Local Government and Natural Resources in the Sudan: The Case of Lagawa Rural Council *

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Abstract: Resource management, protection and promotion are very critical issues facing many parts of our rapidly changing world. In most developing countries, such issues are handled by both central and local governments, but quite often specialised government agencies are entrusted with these jobs. In Sudan, and since 1971, local government has become more involved than ever with the issue of natural resources. This research assesses the performance of a single local government unit in Western Sudan with regard to the above mentioned issues. Out of the multiplicity of resources in the council, only natural grazing is selected for the focus of this assessment study, because of its high significance in the local socio-economic set-up. A lengthy field-study was carried out to determine the resource situation and how it affects policy and control and promotion measures. This council has failed; a situation typical of most rural councils in Sudan. Worst of all, the natural grazing is deteriorating rapidly under stocking rates which exceed the carrying capacity by 49%, a fact that has already enhanced desertification.

Introduction

In the Sudan there has always been concern over the natural resources. Unfortunately, the official concern did not prevent misuse or destruction of the natural resources. Ironically, the government, through its own development programmes, was responsible for more of the damage done than all other agents collectively. The agricultural expansion policies and the rural water provision programmes, which are part of the government's development strategy, have been the agents by far the most instrumental in causing a general state of deterioration of natural resources (DECRP 1976). Haste and improper planning are, perhaps, behind the government's negligence in observing its own regulations and acts. This should not imply that other agents have not contributed to the process of the destruction or misuse of natural resources in the Sudan. The expansion of human and animal populations have created increasing demands for natural resources to satisfy the need to obtain food, build homes and use energy. One could suggest that the impact of this process is more wide-spread than the one mentioned previously. Furthermore, the collapse of the system of central or local administrative control in rural Sudan, over the use of natural resources has led to unprincipled use and has, therefore, enhanced the deterioration and exhaustion of natural resources (El Arifi 1979, p.38). In 1972, the vacuum created by dissolving the Native Administration eliminated the traditional control processes over land tenure and land use. In most cases, this has resulted in individualistic tendencies in using tribal and communal resources.

In 1971, the government issued The People's Local Government Act to replace the 1951 Local Government Act and the Province Administration Act, 1960 (Sudan, Ministry of Local Government 1971). The 1971 Act was issued to create new political realities in rural Sudan and thus added new objectives and values to the local government in the Sudan. The 1971 Act aims at achieving many socio-economic objectives at the local level in addition to development and protection of natural resources.

The other objectives of the Act are certainly different from previous practices and seem to be in line with the objectives of modern, local government. Consequently, the organization of local government administration has changed...
and, as a result, new provinces and regional councils were created to carry out the objectives of the Act.

Four levels of councils were created and included: People’s Executive Provincial Councils (PEPC), Regional Councils, Rural and Urban Councils, and Basic Councils (Village Nomadic Camp, Urban Neighbourhood, Market and Industrial Councils).

None of the councils, except PEPC, had corporate character and therefore the PEPC controlled decisions and budget at the Province headquarters. This did not change, even after the partial amendment of the 1971 Act in 1981.

As part of this reorganization and for political reasons the Native Administration was dissolved. As mentioned, the disappearance of the Native Administration has created a distinct vacuum in the patterns of authority, decision-making and administration at the very local levels (El Arifi 1979, p. 37).

The People’s Local Government Act, 1971, has now been functioning for many years. Some of its objectives have been achieved, but many have not. This paper intends to investigate the performance of the 1971 Act with regard to policies and programmes formulated and implemented for the development and/or the protection of natural resources in rural Sudan. As natural resources are varied and complex, only natural grazing is selected for this study. Grazing land is a natural resource of critical importance in the sustenance of over 45 million head of livestock in the country, and their owners, who form a sizeable minority in the rural sector.

Many issues could be considered in assessing the performance of local government with respect to the protection and development of natural grazing. These issues range from policy formation to implementation processes. At each stage different mechanics and power structures are required, which again are influenced by the structure of power and authority granted to the various tiers of local government. To explore all these relationships, a definite administrative unit is required. For this reason, and the fact that natural grazing is of great local significance, Lagawa People’s Rural Council (LPRC) has been selected as a case study for assessing the role of local government in developing and/or protecting resources, such as natural grazing.

**Background Notes on Lagawa People’s Rural Council (LPRC)**

The LPRC is located in S Kordofan Province within the W Regional Council (Fig 1). LPRC is the homeland of the Messeriyaa Zurg, some of the Nuba, and the Daju tribe. The Nuba tribes and the Daju, inhabit defensive sites on hillslopes. Some Dinka are also found as migrant labourers in Lagawa town and some farming areas. In addition some Fellata and Bargu (W African groups) are found around Lake Kaliek and along the main wadis such as Shallango and Botha (Fig 2).

The Zurg, who constitute about 35% of the total population, are mostly cattle pastoral nomads. However, in the last two decades a sizeable minority have settled around permanent water sites to practise agriculture in addition to raising animals. The main crops that they grow are cotton, millet, groundnuts, dura (sorghum vulgare) and sesame. The settling which has occurred, thus far, has not caused livestock to vanish from Zurg livelihood systems and culture. In fact, the nature of settlement does not seem to have a negative effect on livestock raising. For example, during the wet season, the settlers’ cattle are moved with part of the family, or distant relatives, to the Qoz country outside the muddy environment where the settlements are found. By following this pattern, settlers can protect and even expand their livestock resources. During the dry season the settlers’ as well as the pastoral nomads’ cattle are brought back into the central and S reaches of the council. Usually, surface waters, before drying up, are followed as far S as Lakes Keilak and Abyad before some of the Zurg move once more to the permanent damaring (dry season) sites along the main wadis in the centre of the council.

The tendency towards settlement among the Zurg has been an old process which began with the introduction of cotton in the 1940s. This caused some voluntary settlement,