

Minutes of the seminar “Achieving sustainable Natural Resource management in the Sahel” on October 6, 2008

Background

A seminar was held on October 6, 2008 with the purpose of presenting and discussing the study on Natural Resource Management (NRM) in the Sahel, commissioned by Danida to Department of Geography and Geology (DGG), University of Copenhagen (KU). The outputs of the study were a technical background report and a discussion paper. After the presentation of the discussion paper participants were invited to give inputs to the paper and discuss how to facilitate future development activities in the Sahel. Additionally, DDRN gave a short introduction to opportunities and challenges in relation to research communication, an issue inextricably linked to development research and practice.

Programme

- 09.15-09.30 **Welcome**
Simon Bolwig and Hanne Carus
- 09.30-10.00 **Presentation of discussion paper**
Simon Bolwig, Signe Cold Ravnkilde and Kjeld Rasmussen
- 10.00-10.30 **Comments by discussants from consultancy, NGOs and academia**
Jean-Pierre Zafiryadis, Rambøll
Ole Mertz, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Copenhagen
Marianne Haahr, Care Denmark
- 10.30-10.45 **Coffee Break**
- 10.45-11.30 **Open discussion**
- 11.30-11.45 **Communicating research results for policy change**
Anne Sørensen and Marianne Forti, DDRN Secretariat
- 11.45-12.00 **Discussion**

Anette Reenberg (DGG) had accepted to take the chair. Minutes were taken by Lone Frederiksen and Eva Larsen from the secretariat of DDRN.

Welcome

In her introductory remarks Hanne Carus, Danida (HC) stressed the importance of studying the Sahel since Denmark has development activities in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Important issues are among

others: development of regional interactions in a time of food crisis, land ownership in the interface of customary and modern law, foreign companies buying land for e.g. bio fuels, and the impact of climate change on the vulnerability of the populations. Finally, HC mentioned that a workshop is being planned to take place in the Sahel during the first half of 2009.

Presentation of main themes and issues in the discussion paper

The study was presented by the three main authors, Simon Bolwig from Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Kjeld Rasmussen (KU, DGG), and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde (DIIS). The study's objectives were to: 1) Identify the most important operational experiences from two decades of Danish development activities in the Sahel and 2) Based on these findings to recommend guidelines for new sets of policies and strategies that can tackle future challenges and opportunities for development activities in the Sahel. Additionally, these recommendations should take their point of departure in the emerging challenges such as the Global Food Crisis, Climate Change and the international financial crisis because these raise new concerns with regard to development activities in the Sahel.

The presenters addressed the main positive trends observed in the region as well as concerns about opportunities and barriers following the future consequences of global trends and crises.

- Droughts of the 1970s and 1980s have been superseded by increased average rainfall, although highly variable within the region. At the same time there is a tendency towards more violent rainfalls locally; and consequently, disaster preparedness will be very important. In line with change in rainfall patterns, the widespread impression of land degradation has to some extent been thrown into doubt by observed increase in vegetation indices across most of the Sahel ecosystem. The concern raised by the report is what consequences of Climate Change the Sahel will face in the future. Will Climate Change bring further pressure to bear on resources or will it present new opportunities with possible increased rainfall? What other economic and social consequences will occur as a result of increased pressure on natural resources in the Sahel and how will countries within the region interact in the future?
- Decades of declining or relatively stable food prices have recently been substituted with sharp increases. This opens up for opportunities for the agricultural sector in the Sahel to become more profitable. On the other hand, rising prices are eroding urban and migrant income and will affect economic growth in the region.

- Democratization and decentralization have been progressing, potentially enabling broader participation of civil society and poor people in shaping the framework conditions for sustainable NRM and improved livelihoods. In relation to this, land and ownership rights are still critical issues that have given rise to series of questions and considerations. Contradictions between foreign private investors and local landowners with regards to NRM are an issue that demands focussed attention. How will this contradiction evolve with increased private sector demand for land? Will the global financial crisis, where land resources most likely become an even more attractive commodity and investment, influence the region? Which advantages and disadvantages will this imply for development and NRM in the region?

Areas for further research

Based on some of the questions raised the presentations closed by concluding that further research and gathering of knowledge within specific areas of interest is critical in order to develop appropriate guidelines and policies for the future.

