

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Discussion Paper 12

**BARABAIG NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:
SUSTAINABLE LAND USE
UNDER THREAT OF DESTRUCTION**

by
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June 1990

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ISSN 1012-6511

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The following paper reports on the traditional land management practices of the Barabaig, a semi-nomadic pastoralist group in Tanzania, and on the impact that a large-scale agricultural development project has had on their livelihood and on the environment. The paper was prepared as part of the UNRISD programme on **Sustainable Development through People's Participation in Resource Management**, which seeks to explore the dynamics of local level initiatives concerned with environmental degradation, to examine and analyse traditionally sustainable resource management practices and to investigate the factors which facilitate or constrain community participation in externally initiated resource management projects and programmes. The project is being co-ordinated within UNRISD by Jessica Vivian.

The author of this paper has spent 10 years as a development worker in Tanzania, and is presently a Research Associate with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The paper shows evidence of his thorough knowledge of the Barabaig culture and resource management practices, as well as of the ecological system in which this group lives. The Barabaig practice a complex and highly developed system of resource management suitable for the semi-arid conditions of the Hanang plains. Through intimate knowledge of their environment, and through intricate mechanisms governing the use of grazing lands, which are held as common property by the community, the Barabaig have historically maintained the productivity of their lands.

In the early 1970s, as part of an effort to increase wheat production in Tanzania, a large-scale wheat scheme was introduced in the area. The wheat farms, which involve mono-cropping with hybrid varieties and capital-intensive farming techniques, have meant the loss to the Barabaig of the majority of a particular type of grazing land which had played a key role in their traditional seasonal grazing rotation. Because the Barabaig, in order to preserve the fertility of this land, did not utilize it year-round, it was considered "idle" by the project developers, who believed that wheat farming would put the land to more efficient use.

The analysis in this paper calls into question two widely held assumptions regarding pastoralism in Africa. The first concerns the belief in the "tragedy of the commons", a theoretical model which maintains that lands held in common among a community, rather than privately owned, are subject to degradation because it is in each individual's interest to overexploit the land. In fact, the Barabaig case shows that where a community has developed a knowledge of the capacity of its environment, it is possible that rules which will ensure that common property is managed sustainably can be developed and enforced.

A second widely held assumption about pastoralism is that it is a relatively inefficient use of land, especially when compared with mechanized agriculture. The author argues in this paper, however, that, at least

in the Barabaig case, the use to which these pastoralists traditionally put their land is preferable, in social, environmental and economic terms, to the agricultural project which has supplanted them. The project has displaced the Barabaig and made their traditional way of life untenable. It has caused soil erosion and has eliminated from the area the types of local grasses most productive for grazing purposes. Lastly, the costs of the scheme include imported inputs which require the expenditure of foreign exchange and which are considerably subsidized by foreign aid. These costs, when the opportunity costs of the expenditure of foreign aid are taken into consideration, considerably outweigh the benefits of the scheme.

Ongoing UNRISD work on the theme of sustainable development and people's participation will investigate further some of the issues raised by this paper. As one of the programme's areas of focus, other examples of traditional resource management systems, and the constraints and pressures which these systems are now facing, will be examined, and particular emphasis will be placed on the implications of these studies for national and international development policy.

June 1990

Dharam Ghai
Director

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Introduction

The failings of the “green revolution” have shattered faith in the power of technology alone to solve development problems. Development has come to mean more than simply increasing production. Wider considerations of social equity and environmental conservation have proved to be equally important. Economists are also now realizing that the pursuit of economic growth has an environmental down side that must be given a cost in future budgeting (Pearce et al., 1989). Conservationists from all over the world are involving themselves in the struggle to win the battle to protect Africa’s natural resources (Harrison, 1987). Social scientists are also now revealing the value and importance of traditional land use systems for the preservation of people’s livelihoods and the conservation of nature. Sustainable development has become a new and important goal for developers (Conway and Barbier, 1988).

In recent years more attention has been given to pastoralists’ traditional resource management systems, particularly those with common land tenure arrangements (see Baxter, 1989; Raintree, 1987; National Research Council, 1986). From this has come a growing body of opinion that these systems are both economically efficient and sustainable (Abel and Blaikie, 1989). However, this is not yet adequately reflected in pastoralists’ involvement in policy formulation or development performance.

Tanzania is blessed with some of the richest pastoral resources in Africa. Foremost amongst these are pastoralists and their traditional natural resource management systems. To date most attempts at pastoral development in East Africa have mostly failed for lack of understanding and adherence to local land tenure arrangements (Lane and Swift, 1989). A development project in a pastoral area of Tanzania offers a case that highlights the costs of failing to recognize and support traditional pastoralism. The Tanzanian government, with the help of Canadian aid, has failed to take account of new advances in development thinking and has persisted with a project that is environmentally destructive, socially unjust and economically unsound.

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