain support.

Decentralisation poses many challenges. Setting up new elected structures at local level will not by itself bring more responsive governance, and better service delivery. However, such a process is clearly part of a longer term policy to vest authority and responsibility at lower levels. There is much that can be learned from experience with decentralisation in different parts of Africa, since each country has followed a slightly different path. Whatever these differences, training and information provide the corner stone for ensuring more effective engagement by local people in these new structures.

The MDRI (Mission de Décentralisation et des Réformes Institutionnelles) has produced a very useful CD-ROM providing details of all 682 Rural communes in Mali, their boundaries, principal towns and villages, population, and so on. For free copies of the CD-ROM, please contact: MDRI, BPE 1420, Bakamo, Mali Fax:+223.240 700. Email: mdri @malinet.ml The Swiss supported Decentralisation support programme (Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation – PAD) is based in Bougouni in south west Mali and has developed a series of training materials and booklets. Contact: PAD, BP 53 Bougouni. Tel/fax:+223.651039. Email: pad@cefib.com





Managing the range: towards tailor-made solutions

In the last issue of Haramata *we brought your attention to a region - al workshop on range management in Niamey, Niger. Here, Pippa Trench of SOS Sahel/GB, who attended the meeting, reports back on some of the key issues addressed.*

From October 2-6, a workshop was held on *Approaches to range - land management and development projects: what prospects?* The workshop was all about partnership and collaboration, as was also demonstrated in the way it was both organised and funded. The rural development wing of the German Development Service (DED) in Niger was the main organiser, under the sponsorship of the Ministries of Animal Resources and Planning, but DED also worked in close collaboration with representatives from a range of organisation including: donors, research organisations, a pastoral association, the World Bank and Niger's National Council for Sustainable Development (CNEDD).

The 150 participants came from local government, traditional authorities, NGO and bilateral development projects, government sectors and pastoral associations, researchers and lawyers, from 17 mainly francophone West African countries.

This diversity of backgrounds and perceptions was one of the most important aspects of this workshop. The management of rangeland is a vast topic, as we discovered over the four days, with no blueprint solutions. In his paper on pastoral organisations, André Marty gave an overview of different types of pastoral organisation with whom he has worked over nearly thirty years, whether co-operatives in Mali, *groupes paritaires*[1] in Chad, or local associations in Niger. He described the changing political, ecological and social context in which these organisations have evolved, operated and sometimes disappeared. The region is vast and diverse, so there is need for learning lessons and local adaptation.

Similarly, different political and social contexts influence the way in which new laws are interpreted and applied. For example, Mauritania's new Pastoral Code described by Dah Ould Khtour, combines local practice, customary law and the principles of Islamic Law. It also depends on local government understanding and supporting pastoral practices in a way which could not be guaranteed in, for example, Mali or Niger.

In spite of these differences a certain number of principles did come out, including recognising the value of pastoralism, the need for mechanisms for negotiation over resource access at all levels and, associated with this, a greater equilibrium in power relations and the importance of mobility within the system. Overall it was an intense four days of discussion and a valuable chance to reinforce old friendships and make new ones. In his summing up and note of thanks, Hermann Grell from GTZ in Burkina Faso, who was involved in the PRASET workshops during the 90s, acknowledged the importance of the workshop in bringing many different actors together for the first time. As Boureima Dodo from AREN said in his closing words – *the challenge is now to act.*

[1] Literally meaning a group composed of equal numbers of representatives, in this case based on patrimony.

Pastoral voices – challenging orthodox policy

All over East Africa, pastoral communities and their way of life are under immense pressure. In Tanzania and Kenya, large and small scale farmers are settling in huge numbers on pasture land, and blocking vital dry season migration routes. In Uganda, the Karimojong are unwelcome in the neighbouring districts to which they have to migrate with their cattle during the dry season. The widespread ownership of guns has transformed pastoral conflict and exacerbated insecurity in Northern Uganda, with the Karimojong considered the main culprits. Their unarmed neighbours want the Karimojong either disarmed or enclosed within Karamoja to contain the havoc that their warriors are wont to cause. Wildlife conservation areas and other reserves add further to the pressure on pastoral lands in all three countries.