Areas for further research mentioned were:

- Information gathered through research and analyses thereof pertaining to markets in the Sahel.
- Development of policies that utilise lessons learnt from practical experiences on value chain projects in the region. These include development of models for up-scaling and out-scaling (to other types of products and procedures) of positive value chain experiences.
- Identification of key policy constraints that limit rural people's participation in and benefit from value chain projects (e.g. illegal taxes).
- Identification of which roles Government, civil society, business and international organisations should play in fostering value chain development and participation?
- More knowledge on whether and how economic growth goes hand in hand with enhanced NRM.

Inputs from the invited discussants

After the presentations of the discussion paper, each discussant expressed his or her individual critique of and comments on the discussion paper.

Jean Pierre Zafiryadis's (Rambøll) inputs mainly focused on what was not included in the discussion paper. JPZ addressed a need to focus

more on how poverty alleviation can be successful and on the importance of economic growth in this process.

JPZ addressed a critical lack of general capacity of the population, hampering people to take advantage of development opportunities. With these circumstances, JPZ doubt the capacity of the population to adapt to the consequences of climate change. The capacity issues must be dealt with further in order for the population to respond appropriate to cyclic disasters and global crisis of food, energy and finance. In addition, knowledge and leadership is not present in Niger for example and this further hampers general progress and capacity building. Those recommendations already addressed in the paper lack perspectives from particular Niger's point of view.

JPZ points out that existing and new strategies will still have difficulties in changing conditions with conflicting sectors such as private and public sectors and conflicting interest between government and NGO's within the countries. There is a critical lack of political will within the individual countries and there is a need to understand how this interferes with general development activities and strategies in the region.

As the region has and still receive emergency aid it is critical to understand more fully what the impacts of emergency aid and other commercial network have on the local food markets and local food prices? In this relation, new strategies that the one hand manage and improve emergency aid and on the other hand still pay careful attention to local economies and markets.

JPZ address a need to pay more attention to the critical issue of donor alignment with future strategies and policies. JPZ points out that many of the past development strategies and intentions in Sahel are not even fully implemented. Therefore JPZ would like more recommendations on how to improve the existing strategies. Furthermore because some of past strategies and intentions never meet their objectives, researchers and development workers need to understand more fully what went wrong in order to learn from past experiences.

Ole Mertz, (KU, IGG) opened his inputs by suggesting that focusing on the Sahel region is perhaps taking the definition too far. Overall strategies for the Sahel may not work because countries have different problems to tackle and individual needs to address. This is particularly significant from a market perspective. In relation to market strategies there is a lot to be learned from Niger where they have managed to become almost self- sufficient in terms of food products.

OM mentioned that there is a problem inherent in former Sahel strategies because they exclude coastal countries in the region. OM pointed out that it is difficult to say anything precisely about the impact of property rights on NRM. However, it is important to investigate

whether the question of property rights is the most appropriate focus in terms of managing natural resources. In addition, OM raised the question of whether decentralisation will promote NRM in the region.

OM stressed the need to address the fact that population growth leads to further pressure on scarce natural resources, which again gives rise to problems such as migration. It will be necessary to strengthen local adaptation capability as part of general development strategies.

OM further addressed a need to develop actions and strategies for river basin management and for how to measure the impact from NRM on these. Finally, agricultural researchers should investigate why the green revolution never took place in Africa.

Marianne Haar, (Care Denmark) pointed out that the recommendations in the paper were too policy focused; and, as a consequence, ignored the role of civil society. MH stressed the importance of development strategies being more applicable for civil society.

MH further pointed out that strategies should try to increase landless people's rights to property. Pro-poor market access must be discussed in more detail because the commodities (e.g. cereal) that rural people tend to bring to the market are very sensitive to market price fluctuations.

MH suggested that national governance should include both traditional and modern legal structures - "institutional nesting". Informal institutions play a powerful role in many matters such as land rights, private ownership and exclusion of women. Besides, she brought up the importance of religion in property rights issues, a key institution sometimes overlooked in research on land and property rights. Therefore suggestions such as legally formalising private property rights in favour of women could solve some of the issues of female exclusion.

Open debate

After the panel input session the general discussion between all participants opened up. The first round of comments centered on questions of how to prioritize research and development activities. The remarks and questions raised were among others:

- Pro-poor strategies are mostly ideological and political, and that the critical question to address is whether they work in settings like Sahel. For example national policies and private interest often hamper pro-poor strategies.
- Renewable energy sources are ideally the best solution, but what about local energy systems and the increasing demand on charcoal, which need to be managed locally? And how secure sustainable energy supply for the poor

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- We must investigate the effects of private sector involvement, which is overtaking the role of development workers.
- Class formation in the Sahel should be investigated as an important factor in development.
- We should focus more on how research results are transferred to and put into practice by local development workers.
- Development is an important condition that will increase local capacity for adaptation to climate change, oscillations in market prices, and other shocks.

