

CONCLUSION: THE WORKSHOP AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

One of the more important results that we gained from this workshop was the understanding that learning about ‘development is likely to happen more easily when the information comes from people who are in a state of development comparable to their own. We were surprised to learn how narrowly that comparison was made: when Somali weavers from the Jelib Marka Project admitted that they have never been nomads, the more conservative pastoralists considered non-nomadic activities as irrelevant to them. Similarly, when the Keur Boumy group were presenting their project, some of the pastoralists, in particular the Maasai, considered activities such as livestock-fattening to be rather far-fetched, and they could not see how such an activity would be relevant to a pastoral nomadic economy. Again, with regard to the Dialambere Integrated Project, the nomads found some of their treatment of cattle unacceptable, especially the staking down of cattle at night to prevent them from wandering into the cultivated fields. As one participant from Somalia put it, “How do the cattle feel about it?”

In other words, there was an identity question that seemed to lie behind the flow of information. Ideas of development, originating from a people who seem to be “like oneself,” were deemed to be more relevant or more feasible. The attitude is quite clearly reflected in the following comment made by N’Gade to the Jelib Marka Weavers when he said, “If you are not nomadic, then I don’t think we can ask you a lot of questions about cattle-raising, and I think that I don’t see any relationship between what you do and the Nomadic Workshop.” By way of salvaging some relationship with them, he then added that maybe they could talk about their relationship with the nomads, since they seem to maintain contact with them.

In the preceding case, traditional histories played a major part in clarifying identity among those who were not actually living a nomadic life, but who were herders; those who were farmers and living in an interdependent society of farmers and herders; and those who were nomadic herders, both by definition and practice. In the cases of Dialambere, and to some extent Keur Boumy (a mixed-farming community of Wolof farmers, Fulani herders, and Toucouleur herders), there is an ancient heritage of descent from populations that were once nomadic. That kind of historic linkage with a nomadic past seemed to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between the sedentary farmers and the pastoral nomads.

The sharing of traditional histories was central to the understanding which participants had of the nature of projects implemented by the various communities and of livestock activities, in particular.. What we was observed was that sedentary farmer/herders put increasing investment in livestock activity. On the other hand, we learned of nomadic herders adjusting their way of life by going in the other direction and diversifying the economic base to include other activities beyond camel, cattle, and small stock husbandry, such as craft production and trade. In actuality, it appears that both groups are adjusting toward a “mean” of reduced transhumance, and a broader economic base that is not solely livestock dependent.

The nomads are in different stages of transition. Some, like the Maasai, found the complex nature of mixed farming too far-fetched to serve as a source of ideas. Others, like the project leaders of Agro-Nord, Tassaqt, the Herders’ Cooperative of

Niamey and Mini Mini, were more inclined to engage in serious dialogue with participants who presented integrated development programs such as Dialambere and Keur Boumy. To the extent that such projects represented an alternative model of what pastoralists see as their desirable future, for some, like Mini Mini, these projects reinforced their choice *not* to become farmers, while demonstrating how traditional and modern husbandry practices could become efficiently integrated. For others, it offered new possibilities for community development, as was the case with Agro-Nord.

In terms of environmental awareness, the experience of travel was irreplaceable for the impact it had on the Workshop participants' understanding of what can be lost through inappropriate natural resource management. By traveling through the extensive grasslands of Tanzania, west African herders were reminded of their traditional homelands, as they have been described to them by grandparents. To a great extent, this is a landscape that no longer exists for them, except in stories. They understood that in order to regain such an environment, or to maintain what they have now, a struggle will be necessary, and hard decisions will have to be made.

On the other hand, the pastoralists of east Africa were immensely touched by the stories of suffering, loss, and displacement that were shared by the herders of west Africa. They were struck by the possibility that this sort of degradation was possible; that, in short, such a calamity could "happen to them," and what the social and economic consequences of severe, ongoing drought might be.

In looking towards the future, the herders expressed the wish that such Workshops and exchange experiences occur again. They felt that such Workshops could also be helpful on a national and regional basis. ADF has been encouraged by the effort and sincerity of the Workshop participants to continue in its efforts to support project development in herding communities. It has become clear that grassroots herders, unlike many of their commercial counterparts, have an attachment to their resource base that is particular and which may teach us something about pasture management and human development.

Mme. Hawoy Baby of Agro-Nord stated quite poignantly that, "Herders have a right, just like any other people, to profit from the progress of science." She went on to say that in her point of view, "no civilized person has the right to remain insensitive to the cries of children and women who are hungry."

The Herders' Workshop demonstrated the concern and commitment that many local grassroots leaders have for the development and well-being of their communities. Through the testimonies of the Workshop participants, we have learned that, contrary to much popular opinion, many herders want to learn from "educated herders" or "risk takers" from their own and similar communities. Such an approach has proven, in the projects presented, that it encourages local hope and research towards identifying new strategies that will allow nomads and other herders to participate positively in change, rather than becoming its victim.