Yet the greatest threat to the pastoral way of life lies in the policies of the three governments, who see pastoralism as an unsustainable land use system, a backward way of life, which must be transformed through settlement. In Uganda, there was even once a Minister of State for Anti-Nomadism, whose mandate was to abolish nomadic pastoralism. In Kenya, there used to be a Ministry for Reclamation of Waste Lands, intended to reclaim waste (i.e. pastoral) land for cultivation. Although these ministries no longer exist in name, the official attitude to pastoralism has not changed. Governments expect pastoral communities to settle down and become cultivators, with intensive livestock keeping replacing extensive systems.

Yet the rationale for pastoralism has never been more clearly understood in the research and NGO worlds. Recent work has shown conclusively that pastoralism is much the most sustainable land use and production system for the areas occupied by pastoral communities in East Africa and elsewhere. Pastoral practices and mobility have evolved over many centuries in response to ecological realities, to make best use of scarce and variable resources.

For the last hundred years, colonial and post-independence governments have tried to get pastoralists to settle down. Huge sums of money have been invested in water projects to construct dams and boreholes in Ngorongoro, Karamoja, Narok and Wajir, because it was believed that herders moved in search of water. Hence, if they were provided with water, they would settle down once and for all. Politicians and civil servants who tend to be from agricultural backgrounds, and backed by donors with similar convictions, were sure that development for pastoral communities meant settlement and cultivation. All these attempts have failed, not just because they have been resisted by the pastoral peoples, but because they have been founded on an inadequate appreciation of the rationale of pastoralism. The infrastructure for most of the large-scale water projects lie idle and forsaken as cattle need more than water to survive.

But, why do governments in East Africa continue to pursue policies which are so clearly unable to address the needs of pastoral development? Why are the same mistakes made, year in year out? Why do decision-makers ignore the realities of pastoralism, which every pastoralist knows and lives by? These are some of the questions behind an action research project jointly developed by RECONCILE and IIED. The project seeks to work with pastoral communities in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, to help articulate the rationale for pastoralism as a mode of production and a land use system, using local knowledge and experience, and find ways of presenting this to policy makers in a language that the latter can understand.

This project will build on ongoing work in West Africa (Burkina Faso and Niger) where IIED has been facilitating a series of pastoral policy analysis workshops designed to enable pastoral groups articulate their reality and the justification for what they do, in the language of the policy makers and implementers. Preliminary consultations in East Africa by IIED and RECONCILE show that, like in other pastoral regions, a large number of civil society organizations have emerged in pastoral East Africa over the past decade, from community-based organizations to national NGO federations, which bring together a number of organizations. The Pastoralists' Parliamentary Group (PPG) in Kenya and the Karamoja Parliamentary Group in Uganda both provide a framework for Parliamentary action on behalf of pastoralists. There is even talk of creating a regional Pastoralist Forum for the three countries.

The emergence of these organizations is an important milestone for pastoral development, but most have focused on service delivery to address immediate development needs, rather than analysis of the structural issues that sustain underdevelopment in the drylands of East Africa. Our project plans to initiate a process whereby the pastoralists themselves define their development objectives by inter-acting with policy actors. Pastoral groups need to play a much stronger role in designing appropriate policy and legal instruments and institutions capable of delivering sustainable development for pastoral communities in the region. Giving voice to pastoralists to determine their development priorities will strengthen governance and democratic processes throughout the region.

For more details, contact Michael Ochieng Odhiambo, RECONCILE, Nakuru, Kenya. Email: ochiengodhiambo@hotmail.com and reconcile@net2000ke.com

Networking in the Horn

The annual meeting of the Resource Management Somali Network (RMSN) was held 23-30 October 2000 in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This was attended by the Minister of Environment and Rural Development, the Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA), Hargeisa University and local NGOs. RMSN is funded by NOVIB and seeks to improve quality of life through conservation of the natural, human and economic landscape

Regional networking by the RMSN is based on the following:

- pastoralism is a common issue in the Horn of Africa
- regional networking will decrease tension amongst member countries
- resource-based conflicts are frequent
- regional networking will lead to better early warning of pending crises
- mechanisms for collaboration should be created
- a culture for peace, tolerance and co-existence should be promoted
- stronger linkages with the rural and pastoral women in the Horn should be developed

During the workshop, the issue of the current livestock export ban was raised, following the fear that Rift Valley Fever has been found in Somali territories and the Horn of Africa. Apetition was signed by participants urging the ban to be lifted, and stating that there is no evidence that RVF has been found in Somali territories, and there is no or little evidence of it in the Horn of Africa. The RMSN appealed to all authorities to explore ways to reduce dependence on Gulf markets.

