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Developing World: Challenges and Opportunities

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Includes *Developing World Challenges and Opportunities*, an introduction to one of the Second International Rangeland Congress convenings, as well as Spooner's conference paper, *The Meaning of Social Soundness: A Case From Baluchistan*.

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Developing World: Challenges and Opportunities

Abstract

The complex problem which confronts us in the world's rangelands -- is the need to raise living standards, increase economic productivity, and at the same time reduce ecological stress -- is approached in this symposium from a number of different disciplinary points of view. The case material presented in the papers shows (in varying degrees) the significance of the accumulated experience and cultural ideals of the different types of people involved -- local pastoralists, Western-trained ecologists, planners - as well as the constraints and opportunities that derive from fluctuation in climate and political economy. s - as well as the constraints and opportunities that derive from fluctuation in climate and political economy. The role of human activity in the history of the rangeland ecosystem and the cultural memory of the ecological past are treated as complementary to the potential of social forms and cultural aims and values.

Disciplines

Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Comments

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RANGELANDS: A RESOURCE UNDER SIEGE

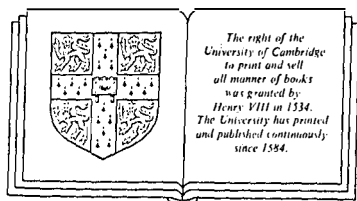
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Developing World Challenges and Opportunities

Convenor: Professor B. Spooner
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The complex problem which confronts us in the world's rangelands—is the need to raise living standards, increase economic productivity, and at the same time reduce ecological stress — is approached in this symposium from a number of different disciplinary points of view. The case material presented in the papers shows (in varying degrees) the significance of the accumulated experience and cultural ideals of the different types of people involved — local pastoralists, Western-trained ecologists, planners — as well as the constraints and opportunities that derive from fluctuation in climate and political economy. The role of human activity in the history of the rangeland ecosystem and the cultural memory of the ecological past are treated as complementary to the potential of social forms and cultural aims and values.

Successful development requires attention to all these dimensions of human experience. The best way to ensure that this attention is given is to have each disciplinary point of view argued out in a multidisciplinary forum — which is what the symposium tried to achieve.

What exactly are the challenges and opportunities for pastoral development? The first and major challenge is of course not simply to improve productivity or even to raise living standards, but to work out the best balance between what is required for ecological sustainability, national interests or policy, and the wellbeing and morale of the local population.

This challenge is particularly immediate because of the widening gap between modern urban-based economic sectors and traditional sectors which (often for historical and cultural reasons) remain unintegrated into the life of the country. Gross changes in the larger political economy over the last 50 years or so have placed most pastoral populations

in positions of unprecedented economic dependence and under unprecedented degrees of state control, leading to increasing political inequality and discrimination.

This change in the way pastoralists fit into the world around them has caused various types of upheaval in their own internal economic and political relations, and in many cases has disrupted them to the point where their way of life is less sustainable ecologically, their morale is threatened, and their sense of themselves — their culture, identity, way of life — is in serious danger of disintegration.

But the challenge is not the same for every traditional pastoral situation. As a result of the global economic and political evolution of the last hundred years, pastoralists, like most other populations have undergone change to differing degrees in each of three dimensions: ecological (their relationship with their resources and their environment), social (their relations with each other), and cultural (the values by which they organize their lives). A development effort that sets out to deal with the ecological dimension only and ignores the other two, or assumes the other two will take care of themselves, is unlikely to succeed.

Unfortunately, we do not have the same expertise in each of these dimensions. Although the social and the natural sciences may be more comparable in many ways than is generally believed, they are not comparable in application. A range scientist can analyse the condition of the range, assess the trends, diagnose the causes and design an appropriate management plan to manipulate the ecology and raise primary productivity. The social scientist can analyse and diagnose, but not design — for two reasons: a) he has not been able to perform comparable laboratory experiments to test his hypotheses before applying them, and b) it is morally unacceptable for him to impose a design, however

manure that is readily available from Borana encampments where the night enclosures are cleaned out daily. The animal manure contains at least 1% N which adds 600-1,000 kg grain/ha to present yields if applied at about 6 tonnes DM/ha (de Ridder, pers. comm.).

