

The Need for a New Perspective on the Sahelian State. An Introduction

Henrik Secher Marcussen,

International Development Studies, Roskilde University,DK

Introduction

Being on mission to Sahelian countries in recent years has been an increasingly worrying experience, at least in the cases where contact to and discussions with government officials have been part of the programme, as it almost inevitably is when formulating new projects or reviewing past ones. Government officials are hard to find, and those in place are without a clear mandate to negotiate, are suffering from low pay or no pay at all, have no equipment (from paper, clips to access to computers), cannot move to the field unless transport being provided for and extra payment secured, etc.etc. In short, attitudes showing poor morale and depressing signs of giving it all up are prevalent.

Following from Structural Adjustment Policies with the associated budget constraints and trimming-of-the-fat policies, government officials are increasingly on the move ,-shifting from one function to another, but basically searching out possibilities for better living conditions in other than state jobs, be it in the private sector or abroad. The best and most qualified civil servants have already moved, bowing to the invitations, challenges and particularly the outlooks for better salaries with donor agencies, NGO's or consultancy firms at home or abroad. The World Bank, but also the UN system, are in particular good at "filling a hole by digging a hole", eg. identifying the best human resources in the country and inviting them to positions at headquarters as project and programme managers or technical advisors.

In a broader sense the results of budget squeezing and smaller revenues are being felt hard also outside the national state apparatus, as expressed by Chambers (1989, p. 5):

"existing field bureaucracies have been starved of resources, with the familiar tragedies of agricultural extension staff without tyres for their bicycles, schools without textbooks, clinics without drugs, and teachers and health staff without pay. With economies in decline, basic goods have become scarce and costly. In places it has been NGOs, rather than the market, that have filled the vacuum left by the decline in government services".

What has been going on prior to this is nothing to write home about. To quote Chambers (Ibid., p. 20) again:

"the state has often done those things it ought not have done, and has left undone those things which it ought to have done".

In response to this situation, Chambers is suggesting a *paradigm of reversals*, where the state is being "brought back in", in a more efficient, accountable, enabling and providing shape. Others strike similar notes, as when judging present tendencies as "a reaction too far" (Killick, 1989).

However, Chambers' viewpoint and emphasis is on decentralisation, participation and democracy. His agenda for action is surely allowing the state to play a role, but a role subordinate to the one played by the decentralized structures and the civil society. Many more with him are emphasizing decentralization and participation, however often with phrases and expressions which are full of well-meaning and good intentions, but not necessarily realistically assessing both opportunities *and* constraints.

In particular donor agencies and politicians have been good at including the participatory rhetoric in their vocabulary.

The key issue under discussion in this seminar is how to delimit and conceptualize the paradigmatic shift towards reversal, where - while maintaining the principles of decentralization, participation and

democracy - the state is given its proper constructive and enabling role back, the one it was theoretically intended for.

In other words, the "reaction too far" seems to be a correct description not only of the situation of that of cutting back on the role of the state, but similarly correct for a prevailing tendency of (over)emphasizing and overstressing the participatory approach, at least in the sense of the concept being more an acclaimed principle, however not always with the needed specificity and precision, and not developed and implemented in conjunction with a valid approach regarding the "enabling state".

It is, thus, one of the major *objectives* of this seminar to contribute to filling out the reversal paradigm, with each of the angles, the state and civil society, given its proper place, individually and in mutual interrelatedness.

The Budget Constraints. How Bad?

The problems in the Sahelian region include a general economic malaise with inappropriate economic policies and slow or negative growth. The problems in the agricultural sector have been made worse by both policy failing in that sector and by the failure of measures to diversify the economy, create alternative employment and generate wealth in other sectors. Such developments, if successful, could help reduce the pressures on the natural resource base, create a breathing space to facilitate adjustment in the farming system and natural resource use, and provide funds for investment.

The poor economic performance of most Sahelian countries combined with weak economic management has led to growing budget and trade deficits. These in turn have led to borrowing and growing foreign debts. At the same time these countries have become heavily dependent upon foreign aid so that the direction of their economic policies is increasingly subject to foreign conditionality. The SAP programmes in particular, but not exclusively, are most often made responsible for the enforcement of further budget cuts and trimming policies, partly undermining possibilities of good management at most levels.

The evaluation of effects of SAP programmes on state budgets and administrative capabilities, however, vary. An example from the camp of strong critics is for instance Campbell and Loxley (1989), seeing the conditionalities of the World Bank and IMF as the strongest and most appalling "frontal attack on state intervention" in sub-Saharan Africa. Although this might be true, studies of the actual effects of SAP policies are scarce and not very detailed, often for lack of reliable data, particularly in Sahelian countries.