For more information or copies of the report, please contact Horn Relief, email: horn-rel@nbnet.co.ke or PENHA, PO Box 494, 1 Laney House, Portpool Lane, London EC1N 7UL, UK. Fax: 0207 404 6778. E-mail: p.penha@ukonline.co.uk

Land reform in Scotland

Haramata ***talks to Andy Wightman, land reform campaigner in Scotland. Andy explains here why land reform has become a hot political topic and some of the parallels with land reform campaigns elsewhere. For those wanting to follow this work, please visit www.caledonia.org.uk/land***

Why is land reform an issue in Scotland?

I suppose its surprising, but it's all to do with history. I think you can identify three different kinds of land reform. The first concerns major programmes of agrarian reform, involving redistribution of land and a range of other measures aimed at promoting agricultural development, as we find in many developing countries today. Second are the reforms now taking place in much of the former communist bloc of Eastern Europe, which involve restitution of land, and the re-establishment of land markets. Third are the reforms which have taken place in Europe from the 18th and 19th centuries onwards, aimed at overturning a feudal or aristocratic structure of landholding, in favour of many small landowners.

Britain missed out on these revolutionary upsets. The abolition of the aristocracy and break-up of large landed estates never happened. During the 18th & 19th century, landowners in Scotland cleared many people off the land in order to make way for large commercial farms, and most common lands were divided up into private holdings. Hence, today, 50% of the privately-owned rural land in the country is owned by only 343 people, in one of the most unequal patterns of landownership to be found anywhere in the world. This great imbalance in landownership and political power is now finally being addressed.

So why land reform in Scotland today?

A new Scottish Parliament was set up and held its first sitting in July 1999, after a break of nearly 300 years. The new government is trying to update the legal system as it relates to land. Before then, all legislation had to go through the UK Parliament, based in London. There was usually not much time allocated to Scottish legislation. There has been a lot of catching up to do in the last 18 months. Legal reforms have aimed to modernise the system, with the abolition of feudalism, the review of tenancy legislation, and various other reforms designed to reform archaic and complex areas of property law. Historically, land owners have been very powerful in Britain. Until last year, this "landed elite" formed a major part of the second parliamentary chamber in London – the House of Lords. The second chamber has now been radically re-structured to remove them from power. There is no second chamber in the Scottish Parliament, so it ought to be easier to achieve change.

But for a country like Scotland, where very few people are still actively farming, what interest is there in land reform?

There are various interests at stake. Take the many tenant farmers, for instance, who would like the right to buy the land they may have been farming for many long years. There are political interests who argue against the persistence of feudalism and want to see the break-up of large landed estates because of the inequitable economic and political power they represent. Economic development agencies are

also of the view that providing greater access to land is very important to unleash economic activity, particularly in more marginal areas where there are relatively few opportunities for local people. Local community activists are concerned to gain better control over the resources on their doorstep, so that their initiatives are not blocked by local landowners. But there are also people who want to reform patterns of land owning because they object to land being such a freely marketable asset. At the moment, anyone can buy a huge area of land – as long as they have the money. Marketing and ownership of land are often very secretive – the land market is entirely unregulated. Many local people don't know who their neighbouring land owner actually is and very rarely see them – many are absentee owners, living thousands of miles away.

How can local people establish firmer rights to land?

Recent years have seen an increasing number of cases where community groups take action and try and buy land from the local landlord. Often with help from NGOs, local government, or politicians, they form a collective to buy and manage the land. Environmental NGOs have played an important role here, raising money and becoming partners in such jointly managed estates. Some groups have been very effective in mobilising the media – press and TV – to get their views put across and gain public sympathy and funding, as we saw with the community buyout on the Isle of Eigg.