Annette Reenberg, Department of Geography (AR) closed the open debate by asking how actors involved in development activities in the Sahel are supposed to take recommendations from the paper back to the countries in the Sahel and whether one answer is decentralisation of donor money. Furthermore, AR recommended that strategies are not made too simplistic, but that they rather reflect the diversity and individual needs in the different countries. In addition, working in an area like the Sahel requires a strong analytical framework. To achieve this framework a common knowledge on the dynamics of the systems are critical as well as a deeper understanding of how these dynamics work in response to the changing surroundings. Finally, AR pointed to a need for a new set of strategies that cope with shocks and disaster management.

Based on comments from reviewers and questions from participants, the authors of the discussion paper ended the discussion by giving their answers and remarks.

Final remarks and answers from authors

Kjeld Rasmussen concluded that:

- More knowledge is needed on how farmers react to unpredictable events.
- Securing private property rights is an important priority. For example people who lack property ownership resort to selling and cultivating animal stocks instead of land. On the other hand, land ownership may tempt to selling off land in lean periods, which will leave the poor with nothing afterwards.
- Development activities are closer to the issues of solving desertification problems, which is a very positive improvement.
- River basin management is obviously a critical issue; and we need to take a river basin perspective because in that way strategies will be relevant to different communities and countries along the rivers.

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- Increasing demand for energy supply must be taken into account to establish future strategies for renewable energy supply solutions.

Signe Marie Cold-Ravnskilde concluded that:

- Property rights seem to be the solution but new actors and segments of the population should necessarily be included in the process.
- Focus on how women and other vulnerable groups may gain access to land and are given property rights is important.

Simon Bolwig concluded that:

- We need to collect and produce more information based on practical experiences in order to improve market opportunities for the poor.
- Many constraints are country specific, but that does not mean that we cannot develop new strategies at a general level.
- Focus should be on the intermediate level that links the poor producers and the buyers/markets.
- Value chains for livestock are important because livestock is an extremely valuable resource in the Sahel.

DDRN on research communication

Anne Sørensen and Marianne Forti from the DDRN secretariat gave a short presentation on research communication. The presentation outlined the importance of communicating research more effectively to development activities because effective communication is the key to optimizing the impact of development research. The critical question is how research should be communicated in order to bring it to the regional level in development activities. Research communication depends on contexts, and thus communication strategies should be flexible and contextual.

The need to link researchers, donors and knowledge intermediaries was stressed because they may share and learn much from each other. DDRN has a critical role to play in this process as the network aims at linking knowledge and development.

Alliance programmes supported by Danida open up opportunities of joining partners in a formalized way. It was acknowledged that there are costs implied in linking people or in paying others to do rewrite research in a more easily accessible way. Many researchers do not have the

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resources or the required competences. It was suggested that the research communication activities should receive supplementary funding in order to fight those constraints.

In the short discussion after the presentations, the following issues were raised:

- How do we get access to the front line stakeholders such as ambassadors, politicians and formal institutions?
- Local researchers need to be a part of the research. How do we secure that?
- Research initiatives seek to change policy, but the research must get through to the local people and involve them in the process.
- Has the increased pool of and access to information made policy implementation easier?
- We need education to change the practices of people trained and brought up with specific, local values and traditions.

The closing remarks from the DDRN presenters suggested that in many cases communication of development research projects may need support from professional communicators rather than relying on those directly involved in the projects.

After these remarks the seminar was closed by the chairman.

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List of participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Institution</i>
Ahmed Nur Osman	KU, LIFE
Andreas Aae	DIIS/FOI
Anette Reenberg	KU, DGG
Anne M. Sørensen	DDRN
Brigitte Thébaud	Nordic Consulting Group
Britt Granquist	BriAgri ApS
Christine Wennerberg	ENERGICA
Eva Larsen	DDRN
Francis Nkoka	KU, LIFE
Hadiza Moussa	Lasdel Niger/RUC I
Hanne Carus	UM, BFT
Henrik Secher Marcussen	ISG/RUC
Jean-Pierre Zafiryadis	Rambøll
Kjeld Rasmussen	KU, DGG
Lea Hansen	Care, DK
Lone Frederiksen	DDRN
Louise Meisner-Jensen	KU, Centre of African Studies
Maj Manczak	WWF
Marianne Forti	DDRN
Marianne Haahr	Care Denmark
Ole Mertz	KU, DGG
Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde	DIIS
Simon Bolwig	DIIS