In a recent study, Sahn (1992) has tried to assess whether and to what extent government expenditures have been reduced in recent years during which most countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been subjected to World Bank and IMF policies of reducing balance-of-payments and budget deficits. His results indicate that during the period 1977-1989 there has been a steady *increase* in total central government and social services:

"For most countries spending was steady or increasing despite the proliferation of IMF and World Bank loans that often carry with them conditions involving austerity. Furthermore, the data do not support the hypothesis of widespread and systematic decline in total expenditures following the beginning of sectoral or structural adjustment loans" (p. 677).

This increase has, of course, not been evenly distributed among African countries. For 8 of 21 investigated countries, of which 3 are Sahelian countries (Niger, Senegal, Gambia), the analysis indicates a decline in real expenditures. The fourth Sahelian country included in the analysis, Burkina Faso, experienced a remarkable increase.

However, population growth has been eroding the value of government spending as only a few of the African economies have been growing fast enough to keep pace with the population. The result is that "the average household continues to witness an erosion in service delivery" (p. 690), particularly the households living in rural areas.

Another study (Comlan, 1991) of the CILSS countries specifically underlines the conclusion above, that most of the Sahelian countries

are in a sub-Saharan context particularly hard hit by budget constraints.

Although some of the Sahelian countries during the period 1980 to 1989 have improved on their budget deficits (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso), they are still in the red and budget deficits are still comprising a worrying large share of GNP. The way in which budget cuts have been administered is typically by cutting in equipment and provisions, but in particular by cutting in salaries and personnel.

The latter has often taken place after an evaluation of previous years' steady increase in employment, and the evaluation has shown that, in cases, substantial numbers of positions have been fictitious. In Mali, for example, 8.000 persons were found to be functionaries without any real job function to pursue, and in Guinea Conakry it was in 1986 found that 1.300 employees, or around 7% of total public service personnel, were literally impossible to locate and find (Comlan, p. 12). - Reducing in the number of public employees is, however, one of the more difficult ways of handling adjustment policies, not only because of the politically disturbing effects it might have (demonstrations), but also because "trimming of the fat" seems to be an only temporary remedy as public service personnel apparently have an extraordinary ability to find their way back into other lucrative state functions or positions within the donor milieu which allow for certain spending (cars, equipment of various sorts, etc.).

Another important and much more devastating way of reducing budgets has been in cutting in service provisions, particularly towards the education and health sectors. While investment levels generally seem to have been maintained in agriculture (although with a leaning towards infrastructure), budget provisions for education and health have been declining rapidly. In Senegal, for example, the share of education and health in current budgets fell from 23% in 1980 to 17% in 1986, and from 5 to 3% respectively. Similar tendencies are observed for most other Sahelian countries (Niger and Burkina Faso)(p. 18-19).

Comlan (p. 46) is concluding that certain Sahelian countries actually have improved on their budgetary situation in recent years, but that the structural problems of the economies have not basically changed.

And those suffering most from effects of budgetary constraints are the rural poor with even less opportunities for attending schools or receive health services.

Another important effect of the general economic malaise in Sahelian countries is an increasing dependency on foreign aid transfers. Jean-Jacques Gabas has for Club du Sahel over the years made a number of studies of external resource flows to the CILSS countries (Gabas, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1993).

From these studies it is obvious that ODA is constituting close to 100% of the net resources externally made available. But more importantly, however, is it that ODA is providing the bulk of funding available for the states, as ODA constitutes a very large share of total state budgetary spending in the CILSS countries. For Senegal the share was in 1989 the lowest (68%) among four Sahel countries studies, with Burkina Faso next (70%), while no less than 80 and 85% respectively for Niger and Mali (Gabas, 1993, p. 27 and p. 41).

In other words, the Sahelian states have over the last decennium increasingly been subjected not only to SAP programmes and their impacts, most devastatingly felt in the actual situation by the rural poor in relation to their access to education and health facilities. But the Sahelian states are also increasingly at the mercy of the donor community, with their often strongly varying agendas and political interests. Without these external resource flows the Sahelian states would most likely not be able to provide the most essential and basic services.

It would take the present analysis too far to go into details regarding the sectors and areas favored by external donors. But one obvious hypothesis would be, that it would not be in the liking of most (bilateral) donors to try to pop up the state apparatus, to support the prospective parts of the state set-up which could introduce the concept of the "enabling state", as this is certainly not "in vogue" among donors at present. Efforts in bringing the state back in would, therefore, be expected to be limited, even if in a slimmed, reshaped or revitalized form. And even if efforts were aimed at avoiding some of the misgivings of the past, regarding unprofessionalism, heavy bureacuracies, corruption, nepotism, "clientilism", etc.

Rather, it would be my guess that most donors continuously would prefer the project-type of intervention, easily identifiable and controllable, to a certain extent geared towards basic service provisions, but in particular directed towards improving rural development and redressing the ecological situation, etc. And implemented under the proviso of decentralization and participation, as an obvious antithesis to the state and all its shortcomings and fallacies.

The Nature of the Sahelian State. How Bad?