But how can community groups find the money to purchase these big landholdings, many of which are put on sale for several million pounds?

Some of these estates are bankrupt – due to very poor management by the landlord and bad relations with the local community. Often the land owner has borrowed a lot of money and cannot pay it back. Hence, community groups can sometimes negotiate a much more favourable price with the creditors than you might imagine. Private donors, NGO funds and a public appeal can help raise the money needed. But you also get cases where the landlord refuses to sell land to the local community and then there is no easy way round this.

How might legislation help bring better and more equitable patterns of land ownership?

Many of the fundamental political and economic problems are linked to a gross imbalance of power in our society, which is typified by the land ownership figures I gave you earlier. If we could achieve a more equitable pattern of landownership, allow more than just the eldest child to inherit land, and restore common land rights, this would achieve a much better balance of power. But government is currently unwilling to do anything quite so radical. Instead, they propose to enable community groups to buy land when it comes on to the open market

So what can you do if people don't want to sell?

Well, the government does have the power of compulsory purchase which it can invoke, when the interests of the broader society are at stake. But they have been very reluctant to consider using such legal force. Some people have argued that any attempt to use a compulsory purchase order would be contested by the land owner as constituting a breach of human rights, on the grounds that you are not allowed to dispossess someone of their property. But I feel that the human rights of one person need to be weighed in the balance against the broader public interest, so compulsory acquisition could be feasible without running foul of the lawyers. The government and

Parliament are probably worried by the threat of such legal action by land owners, and don't know how far they can go.

Tell me about the Land Fund.

This was established with a sum of £10million to cover a three year period. It is meant to help community groups acquire rights to land, both through purchase and various leasing arrangements. The Fund is financed from the U.K. National Lottery and will be available from January 2001. I can report back to your readers after the first year's work.

What about access to other valuable resources?

Game is an interesting issue – here we are talking about deer, fish and birds. While most common lands have disappeared, game are a common property resource, yet rights of access have been privatised. The rights to hunt game are usually owned by the landowner alone, who manages their estate as a private hunting reserve. Gamekeepers protect the animals from 'poachers' who do not have rights to kill these animals. Game management has always been associated with rich landowners who sell hunting rights to those who can afford to pay the enormous fees. Yet there is much potential for joint management systems for game, as well as forests. Here we have a lot to learn from community conservation projects in Asia and Africa. Wild deer have been particularly damaging to the Scottish landscape and environment, since they browse on young trees, preventing their regeneration. We have had decades of work to try and get deer numbers down, but to little real effect. Landowners don't want deer numbers reduced too much, since this would mean they would get less revenue from hunters.

With all such new initiatives and legislation, how important has it been to consult with the people?

Consultation is always a good idea. The Scottish Parliament started its work with a commitment to listen to people's views, on a wide range of subjects. But consultation is never perfect. It can provide a cover for listening to some groups and ignoring others, whose views don't fit. In some cases, people who might want to take part don't have the right information at the right time to be effective. When a subject like land tenure has been off the agenda for so long, it takes time for civil society to understand and master the subject, and give sufficient time to think about the diverse options and issues at stake.

So what thoughts about how the Scottish debate might benefit from linking into what is happening in African land reform?

We're not dealing here in Scotland with the levels of dependence and poverty which you find in many African farming communities. But there are commonalities. Land ownership here, as everywhere, has great practical and symbolic power, conferring cultural, political and economic dominance at local and national levels. Landlords have control over tree planting, fishing, hunting and mineral rights and can block local people's economic initiatives. Equally, as much as one third of our farmland is held in the form of agricultural tenancies, where land users can face insecurity regarding their long term rights to land. As in Africa, it is critical to get different people and interest groups engaged in the debate, so that a wide range of options can be considered. Everywhere, the purpose of land reform must be to achieve a better, fairer balance of power and interests, to guarantee equitable access to this most fundamental resource and bring lasting benefits, particularly to local people whose livelihoods stem from these resources. Let's keep in touch.

How to address poverty?

