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Center for International Education

Fall 2007

STUDY EXAMINES SOCIAL EFFECTS OF OIL PRODUCTION IN CHAD

by Professor Steve Reyna, Department of Anthropology



Professor Reyna with local Chadians near the oil base in Komé

Between May 25 and June 20, 2007 a team, consisting of Andrea Behrends, from the Martin Luther University of Halle, Djorno La Guerre from the Université de N'Djamena, and Steve Reyna, of the University of New Hampshire and the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology (MPI), conducted research in the Republic of Chad concerning the social transformations resulting from Chad's becoming an oil producer. Additionally, we put the final touches upon establishment of the Centre de la Recherche en Anthropologie et Sciences Humaines (CRASH), planned with the assistance of UNH and MPI in cooperation with the Universities of N'Djamena, Leiden, and Wageningen.

Our team worked in three areas: the oil producing South; the war zone in the East (near the Darfurian border); and the capital (N'Djamena). We interviewed peasants and herders; local, regional, and national officials; members of Chadian civil society; and representatives of the oil, NGO, and humanitarian communities. Our findings from this, and previous, researches have resulted in a body of publications in Sociologus, FOCAAL, and Social Analysis. Dr. Behrends and I are editing an issue of FOCAAL dealing with the anthropology of oil and a book on the same topic for Berghahn publishers. Most recently CRASH has won funding from the European Union to conduct research into conflict resolution along the Chad/Darfur border.

Our findings allow us the possibility of commenting on certain major questions. For example, one of my articles addresses the question, 'Why Development Really Fails.' The article examines the World Bank Chadian poverty reduction project. This is supposed to work by controlling the Chadian government's utilization of oil revenues, with 80% of oil royalties supposedly spent upon anti-poverty measures. The project has been hailed as a 'model' because it is believed to offer a way of resolving 'oil's curse.' This 'curse' is the paradox that citizens of petro-states often become enmeshed in greater poverty and conflict, even though oil greatly enriches their countries. The Bank's 'model' project is failing. Chad is becoming poorer; civil war is increasing. The article suggests that it flounders due to a conjuncture of the exigencies of the Chadian government, functioning as a patrimonial state, and of the American government, functioning as an instrument of an informal empire. A key exigency of the Chadian patrimonial government is to stay in power: To accomplish this it needs to fight off its opponents; to fight opponents it needs to divert oil revenues from poverty reduction to military purposes. It does this and, as a result, poverty rises in an ensuing hell of

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increased warring. Why do the Bank and the U.S., which controls the Bank, not insist that oil revenues be spent as envisioned by the project? The answer to this question is that the U.S. is an empire whose chief exigency is a voracious need for oil. Oil is becoming scarce. The U.S. is competing with China over access to Chadian oil. In order to insure that Exxon is able to continue pumping Chadian oil, the U.S. acquiesced to the Chadian government spending oil revenues as it saw fit. Why does development really fail? In this instance, it is because the most powerful actors--the Chadian and the U.S. governments--want it to fail, so their needs can be gratified.

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