The state in Africa has been dealt major blows from all sides in recent years, often for very good reasons. Examples of mismanagement, pocketing of money and equipment in small and large scale, repression, "dirigisme", nepotism, authoritarian rule, etc. are legio. And the heavy bureaucracies, their unprofessionalism, their bad spending habits and inefficiencies, their efforts in intervening in and controlling most parts of the economy, etc. have fostered the new development credo of liberalization, market reform and privatization. Again for good reasons.

However, the characterization of the state has somehow gone astray, as the state has been claimed to bear the prime responsibility for most shortcomings and failings in Africa in general, as well as in the Sahel. The state has become the "prügelknabe" for most problems available.

To avoid misunderstanding: Again, the state has not done much good, as also said by Robert Chambers, quoted above. Often it has been a "disabling" rather than an "enabling" state. Still, this scapegoat role of the state is often blurring the picture in not allowing a more correct understanding of the Sahelian state to unfold, in neglecting the analysis of its origin and contemporary form and functions, and is thereby also blocking for efforts in support of the development of a more appropriate and adequate future state form.

For the present "state of affairs" is neither viable nor sustainable. No society can function in a cohesive and prospective manner with a state which has been reduced to less than a minimum, which is unable to

provide the most basic services, nor to maintain cohesion for lack of means and, most importantly, lack of legitimacy. Instead, market forces and privatization have taken over, and to a great extent are state functions being financed, but also often run by foreign donors, who establish new institutions, where the existing ones are found inadequate and inappropriate, and who initiate planning strategies and other policy measures, replacing and substituting for normal state run functions.

Jacques Giri (no date), together with a number of other, often French researchers, is addressing such issues as what characterizes the state *and* the civil society. And raising such questions as to whether "the sins of the state" in Africa are purely African phenomena, unknown in the western world or in other parts of the developing world. And whether the shaping of the state in its present, contemporary form has nothing to do with us or with the immediate historic past, colonialism.

Not surprisingly, according to such analyses things are a bit more complex than what meets the eye at first sight.

Recognizing that the complexity of the Sahelian states in French speaking West Africa in pre-colonial times does not warrant any easy summation, Giri (p. 3) nevertheless suggests three main characteristics. First of all, the pre-colonial societies in Sahel were aristocracies, organized in units of varying sizes, in which *personal allegiances* played a key role. Those in power were accepted on the condition that they complied with the rules underpinning society (law and order) and that the dominant families continued to support them. Secondly, those in power acted as a "spiritual interface", meaning that they maintained harmony between the visible world and the world of the invisible beings and forces that interfere with everyday life. This role as an intermediary was held in high regard by society, as leaders had "virtually sacred status", although they were not placed above society. They were never more than "delegates of society" and they were not exempted from society's general rules. Thirdly, the leaders levied and redistributed, but "practically never organized society with a view to creating wealth".

With the arrival of the colonial powers, all this changed. The colonial rulers, in the words of Giri, "carved up the territory" for military reasons, and replaced *jus sanguinis* with a *jus loci*, which was completely new to the Sahel.

As is well known from the many tales of colonialism, power was now imposed by force on the population in order to open up the region for European trade and investments:

"To achieve that aim, a State was established, (described) as "a very rough approximation of the modern Western State". Although a modern rule-based State and bureaucracy were set-up, the true basis of the State was not democratic rule of law. The Code de l'Indigénat made Sahelians subjects, not citizens. Different powers were often held by the same people (the district administrator was also the magistrate). Law was not an expression of the general will (neither that of the Sahelians nor even that of the colonizing power) but the result of arbitrary lawmaking by those in power and lobbying by those with commercial interests in the region. The system had more in common with Ancien Régime (sometimes even including patrimonialism!) than with a republican State" (Giri, p. 4).

Due to lack of personnel from Europe (but probably also as a cooptation strategy for ensuring some legitimacy) the colonial rulers were forced to govern through an army of intermediaries: chiefs, interpreters, clerks, bailiffs, etc. Although with no formal authority, the chiefs and intermediaries actually had some autonomy and power, and occasionally used it. Around the colonial rulers, a new aristocracy grew up, created by but only loosely controlled by the colonialists. And the redistributive functions described above gradually changed:

"Some of the new aristocrats were members of the pre-colonial aristocracy, but there were a great many new faces. The new aristocrats followed the old rules: They took advantage of their privileged positions to create rents, exploit them and redistribute the wealth as a way of asserting their prestige. But Western influences soon changed the ground rules: Social status was seen to come with material possessions and the new elite progressively began to accumulate wealth rather than distribute it" (p. 5).

Certainly, the pre-colonial times were not ideal nor idyllic. And certainly, the colonial powers are not to be blamed for all the shortcomings and failings of the present-day state in the Sahel. But the analysis by Giri do suggest that *understanding* the contemporary state is an important, although difficult objective, as it underscores the complexities at hand: the contemporary Sahelian state is neither only an extended arm of an imported colonial state, nor is it a state appropriated totally by African society. It is, obviously, something in-between, a messy inheritance and prolongation of some of the features of the colonial state, intermingled with elements of traditional rule.