In 1980, and again in 1990, poverty was the central theme of the World Development Report. The third such report has now appeared under the title *Attacking poverty*. As this latest report clearly shows, despite years of rapid global growth, poverty remains widespread and persistent. Alleviating poverty, let alone eradicating it, has proved to be a very difficult task. Worse, many of the poor consulted during the preparation of the World Development Report, said that their situation had not improved and, in many cases, had worsened.

Poverty alleviation has again become a central plank in donor plans and strategies. OECD nations have pledged to cut by half the number of people living in acute poverty by the year 2015. Preparation by developing countries of Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans has become a condition for debt relief and donor support. Although reducing poverty is the common objective, opinions diverge on how to go about this. The position of the World Bank is particularly interesting, given the divergence in views expressed by its staff in recent publications. What's best for poverty alleviation – liberalisation and macro-economic reform, or more specific government interventions and policy measures tailored to help poor people seize new opportunities?

One study – *Consultations with the poor* – aims to give voice to the perceptions of the poor. It makes for sobering reading. This comparative study was conducted in 23 countries using participatory research methods. Four issues were explored: what makes for a good life and bad life? what are poor people's priorities? what is the nature and quality of poor people's interactions with state, market and civil society institutions? and how have gender and social relations changed over time? The results are discussed in relation to five dimensions: material, physical, social well-being, freedom of choice, and security.

In each of the five dimensions, the poor argued for major changes: from corruption to honesty and justice; from violence to peace and equity; from powerlessness to grassroots democracy; from weakness to capacity for action; and from bare subsistence to assets and security. Aspects of poverty thus go much beyond issues like lack of income, food and assets, but also emphasize the changing relations with other people and institutions. The report notes that poor people's contacts and experience with government institutions are largely negative. By contrast, they find their own institutions to be the most dependable.

Growth **is** *good for the poor* is the title of another report from the World Bank, which aims to tackle those who argue that the WTO and globalisation are bad for the poor. It presents the results of an econometric analysis in a sample of 80 countries over the last four decades. The paper concludes that the income of the poor (taken as the bottom fifth of the population), rises one-for-one with overall growth of per capita GDP. As other econometric research has concluded that per capita GDP growth is positively influenced by openness to international trade, macro stability, reduc-

Source: Ecovox No. 21, Jan-Mars 2000

tion of inflation, fiscal discipline, private property rights and the rule of law, it is then argued that these measures are inherently good for the poor. This paper generated a storm of comments. One response from OXFAM is called *Growth with equity is good for the poor*. It starts by agreeing with the World Bank paper, that economic growth is self-evidently central to poverty reduction as, without this economic growth, average incomes cannot rise. But, it goes on to argue that to achieve equity, governments have a key role to play by helping poor people earn their way out of poverty.

The World Development Report takes a more nuanced view and proposes a comprehensive approach, emphasising the triangle of opportunity-empowerment-security. Promoting opportunity is considered one key action to reducing poverty and includes stimulating economic growth, making markets work better for poor people, and building up their assets. Policy needs to address ways to reduce vulnerability to risk and put in place mechanisms to help poor people cope with adverse shocks.

The report acknowledges that political power is unequally distributed which leads to the inequitable distribution of economic power, while the way state institutions operate may be particularly unfavourable to poor people. Facilitating the empowerment of poor people is therefore the second key to reducing poverty, resulting in state and social institutions becoming more responsive to the poor. Actions proposed to enhance empowerment focus on the legal system, which needs to provide a basis for open and accountable state structures, public administrations that implement policies efficiently and without corruption, improved service delivery by the public sector, private sector growth, and greater decentralisation and community development. Access to information, such as budgets, and participatory policy making are important aspects. Social relations are also mentioned such as promoting gender equity, tackling social barriers and supporting poor people's social capital.

The WDR presents a rich analysis of the many faces of poverty and proposes a challenging agenda. Governance and institutions are put at centre stage, with a clear recognition of the importance of 'informal' institutions for poor people in many places. The World Bank is clearly not monolithic in its thinking, although when it comes to action on the ground and negotiations with governments, they can be much more single-minded and inflexible. It will be interesting to see whether the WDR has much influence on World Bank practice. The main author resigned in protest at the watering down of his recommendations in favour of greater empowerment. Nevertheless, the report provides much support for work towards building more accountable and inclusive institutions. And with fifteen years to go to meet the global poverty reductions targets, the difficult question of how best to address poverty will remain high on the agenda.