The general idea of forage crop production in rangelands areas is not new. The Mugaga research station in Kenya has produced a package which provides 6 tonnes DM/ha/yr of forage sorghum on a rainfall of 220 mm per crop season (Potter 1979). Unlike other improvements in pastoral systems it would not run head long into the problem of income distribution or greater dependence on food imports. Rather than adjusting the use of existing resources, intensification of production starting with the problem of how to increase calf growth rates while retaining mild offtake and subsistence independence appears to be the best bet for pastoralists. In this way systems which are already very productive in terms of supporting people and providing a cash income can be made even more so — which, however, does not mean that they will ever be well off, even in a modest Western sense, at their present ratio of people to unit area.

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THE MEANING OF SOCIAL SOUNDNESS: A CASE FROM BALUCHISTAN

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The criteria which are currently used by some agencies for assessing the social soundness of development projects are not sufficiently detailed or comprehensive to cover all important eventualities. The case of Baluchistan (especially within Pakistan) provides some lessons which may be applicable to Southwest Asia and the Middle East generally. In particular, it illustrates the need for a more positive approach to nomadic pastoralism in some situations.

Baluchistan is a sparsely populated area comprising some 350,000 km² of western Pakistan and a further 500,000 km² in southeastern Iran and southwestern Afghanistan. It is probably the poorest and least developed area of each of the three countries. In Pakistan it comprises 44% of the country, but its population is less than 5% of the national total. These figures combined with the fact that it is largely barren mountain and desert, has no large rivers or other economically significant renewable natural resources, suffers from severe climatic extremes and is populated by tribes which are culturally and linguistically distinct from the rest of Pakistan, are largely responsible for its past failure to attract development.

Since 1979 this situation has changed. Pakistani Baluchistan has become a focus of attention for a number of bilateral and international agencies, as well as the Government of Pakistan. But the nomads of Baluchistan may now stand to suffer more from development than they did formerly from neglect, since by far the greater part of the new effort is focused (as it would be in more densely populated areas) on irrigation — albeit relatively small-scale — in the scattered settled communities. This strategy will further disrupt the economic and general social and political balance between the pastoral and agricultural, the nomadic and settled sectors of the society — a process which has already been set in motion by the combined effects of national politics and exogenous economic processes. Development is another exogenous factor, but one whose effects might be more controlled and constructive. Unfortunately, the idea of supporting nomadic activity seems to offend the professional conscience both of many applied ecologists and agricultural economists and of the national politicians who dominate development thinking. In the case of Baluchistan this professional position may lead to unfortunate results.

The relationship of nomads to the rest of the population in Baluchistan is comparable to other parts of the Middle East. Only 1.2 million ha of Baluchistan are cultivated annually. Investment in irrigation will probably be more effective in improving the quality of this cultivation than in increasing the proportion of cultivated to non-cultivated land in the province as a whole. Uncultivated land is considered rangeland, but it is mostly of poor quality. It is used by an uncounted number of nomads, probably less than half a million, or less than 10% of the population of the province excluding the provincial capital, Quetta. However, the contribution of the nomads to Baluch society is out of all proportion to their numbers, and is not so much economic as cultural. In ways that can be explained both historically and

ecologically the nomads provide the generative force behind the Baluch view of the world, which is the cultural basis of the whole society, nomadic and settled. Without the nomads Baluch society as a whole will lose the cultural glue that holds it together, and non-Baluch will not live in Baluchistan except in the major settlements on a temporary basis in return for uneconomic incentives. Depopulation of the countryside now will create a political and social vacuum that will defeat not only development, but the strategic objectives associated with the current effort.