This is also expressed by Bayart (1992, p. 52-53) in the following way:

"Perhaps the theory of extraneity mistakes the exceptions for the rule. The state in Africa, and even more so in Asia, should not be considered *a priori* as a simple product of the colonial period. (...) (The states were not created) *ex nihilo*; and colonial creations were also subject to multiple acts of reappropriation by indigenous social groups. Therefore, these states, which are reputed to be artificial, rest in reality upon their own social foundations; they neither lack "structural roots in society", nor do they resemble "balloons in the sky", a term which Göran Hyden employs in reference to sub-Saharan Africa".

The result is a complex, hierarchical and loyalty-bound state, which seems to be a difficult cocktail to get to grips with and conceptualize. "Clientilism" is one of the terms used to describe some of these, to us, often invisible connections of loyalty and other interpersonal links based on distribution and redistribution systems. "Straddling" is another concept used to describe strategies of handling relations and interaction between those in power and those outside, or, in the words of Bayart, "the correlation between the common practice of straddling between positions of power and those of enrichment" (Bayart, 1992, p. 65), which Giri is modifying a bit:

"Some observers have spoken of "straddling" between those in power and the others, but the term intermeshing may be more appropriate. Those in power not only eat into the State budget (often only in modest proportions in the Sahel), they also supplement their incomes with the profits of power. They put their dependents in charge of economic activities that could not survive without their protection, and their dependents pay them for that protection. They redistribute part of their

income to their less fortunate relatives. They in turn are dependent on their superiors and in any case could not continue to operate without their protection. From top to bottom, this hierarchical system is bound together by the money in circulation but also, and most importantly, by the rent that is generated by protection and special dispensations" (Giri, p. 9).

Although the states in Africa, in the words of Bayart, "rest in reality upon their own social foundation", this does not necessarily imply that the states and their rulers are able to provide legitimate authority nor that they rest on a *solid* and *secure* foundation, quite on the contrary. Authoritarian rule, repression and the lack of public support have led to the well-known decomposition of state structures and the tendency to de-institutionalization.

Still, the state has been able to maintain a style of statehood, which is not "indeed of reassuring institutional solidity, but remarkable enough in terms both of the political inventiveness deployed by those who have charge of the state, the political elite, and of skills deployed by those who seek to avoid the state. (...)...the state often appears to survive essentially as a show, a political drama with an audience more or less willing to suspend its disbelief" (Cruise O'Brien, 1992, p. 145-46). Totally ridiculing the state (or giving a realistic description of the ridiculous state, as found in a number of African cases), Cruise O'Brien is characterizing the state, quoting Achille Mbembe, as "an alimentary space", politics being focused on the subject of who is going to eat. "The state, the civil service, the police, the armed forces are perceived above all as alimentary deposits and as instruments of extortion" (Ibid., p. 148).

Other, rather easy, efforts in drawing the attention to the absurdity and grandeur on the one hand, the informal market place character on the other hand of modern Africa statehood are offered by Terray (quoted in O'Brien). Here, two distinct, but intermingled types of government are suggested, the government system of the "air conditioner" and that of "the verandah".

"The system of the "air conditioner" has all the apparent ingredients of "State....President, Ministers, Parliament, Administration, Party, Constitution, Laws, Rules and airport with VIP lounge, company of

paratroopers...cycle outriders with siren" (...while) Real government business is done according to this model elsewhere, on the verandah, by a system of patronage "governed by a logic which is no longer that of efficiency, but of the share-out"" (Ibid, p. 151-52).

Perhaps needless to say, this characterization is based on Francophone West Africa, which then, again, underlines that contemporary states are a difficult blend between colonial and neo-colonial relations and traditional or customary rule and relations.

While such notions and characterizations of modern African statehood with the associated claims of inefficiency, corruption, mismanagement of the economy in general and the natural resource base in particular, are at the roots of the many well justified efforts in "deconstructing the state" (*Le Desengagement de l'État*, see Mercoiret, 1990), two rather evident facts remain: On the one hand, that the state will continue to exist and is an essential factor in insuring the maintenance of the conditions under which peaceful local development choices can be made (as expressed by John Lewis). And on the other hand, that the state and its laws and institutions and personnel may themselves be a suitable target for development (Falk Moore, 1993), something which the donor community has not yet discovered.

Decentralization, Participation and Democracy. How Genuine and How Good?

No doubt, in many respects were and are SAPs well justified and necessary. The rigidity with which SAPs have been implemented, often with the benevolent consent of the governments in question, have, however, had a number of serious socio-economic consequences and have in particular hit the rural poor. While SAPs have been spreading, other international organizations (UNICEF, UNDP, etc.) have been sweeping up after the Bank, trying to give SAP a "human face".