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***Moving methodologies: Learning about integrated soil fertility management in sub-Saharan Africa*, by Toon Defoer. PhD thesis Wageningen University, The Netherlands. December 2000. Details from tdefoer@wanadoo.fr**

This book presents the lessons of recent years from participatory learning and action research (PLAR) carried out in Mali and Kenya. Building on material presented in the Resource Guide for managing soil fertility in the tropics, *Moving methodologies* presents an analysis of participatory methods and assesses their impacts.

PLAR methods emphasize a farmer-learning process facilitated by change agents. It works at community level and follows a number of phases, covering diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation activities on a yearly cycle. 'Test' farmers form the basis for experimenting and feeding back lessons from trying out new soil practices. Maps and resource flow diagrams are central to analysis of farming strategies and how best to improve these. While much attention has been paid in the past to developing appropriate techniques for improved soils management, much more thought is needed to address how to spread farmer learning within and between villages, and to build skills amongst research and extension structures in favour of such methods. The book rightly notes that institutional change and learning are inevitably slow processes. If extension agents are to facilitate farmer learning, they must themselves become more willing to evaluate their performance and identify areas needing change. Attitudes and behaviour need to change, so that career incentives support the role of facilitation and working effectively with farmers.

***Integrated soil fertility management*, by Thea Hilhorst and Camilla Toulmin. Policy & Best Practice Document no.7. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands. October 2000. Other Best Practice Guides include Sustainable land use, Participatory integrated pest management, Sustainable irrigated agriculture, and Water for the future. For copies, please contact: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PO Box 20061, 2500 EB The Hague, The Netherlands. Order no. OSDR 0434/E.**

This guide examines the issues at stake in relation to soil fertility management, the reasons why policy makers should be concerned about soil degradation, lessons learned from interventions in this field, and the type of policies needed to generate more sustainable practice. Commissioned by the Dutch government for its staff and partners working in this field, the guide presents the issues in simple clear text, and tackles how a donor like the Dutch government might best support better soil fertility management.

As noted in the introduction by veteran soil scientist Albert Howard in the 1940s: *The maintenance of fertility of the soil is the first condition for any permanent system of agriculture.* But since conditions are enormously variable, approaches must be tailored to local circumstances. Projects and policy makers must remember that it is the farmer who decides how to manage soils, so her or his views are central to achieving more sustainable patterns of management. But exhortation in favour of soil conservation won't work by itself; if farming is not profitable, there is much less interest in investing time and capital in soil fertility.

The guide notes the diverse interest groups involved in this field, each of which has pushed a certain agenda. But given that situations are usually complex and undergoing change, a simple solution rarely is appropriate. The guide also cautions against too great an involvement in global initiatives, since these can absorb a great deal of time and energy that might have been spent on more practical national and field level work.

***Décentralisation, acteurs locaux et foncier.* Alain Rochegude, 2000. Programme de Développement Municipal (PDM) and Coopération Française. Contact: pdm@intnet.bj**

Essential reading for those following the decentralisation process in Africa, this book also provides a listing of legal texts, a glossary of terms, and a methodological note underlying the analysis. Rochegude sets out to examine the new institutional and legal provisions developed in some 15 West and Central African countries, as they relate to decentralisation, land tenure and local development. Management of land is a central component of local political power, yet it is by no means clear how newly established local government structures will relate to existing 'customary' systems for control over land. Decentralisation has been largely driven from the top – whether by central government or donor agencies. Maintaining and strengthening local political control, and breaking the power of traditional rulers have been major objectives, despite the rhetoric in favour of participation, democratisation and responding to local priorities. In most places, the decentralisation machinery systematically ignores the 'village' as a social or political unit, despite its legitimacy as a decision-making unit. Equally, although new local government structures are intended to be financially autonomous, in practice they have little room for independence and rely very heavily on grants from central government to fund their activities. Nevertheless, the author cautions the reader against coming too rapidly to conclusions, since the process is only recently underway in many places, and will need long term support if the potential benefits are to be gained. And he argues for a systematic review of progress in different countries, with the aim of learning lessons and exchanging experience.