In Makran especially (the southeastern Division of the Province, approximately 38,000 km², continuing westward across the border into Iran) but to some extent throughout Baluchistan and even beyond the nomads are especially important. It was they who somewhere between ten and five centuries ago brought into the area the language, the identity and — most importantly — the values which have come to constitute the culture of Baluchistan. The population of Makran was registered in the 1972 census of Pakistan as 304,000. Of these 74,000 are settled in the two major agricultural centres of Turbat and Panjgur, and the port settlement of Gwadar. There are no reliable figures to indicate how many of the remaining 230,000 are nomadic, nor how many of those who are nomads by socialization still spend most of the year in tents or other temporary dwellings with their families and flocks, rather than taking the modern option of wage labour in the booming Gulf Emirates. We may estimate, conservatively, well over 50,000. But as in the larger society their significance for the future development of Makran far outweighs their numbers or their own economic contribution.

The importance of the nomads for Makran is best seen as a combination of logistics and morale. The nomads produce milk products and supply the necessary labour for the date harvest — the most important event in the agricultural cycle, which coincides in the late summer with the slack season in the pastoral cycle. The nomads are, therefore, important for the economy of the area, both for what they produce and as a source of seasonal labour. But they are also agricultural producers themselves. Much of the agricultural production of the area depends on unpredictable river flow and run off, which only the nomads understand. Small pockets of soil scattered throughout the area produce crops when a downpour happens to bring water by it — if a nomad is there to apply it.

In addition to their economic role, the nomads are even more important for the morale of the total population, because their way of life is thought of by the rest of the population as embodying the values to which all subscribe. Baluch values derive from the conditions of the nomadic life. Their explicit code expresses the major rules of honour, hospitality, asylum and compensation for homicide, governing relations with strangers, refugees and criminals, and between men and women. Their poetry and songs celebrate exploits and conditions that are either explicitly nomadic and pastoral or difficult to reconcile with a settled agricultural life.

The nomads are the only people who use or are likely to use some 90% of the territory of Makran. Without them the greater part of the population would be marooned in isolated oases, which do not have the resources to be economically independent, and with increasing dependence on the outside subsidies would gradually lose population to more attractive economic and cultural opportunities outside the Province. With them, the population forms an inter-dependent social, economic, political and cultural network covering the whole of the area.

The decline of the nomads which now threatens Baluch society is due to a syndrome familiar from other pastoral

areas of the world that have become better known to us through the effects of the Sahelian drought, although it is somewhat different here because of the long history of interaction with small agricultural communities with which intermarriage was common, and because of the influence of India, Iran and Muscat which have caused important changes in the terms of trade and in economic and political opportunities from pearl-diving and buccaneering in the past to the present market for wage labour and smuggling. But even more important than these changes in the larger political economy are the changes in dominant values in the larger consumer-oriented society. These changes have altered the day-to-day economic and political balance between the farmers and the nomads. Despite the importance of meat and milk products in the lives of the Baluch, and the consequent importance of nomadic production development programs here as elsewhere favour industry and agriculture. Development experts are trained to see the meager natural resources of Baluchistan, the non-existent infrastructure and the unpromising quality of the labour pool, and conclude that there is no economic justification for investment. The only justification which makes sense in this frame work is political: to persuade the people to think that they are not forgotten — that they are part of Pakistan — by boosting morale with a gesture towards improving productivity, communications and living conditions. But the best way to boost morale is to look at the situation, not from the point of view either of a banker or of the Government of Pakistan — which will be likely to exacerbate the socially disruptive effects of existing policies on the Baluch way of life — but from the point of view of the people who are supposed to benefit from it.

Admittedly, such an approach is difficult both in the formulation and in the execution. How is the point of view of the peoples to be ascertained? Those who would answer the questions of any sort of team of investigators would speak as individuals, expressing individual interests. Even if some nomads happened to participate, they would probably not express an independent view — they would already be domesticated to the point where they would rather seek opportunities in the non-nomadic sector. At best they would be a minority. The chances of happening on a spokesman for public rather than private interests is remote.