Other consequences of the restoration of macro-economic policies have been, whether intended or not, that the better conditions for economic growth which were created, at the same time led to the removal of opportunities for sustaining the artificial rents and eroded

the material basis for the ruling classes. In other words, the state "deflated like a balloon" and "withdrew, effectively stopped providing some of the services it was meant to provide, and even abandoned large areas of land that turned into "state wasteland" and remained largely uncontrolled" (Giri, p. 10).

As a corollary, the participation and decentralization aspects have been sweeping the international debate and, in particular within the donor community, it has taken up a predominant role as part of current aid jargon and phraseology, or, as Mercoiret (p. 4) has mentioned it, there has developed a clear "banalisation du concept".

This does not mean that donors and others are not trying to operationalize the concepts, or are trying to develop appropriate participatory approaches. But it does mean that far too often participation and decentralization become part of both rethoric and ideology in stressing these elements as the antithesis to the state. And when implemented, participation is primarily seen as a means for better project performance, rather than as an end in itself.

Most importantly, the decentralization and participation credos, however well justified in theory, are often followed by very superficial views as to the complexity of the rural scene in the Sahel (and other places in Africa), in which participatory strategies are to be implemented, and hence giving rise to largely unfounded and unrealistic expectations as to what might be accomplished.

Evidently, it is nowadays a well established truth that improved natural resource management cannot succeed unless those who depend on the natural resource base for their living take charge of managing the resource base themselves. And, at a general level, it is a similarly established truth that being in charge is only one, although major, incentive needed for better cultivation and herding practices. Other incentives are clear access and user rights to the resource, price incentives and accessible marketing channels, etc. The problem, however, is that this strategy is not easily implementable due to the socio-economic and cultural complexities at hand, which makes it "not always possible to internalize the externalities" (Lawry, 1992, p. 95).

This has been most obvious in discussions over tenure reform. The commonly developed hypothesis, strongly advocated by the World Bank and often recommended as associated with the Bank-supported National Environmental Action Plans, goes somewhat like the following: Security of tenure, which in practice often means private property rights, will motivate users to invest in land which again will foster improved resource management and higher productivity. In consequence, many donors prescribe titling and registration of land as a means to secure tenure.

A good number of research and studies have modified and nuanced the dogmatic view of the excellence of private property rights (See for example, Bruce, 1993; Bloch, 1993; and Falk Moore, 1993). Such studies have stressed that on the one hand, the concept of private property is very far from current local socio-economic realities in the Sahel which are based on both formal hierarchies and systems of mutual support and help. And, on the other hand, secured *access* rights are far more important than individualized property relations, as indicated by the fact that customary tenure in many cases provides the farmer the needed security.

But recognizing this, the picture is often even more complicated. As mentioned by Lawry (1992, p. 95):

"Analysis of the relationship between tenure and resource management is complicated by the fact that economic and other circumstances can arise which lead users to under-invest or over-exploit, even when they have secure tenure".

In other words, the pre-existing social systems are both diverse and complex, and they might in certain instances be quite sufficient, in their original or modified form, to meet requirements as to securing tenure and maintain incentives. And, secondly, the pre-existing social systems also strongly reshape the way formal systems or changes from the outside are sought implemented. And, thirdly, secure tenure is not necessarily synonymous with sustainable use of the resources.

The example of individual property rights, along with many others, directed towards redressing natural resource degradation often use blueprint approaches developed in the West to address problems

which are far more complex than realized and anticipated. The multitude of agencies and agents advocating decentralization and participation, and trying to implement these in practice, very often base their efforts on incorrect diagnoses and superficial notions of the complex and very diverse local socio-economic and cultural scene: "They often fail to capture the complexity of resource use strategies" (Lawry, p. 96).

The most obvious shift in focus among donors, lenders and others - from the state and state institutions to decentralized levels of resource management and the promotion of local institutions -is perhaps best indicated in the concept of *gestion des terroirs villageois*, now sweeping most of the Sahelian countries, with the Bank as strategy formulator and with bilateral donors stepping in, financing projects formulated under this headline.

This approach to decentralization and participation is, again, in theory well prepared and worked out. It is certainly well justified to develop strategies where responsibilities for resource management are transferred to those depending on the natural resources for their living. And the support to the further development of existing local institutions, or the establishment of new ones if none are in place, is also a seemingly well founded approach.

However, behind the conceptualization lies often a simplified view of local communities, which in the concept implicitly are seen as rather homogenous societies, with self-evident interests in managing the natural resource base in a harmonious way and with no serious constraints as to grasping the opportunity for establishing self-management groups. However, in Mali, where the Bank has come some way in promoting the *gestion des terroirs* concept through a number of *zone test* programmes and villages, a number of different "development committees" have been erected, each serving its specific development objective or, rather, serving the requirements of each individual donor as to participation. In this case general development committees are existing, in addition to women development committees, committees for health and education, committees in charge of the village water supply systems, committees responsible for collection of user charges of various sorts, etc.etc. The result is,

particularly in peak periods of the cultivation cycle, that if farmers were to comply with donor expectations as to participation and committee work, there would be no time left for tilling the land.