***Avenir du Bassin du Fleuve Sénégal. USAID 2000*. French and English versions can be obtained from: IRG, 1211 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 700, Washington DC 20036, USA, Fax: 202 289 7601. To order local language copies, please contact: ARED, BP 10737, Dakar-Liberté, Sénégal. Fax: +221.824 7097. Email: ared@enda.sn**

Big dams have always been at the centre of controversy. Governments and donors argue that they will benefit the nation as a whole, by providing much needed electricity, and boosting agricultural production to feed a growing urban population. Others, such as farmers' organisations, environmental groups, or academics question the sustainability of such ventures which are often extremely costly in economic, social and environmental terms.

The Manantali dam in Mali on the Bafing river, and the Diama dam at the mouth of the river Senegal are no exception to controversy. Built in the 1980s to increase irrigated rice production, generate 800 giga-watts of electricity and make the river more navigable, these dams have failed to live up to expectations. Developments in the Senegal river basin are continuing with the construction of hydroelectric facilities and the establishment of a Water Charter that will determine how the dams will be managed in the future.

USAID have produced an excellent colour brochure tracing the history of the dams and the effects of past investments in irrigated agriculture, highlighting the key social, economic and environmental issues that need to be considered by such a Charter. The booklet is written in an accessible style, and provides much needed information to allow informed debate by the broader public on the future options for the development of the Senegal river valley. The booklet has also been translated into local languages (Pulaar, Soninké, and Wolof) to enable those most concerned, the inhabitants of the valley, to participate in discussions.

Ecovox

The current edition of the French language magazine Ecovox contains a special report on poverty and the environment with a range of lively and thought-provoking articles written by African journalists, teachers, sociologists, doctors, agro-economists, and environmentalists. Contributions or articles from readers are welcomed for future editions. *Copies can be obtained from: Relais France-Cameroun, 14 Impasse Marc Sangnier, 34070 Montpellier, France. E.mail: ecovox@wagne.net or visit www.wagne.net/ecovox*

Policy and information

What is policy, and where does it come from? Which actors play a major role? What kind of information helps formulate more appropriate forms of policy making, and what form best suits different kinds of decision-maker? How best can local decision-makers be supported by access to better information and understanding of the larger political and institutional framework. These are just some the questions discussed at the above workshop. The report is now available and makes for interesting reading. *Information support for natural resource management policy. Proceedings of a CTA workshop, Wageningen, The Netherlands, January 1999. English and French editions. Contact: Fonseca@cta.an, or fax: +31.317.467.0067.*

Credit: Andy Catley

Keeping up to date with camels

From camel racing in Australia to microbial digestion in the rumen of dromedaries, this newsletter covers nearly everything you would want to find out about camels. Aimed at readers of English, with short sections in French and Arabic, each issue publishes a combination of news, reviews and the finding of research studies. If you can't find an article on your particular area of interest, the bibliographies and dedicated section on new publications should point you in the right direction.

The Camel Newsletter *is published by the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Drylands (ACSAD), P.O.Box 2440, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic. Email: ruacsad@rusys.eg.net*

Regional Sahel Forum

Ever since the Ségou meeting of 1989, CILSS has been focusing on promoting decentralisation, land tenure and natural resource management issues. The latest meeting held in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso in October 2000, provided an opportunity for local organisations to define what help is needed to support their role in taking responsibility for their own development. Thus, attention focused on analysing lessons from decentralisation so far, how best to organise service provision, and natural resource management at local level, and needs for capacity building amongst the range of actors and structures operating at decentralised level.

Participants included representatives from community based organisations, local and national government, and donors. After four days of debate and field visits, they drew up a list of recommendations to take forward. These include the need to:

Strengthen local democracy and accountability through regular, fair and transparent elections; create opportunities to share experience of decentralisaton between CILSS member states; ensure proper representation of less vocal social groups; address issues of conflict between customary and statutory rules for managing access to land; and

strengthen participatory approaches through training of local actors and organisations. A special plea was made in favour of oasis communities in the Sahel, and the need for greater contacts and exchange concerning ways to develop their resources sustainably.