The odds are heavily against the nomads. Many influential members of the larger society would rather move to national cities than reinforce their own society. The nomads are losing the will to argue their own case. On the other side, powerful arguments have evolved against any policy that would encourage nomadism. Apart from the traditional distrust of governments for nomads who are difficult both to tax and to provide with facilities, there is also another, often strident, argument, which maintains that nomads are responsible for over-grazing, which has reduced the vegetation cover to levels where it is economically useless and often possibly beyond recovery in any meaningful period of time. To support nomads, I have heard it argued, would not be ecologically sound. This argument should be questioned carefully. The ecologists' assessments are essentially extrapolations from the short term to the long term. There is in fact no evidence for the view that the range has deteriorated over the long term as a result of nomadic activity, only prediction that present practice will lead to long-term degradation. We simply do not know whether nomadic herding strategies (or for that matter those of most other nomadic pastoralists) are adaptive or not, or for that matter (if they are not) whether recent demographic and economic change has altered their relationship with their resources in such a way as to reduce their flexibility and so also their ability to adapt to fluctuations in the range. We do

know that nomadic pastoralism has a long history and we know that the general state of the range may not have changed significantly since the first Western (admittedly sparse and sketchy) reports were written in the last century. Furthermore, individuals and families who leave the nomadic life are generally forced to join the lowest stratum of the society in a local settlement or the urban proletariat where their living conditions and nutrition are below those of the nomads who (despite assessments of the range vegetation) still produce most of their own food.

If nomadic pastoralism as a way of life has survived so long, it would seem to have proved itself viable both ecologically and culturally. The dominance of scientific thinking in our orientation to problems of human ecology (which tend to involve variables that science does not have a good record of dealing with) leads us too often to assess cultural viability in the relatively simple terms of ecological and economic success. In fact, neither ecological nor economic success is possible without cultural or ideological success in holding the population together in a particular pattern of interaction.

A historical perspective suggests that if the Baluch were left now to their own devices their future, and especially the future of the nomads would be uncertain. It would largely depend, as much of their history has, on what foreign interests various entrepreneurs among them managed to attract, in what ways they were able to pay such interests off, and on the magnetism of external opportunities. The development of dominant political power within Baluchistan has generally depended on support from an outside power — in the eighteenth century from Afghanistan, and in the nineteenth from Delhi. When there was no foreign interest and no great economic attraction outside, there seems to have been a balance within the area between agriculture and pastoralism, between settled and nomadic populations and between natural population growth and emigration.

This state of affairs is probably gone for good. But since Baluch society appears to have worked best under these conditions it makes sense to design development in such a way as to edge the society back towards that balance. The way to do it is to set about systematically restoring the

balance between the pastoral and the agricultural sectors of the internal economy, and between the nomadic and the settled constituencies of the local polity; to distribute the investment more evenly between the settlements and the focuses of nomadic activity; to rebuild the morale of the nomads in order to rebuild the morale of the Baluch.

Nomadism, as a type of spatial organisation of society, is rarely explicable simple as ecological adaptation. In modern conditions the seasonal movement could in many cases be accomplished by commuting shepherds as well as by migrating families. But although it involves a lack of insulation from the elements and an immediacy of the natural resource which run counter to most modern work values, nomadism should not be discriminated against: the intimacy and the commitment that it forges between the family and the range in marginal conditions is probably unattainable by any other means, and ecologically more promising in the long run than any other feasible strategy. Moreover, the nomads' knowledge and understanding of the total territory is an important support for other sectors of the economy and for the general cultural conception of nature, the relationship between the total society and its environment.

These considerations are particularly obvious in Makran, but both the natural conditions and the historical experience of Makran are sufficiently similar to vast areas elsewhere in Southwest Asia and North Africa to suggest the possibility that the same considerations may apply beyond Baluchistan. Briefly summarised, the qualifying conditions are; sparse population, scattered small agricultural settlements, and a history in which nomadic pastoralists played a role so important that though they may often have been feared, they were the cultural as well as the territorial complement of the settled society — conditions which are reminiscent of the Bedouin and the Pashtuns, to name only the most obvious. Despite their apparent ecological and political drawbacks, nomads may, because of their ideological contribution, be indispensable for the future use and development of vast areas of desert and steppe throughout the Middle East and beyond. The criteria for assessing social soundness in such situations should be re-evaluated accordingly.