But local hierarchies may block efforts in introducing institutional innovations from the outside, as this may threaten existing power and authority relations. In the internal political hierarchy, data show that authority is often in the hands of certain senior male elders, who control most forms of access to village resources, being it land, water or labour (Falk Moore, p. 11). In addition, in most villages studied in Burkina Faso, mutual assistance in all tasks that one man or one woman cannot do alone is a prevalent characteristic. This assistance rather readily provided by neighbours or kin has a price, dependence on others, therefore control. And this control is exercised through village councils, controlled by an elite, who is not likely voluntarily to give up their power through the establishment of competing development committees of various sorts (Ibid., p. 12). As expressed by Lawry (p. 97), "local elite groups can monopolize control over local resources in ways that reduce the welfare of non-elite groups. Diverse interests cut along a number of social and economic fault lines, based on ethnicity, gender and resource endowment".

In general, interventions from the outside are not geared towards this complexity. And the lack of local government structures is adding to the problem, which *in toto* easily can make participatory approaches to fail, as stressed by Lawry (p. 97):

"Initiatives to promote greater control over common property resources often define the policy problem strictly in terms of devolution of control over resources from the centralized state to local communities. Unfortunately, little consideration is given to whether the political authority and social legitimacy, and levels of administrative and technical competence, necessary to regulate resource use locally. There is a danger that tenure over common property resources, now disconnected from the state, will instead be monopolized by unrepresentative elites, and that the tenure security of many users will not be enhanced, and could possibly be reduced".

Efforts in implementing participatory approaches and decentralization, are in a good number of cases promoted from the

outside via donor agencies' wellmeaning strategies. However, such attempts are often disregarding the diversity and complexity of pre-existing social systems and network functions. And, as mentioned by Toulmin (1991, p. 115) "...there are still many questions about this process of shifting responsibility and power to local communities which need to be considered. It must also be recognised that devolution of control to the local level is no guarantee of fair access rules and wise decision-making..."

Among the problems are, as pointed out (Toulmin, *Ibid.*):

- Problems of definition of the local community. Is it the village, or a group of villages, the herding camp, or herders' associations? Given the heterogenous nature of communities, is there a representative body at the local level able to manage and control access to resources fairly?

- Problems related to skills and power to manage resources locally. Is local government able to provide the needed support, do the local structures have the skills required? Etc.

- Problems related to diverging, perhaps conflicting, interests between local communities and national government. How are such conflicts over for example land having a strategic interest or particular economic value to be settled? Whose interests should receive priority? Which management structures can be established which bring together local representatives and national government? Etc.

The great interest shown by external donors in the participatory issue has in a number of cases probably contributed to developing more appropriate natural resource management practices, but has at the same time blurred the vision for the recognition of the complex local structures, their diversity and heterogeneity. And seldom are participation and local community structures established and has evolved as genuine, locally initiated efforts.

Which Perspective on Natural Resource Degradation in the Sahel? The Need for a Wider Framework and Strategy

National strategies for improving natural resource management are offered the Sahelian countries in plenty supply. Apart from the above mentioned Bank-supported National Environmental Action Plans, we have National Conservation Strategies supported by IUCN and others, National Plans of Action to Combat Desertification supported by UNSO and UNEP, Tropical Forestry Action Plans supported by FAO and UNDP, and a number of other plans and strategies formulated and supported by bilateral donors. - In a number of cases, bilateral donors are favouring support to the formulation of local, decentral strategies (following their general mistrust of what goes on at the national level), however, with no apparent link to national plans and strategies.

Although most of the strategies and donors are able to defend their position by referring to each plan's "comparative advantage", in the Sahelian countries, however, natural resource degradation is *the* crucial environmental *and* developmental problem, and the one taking up the key role regardless of whether the plan is for conserving natural resources, tropical forests or, in the case of the Bank, trying to cover it all. In consequence, the various plans are to a considerable extent duplicating each other (and hence money, time and resources wasted).

This is, however, not the point here. The point is that even being comprehensive in nature such plans often lack a broader perspective on factors causing natural resource degradation. And they are not interfaced with or formulated in the vein of macro-economic plans already formulated and existing in the countries in question. And, in particular, they have only limited effects and impact as long as the state and the decentral institutions do not have the means nor the legitimacy needed effectively to steer policies and implement decisions. Again, the political vacuum left by the deconstruction of the state, "the deflation of the balloon", is once more a serious drawback.