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Registering rights

Farmers are increasingly interested in getting formal recognition of their rights to land. Pieces of paper are becoming of growing importance as a means to document transactions between, say, a tenant and land owner, which may then be stamped by local government officers, or traditional chiefs. In the South African state of Kwa-Zulu Natal, the NGO AFRA has been asked by farmers to help them establish a land rights register. In a meeting held in London November 8th, discussions focused: Why should rights be registered? What are some of the risks and benefits involved? How do costs vary, depending on methods followed? What kind of decentralised institution can manage such a record of land rights? What if any role should central government survey departments play?

Experience was drawn from South Africa, Mozambique, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda and Niger. It was clear that formalisation of land rights is occurring in many places, whether or not it has formal backing. All such formalisation measures risk strengthening the rights of some, at the expense of others. Many informal processes are already underway, which provide great advantages in terms of cost. Registration of rights at village, rather than plot, level may be more appropriate where the main threats to land alienation stem from outside the community. The survey profession needs to recognise that high levels of precision and mapping are both too costly and not necessary in most cases. Aerial photos and GPS can complement more traditional methods for identifying plot locations and boundaries. Finally, the question of registration cannot be considered without also looking at institutions for local governance of land. Customary institutions for land rights management have a variable record, and might be made more accountable through increasing representation of different local stakeholders.

For copies of the meeting report and papers presented, contact: Ruth Burchell, NRI, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TB, UK. Fax: +44.1634.883706. Email: r.burchell @gre.ac.uk

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Star-gazing

Marginal agriculture on the Andes slopes

Do you believe you can tell your fortune in the stars? Today, many people regularly read their horoscope in the newspaper, to see what the future holds for a Leo, a Pisces or Gemini. And in some cases, your star sign may even count against you when you apply for a job, since certain star signs are meant to be associated with personality types. For many centuries, gazing at the heavens has provided people with the signs they sought, and guidance for the future, most particularly when comets brought strange lights to the sky, or the planets played out their celestial dance in new and unexpected ways.

But are such beliefs just mumbo-jumbo? Is there any basis for searching the heavens for help in deciding what to do? A couple of US scientists have been working with farmers in the Andes mountains of Peru and Bolivia to test out their star-gazing methods.

Since at least the 1500s, farmers in drought-prone regions of the Andes have observed changes in the brightness of stars at the time of the mid-June solstice to try and forecast forthcoming rainfall and harvests. They have relied particularly on looking at the stars of the Pleiades – the little triangle of stars known by some as mother hen and her chickens. If the stars are poorly visible, the farmers reckon this means rains will be poor, and they moderate their planting dates accordingly.

Villagers make a number of observations about the Pleiades – how bright are the stars, the timing of its rising in the hours before dawn, the apparent size of the cluster and the relative position of the brightest star. Clear skies are associated with brighter stars and a larger size of the constellation, encouraging farmers to believe that the rains will be abundant. If drought is predicted by contrast, potato planting is postponed by as much as 4-6 weeks to reduce the risks of low moisture levels in the first few critical weeks of the tuners' development.

The researchers studied the extent to which the visibility and brightness of the Pleiades did indeed seem to be associated with the success of the potato harvest. The evidence showed a marked correlation suggesting that traditional knowledge and predictive mechanisms of this sort are often based on firm grounds. The main reason for such a link existing seems to be due to the influence of the El Nino climate variation – which is expressed in changes in sea currents on the eastern shores of the Pacific Ocean. Poor visibility of the Pleiades in June, due to increased cloud cover at high altitudes, was usually linked to a warm El Nino year, bringing reduced rainfall during the forthcoming growing season and risks of drought or the potato crop.

So next time you scoff at the fantastical beliefs of those who gaze at the heavens, remember the farmers in the Andes…

Forecasting Andean rainfall and crop yield from the influence of El Nino on Pleiades visibility B.S. Orlove, J.C.H. Chiang and M.A Crane in Nature, vol. 403, January 2000. www.nature.com