But the need for a wider approach in remedying the effects of natural resource degradation in the Sahel is primarily motivated by factors other than those directly associated with farming and production systems. Factors, which can have serious, detrimental

effects on the natural resource base and its proper use, and which Belshaw et al. (Belshaw, Blaikie and Stocking, 1991, p. 77) call the "chain of explanation". This chain of explanation refers to the different levels, from the localized level, to the sector and the multi-sectoral level via the national to the international level. At each of these levels, problems affecting natural resource management can be identified, and policy reforms suggested.

The agricultural sector in the Sahel has been the preferred intervention area for donors, whether multilateral, bilateral or NGOs, and has from governments in the region received the highest strategic priority, economically as well as politically. Furthermore, the predominance of the agricultural sector has apparently been to the detriment of the pastoral production system, which has been neglected in spite of the productive potential present through improved management of the rangeland resources.

However, even with profound improvements in the way in which the natural resource base is managed, and even with demonstrated increasing agricultural productivity, on a sustainable and ecologically sound basis, then efforts and impact might still fall short of meeting basic requirements and coping with population growth. There is thus an overriding need for developing alternative livelihood systems within, but most likely outside, the agricultural sector, which can relieve some of the pressure on the natural resource base.

Rural producers and rural households are most often treated solely as farmers. But as studies on off-farm income possibilities have shown (Reardon, Matlon and Delgado, 1988 and Reardon and Delgado, 1990), Sahelian households are not merely farmers, but households having a diversified income base. Based on research results from Burkina Faso, Reardon et al. show that Sahelian households do feed themselves, even during drought years, and even in zones where one would expect hunger would abound. The reason is that rural households purchase substantial portions of their food, and that in reality most income springs from non-cropping sources, in both the relatively arid northwest of the country, and the relatively well-watered southwest.

Among the other observations made are that rural households are not necessarily worse off than urban households, that non-cropping income is very important and that household income is not closely related to agroclimatic level of the zone, as the worst and the best zones have the highest income.

Of importance in this connection is it that the Sahelian economy, and the agriculturally related production system, already is surviving to a great extent due to economic opportunities outside the farm. Incomes from remittances from absent migrant relatives and workers, employment in the informal sector, in food processing, cottage industry, commerce, etc.,etc. are typical sources of survival.

Such findings show, on the one hand, that rural households are very dynamic, responsive and resilient economic systems. On the other hand they show that policy and planning as well as donor preferences in both thematic area and form (the project form of assistance) can be subject to a number of stereotypes and shortcomings, focusing on one sector in near isolation, as it is not very often seen in its wider macro-economic framework.

Based on such observations it should, in theory at least, be possible to search for other alternative livelihood systems, which can relieve the pressure on the natural resources, building on local experience, support existing positive trends, and develop more holistic strategies accordingly.

Another factor justifying the need for having a wider perspective on natural resource degradation in the Sahel is the role of externally related aspects, such as price distortions or dumping of surplus agricultural production from for example the EEC, which are expected to have a profound impact on the Sahelian economies as well as on the processes of ecological degradation. Such interest should be fostered by the recognition of the importance of seeking the causes, and remedies, of ecological degradation more broadly, also introducing the role and influence of terms of trade, import restrictions on western markets for Sahelian produce, the effects of the Franc zone, etc.etc.

In-between these two layers - the household level vis-a-vis alternative livelihood systems and the externally related factors, such

as price distortions and dumping of surplus meat -is the national macro-economic framework of neglected, but crucial importance.

As a result of the preferred focus on natural resource degradation and improved management practices at micro level, the broader national development objectives and foci have been somewhat lost in the debate on the future of the Sahelian countries. In the early days of the development theory debate, both from classical and neo-classical as well as marxist camps, the issue of linkages in the economy was in focus. The viewpoint was that unless peripheral economies developed some economic autonomy and inter-linkages (primarily between agriculture and manufacturing industry, in which industry manufactured agricultural raw materials as well as delivered the means of production meeting the demand in both industry and agriculture) they would continuously be subjected to external aid transfers as well as dependent on external forces in general.

This aspect has been completely lost in the debate. But the Sahelian economies are still in need of developing some sort of integration and wider basis for their economy, which could make the future less uncertain. Even under the best climatic conditions and with a tremendous positive impact of current and planned interventions aimed at remedying the poor management of the natural resources, the outlook, also considering prevailing population growth factors, will continue to be bleak.

In any case, also the wider framework in which improved natural resource management has to be perceived will necessarily imply that the role of the state be redefined with a view of supporting the "construction" of an adequate and *enabling* state, able to fulfill its necessary legitimate and cohesive role. In other words, a new balloon has to be inflated, made of a stronger web than previously, which can contribute to bridging the gap between the national and decentral levels. But the Sahelian societies cannot do without a state.

Which Agenda for a Reversal Paradigm?

As previously mentioned, Chambers is talking in favour of a "reversal paradigm", bringing the state back in, in a modified and improved

shape. Bruce (1992, p. 93) has suggested an "adaptation" paradigm rather than a "replacement" paradigm (which is the one favoured by the Bank, when advocating individual tenure in replacement of customary tenure systems), which seeks to develop an approach based on local circumstances and characteristics, which then is blended with modern requirements.

What is needed then is a redefinition of the role of the state, which continuously has a number of important functions to fulfill vis-a-vis the civil society, which have been suppressed for some time in the vague of widespread deconstructionist tendencies, which again followed and were responses to years of mismanagement and misuse of public functions and funds. The establishment of an "enabling" state ought to be high on the agenda, in replacement of recent years' "disabling" state.

This redefinition, however, has to take place while recognising and maintaining that decentralisation, participation and democracy are of utmost importance, not only as a means in itself in sustaining the unfolding of the civil society, but also, and particularly relevant here, in ensuring an improved natural resource management practice.

In other words, what we are talking about is a general shift from state power to support of civil society, without, however, the deflation of state functions as seen in recent years. The task is to seek viable solutions to the project of "bridging the gap between top-down and bottom-up" (Toulmin, 1991, p. 110). This is not an easy task, as "the government is torn between the need for political support that requires it to listen to the demands of the local community and the need to carry out a policy of development that drives it to transform the community" (from Coulon, here quoted from Bruce and Magnusson, 1992, p. 89).

But some optimism can still be found. According to Toulmin:

"...current policy in much of the Sahel sees a growing number of government officials becoming increasingly aware of the need to find solutions to land tenure issues and to develop a closer dialogue with their populations. Transferring rights and responsibilities back to local users may be the beginnings of a solution. However, it is a solution which still requires an important role for local and national government in the guaranteeing and enforcement of rights, in the technical support

needed and in the balancing of local versus outsider and national interests" (Ibid., p. 117).

For the *state* there is a need to provide a legal framework for local control and access rights to the natural resources, to the establishment of structures which allow local communities to organize and be responsible, and to formulate rules and regulations pertaining to how functional links and authority lines between national and local government structures and again local community based ones are to work.

Both in the case of traditional institutions and new institutions created there might be a need for supporting technical knowledge, training and insight which, in part at least, will have to be provided by the state.

In general, "effective reforms shall require an active state role in defining and protecting user rights, and in establishing a legal and governmental structure at several levels, supportive of greater individual and community responsibility for natural resource management" (Lawry, 1992, p. 97).

In addition, the state should effectively take on the responsibility of donor coordination in dealing with aspects of natural resource management and should have a more influential role in the formulation and adoption of natural resource management plans and policies, as well as having the means at its disposal for effectively implementing such plans. And it should provide the necessary infrastructure now in most cases totally worn down, etc.

Similarly, efforts in designing and empowering credible *local* community as well as government structures should be envisaged, which can foster and support the development of local decision making, not least regarding both sedentarized farmers and transhumant pastoralists. As mentioned by Lawry (p. 97), contrary to common wisdom particularly within donor's circles, "such structures will not emerge simply upon the withdrawal of the overbearing state"!

In doing that, however, an analysis of local structures, their diversity and complexity is deemed necessary, as far too many efforts supported externally are having a stereotyped view of local conditions, having a tendency of stressing similarities and homogenous structures, while overlooking basic heterogeneities and areas of conflict of interest between different strata, layers and representatives of various production systems.

Transferring increasing power and decision-making capabilities to local structures thus require answers to a number of ambiguous questions. What kind of authority and decision-making capability have to be transferred, to whom, how, when and for how long? How should the local community be defined? The single village, or a cluster of villages, an association, a herding camp, etc.etc.?

In what form, and under what conditions should any of the existing groups and categories be given official recognition?

Having clarified such complex issues, the understanding of which are crucial for identifying possibilities and limitations for transferring rights and obligations to decentralized levels of resource management, the need for directly supporting local community structures arises. Support in technical education, organisational skills, the provision of basic equipment, etc. are examples of such direct support.

However, the process of decentralization and participation is -exactly a *process*, but often forgotten as such. And it is a process which is not conceived in a socio-economic or political vacuum, but is "a planned intrusion on an already ongoing society" (Falk Moore, s993, p. 17):

"Structures and practices already in existence in the Sahel cannot be ignored. They are the context in which any new formal design will be mounted. And they are the stuff out of which civil society will produce much of its form for the foreseeable future. A social system already exists in the Sahel. Or more correctly put, many social fields exist. They intersect, they overlap, some are quite discrete, some contain others. There are myriad permutations and combinations".

Blueprint approaches to constructing or deconstructing the state are adversely affecting intended outcome in a number of respects, as are

blueprint approaches to decentralization, participation and democracy. In recent years, due to its political and ideological appeal the latter have had a tremendous backing particularly within the donor community. As a programmatic principle this is undoubtedly correct. As an agenda for easy action and quick disbursements of donor funding perhaps less so.

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