

"DEVELOPMENT" STRIKES SHEREIK

by Peter Charlesworth, London-based photo journalist, EARTHSCAN 1984

Shereik, Sudan - This small village along the Nile now boasts many of the fruits of development: diesel irrigation pumps, a modern village council, a health clinic and two elementary schools. Villagers are agreed they haven't had it so bad in decades.

Most of Shereik's problems, and the problems of similar villages along the Nile in northern Sudan - perhaps of many villages throughout the developing world - stem from the low prices commodities are earning on the world markets.

Cotton accounts for 55% of Sudan's exports; but cotton prices have fallen sharply over the past four years, and today the world market is glutted. So Sudan cannot afford to buy enough petrol and other oil products, and must ration them, along with such staples as flour and sugar.

About five years ago, most of the farmers of Shereik stopped using ox-driven waterwheels and switched to diesel pumps to irrigate. It seemed a smart move, because the potential for irrigation here along the Nile is tremendous, and the oxen simply could not lift enough water.

Today, with diesel rationed, the pumps work sporadically to water plots about the size of the plots the oxen watered. Large fields, cultivated for only a season or two, lie nearby, wind-eroded and empty. (The drought affecting both eastern and western Sudan has not proved a disaster for the villages along the Nile, but they must pump more water onto their crops.)

Farmers got rid of their animals to save feed costs. Now, as most farmers earn only about \$ 37 a month, they cannot afford to reinvest in oxen, which cost \$ 250-375 apiece. Besides, most farmers agree oxen would be a "step backwards".

On market day, there is little bustle on Shereik's two main streets. An old man offers onions, his only produce, from a sack. Two 12-year-old boys stop chatting occasionally to sell small limes; if

they sell all their stock they could make \$2 each. In the shops are only the everyday essentials - tea, soap, dried beans and noodles - along with a few luxury items such as tinned fish, a powdered orange drink mix and some sweets.

Ten years ago the shops were full of both local and imported goods: canned fruit and meat, cheese, flour, syrups and sugar. Today villagers have gone back to "old fashioned" pancake-like bread baked with sorghum, as they can no longer get wheat flour.



In Luxemburg werden die Informationen von EARTHSCAN im Centre d'Information Tiers Monde, 23 av. Gaston Diderich, zentralisiert. Es wird beabsichtigt, eine gemeinsame Nutzung des Materials für die Zeitschriften Brennpunkt dreit Welt, forum, kéisecker sowie für Radio UKaWeechelchen zu organisieren. Daneben wäre eine Diffusion der Artikel innerhalb der Lehrerschaft und anderen interessierten Zielgruppen ins Auge zu fassen.

Am Donnerstag, 5. Juni wird der Direktor von Earthscan London, Jon Tinker, zusammen mit zwei Mitarbeiterinnen, über die ökologischen Ursachen und Folgen der Dürre im Sahel referieren. Dort wird sich die Gelegenheit bieten, die Arbeit von Earthscan näher kennenzulernen und natürlich auch, die Hintergründe der Hungerkatastrophe in Afrika besser zu verstehen.

citim

L'AFRIQUE EN CRISE - BANQUEROUTE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Causes et conséquences écologiques
de la sécheresse au Sahel

Conférence avec
M. Jon Tinker
directeur EARTHSCAN
de Londres



Jeudi, 5 juin 1986

à 20 h au Centre Konvikt à Luxembourg

org.: AFC-Solidarité Tiers Monde * Earthscan * Mouvement Ecologique
sous le patronage
du Ministère de la Coopération et du Ministère de l'Environnement

There are only 800 people in Shereik now. Another 800, mostly young men, have left to find work in Khartoum, Port Sudan or even the Gulf states. But it is hard to leave Shereik, because oil rationing has decimated public and private transport. The only private-owned vehicle in the village has not moved in a year. There are no buses and fewer, less reliable trains: only four a week, two north and two south, always overcrowded.*

The central government encouraged the setting up of local governing councils around the nation, and Shereik has one. Previously, the local sheiks took day-to-day decisions under the supervision of the local Kadi (chief judge). In a small village like this, people could get their opinions known. Now, people say, the council debates endlessly, but the mass of red tape means little gets done, and people feel they have less say in decisions. Describing the council, villagers tell the fable of the fox who finds a parcel in the woods and, mistaking the noise of the wind in the wrappings for tasting animals rustling inside, rips it open. Finding it empty, he complains: "Plenty of noise, but for what?"

The government hospital at Atbara set up a clinic in Shereik staffed with one male nurse. But the nurse complains that he has almost no medicine.

More than 100 malaria patients report to the clinic each month; he has enough anti-malaria drugs to treat three of them. The nurse has resorted to buying drugs himself in large towns and selling them to patients at cost.

Child mortality is high, due to the two basic problems of malaria and malnutrition. The government has provided the clinic with a poster of a malnourished child to illustrate the problem.

Given the exodus from Shereik by people seeking jobs, the two elementary schools have plenty of room. But there is sharp competition for the few seats in secondary schools in the nearby larger towns.

Life goes on. A wedding in a nearby village provided three days of dancing and feasting. A few days later, a 17-year-old boy died; villagers took up a collection for the family, paid their quiet respects and then held a festive wake.

The villagers who remain say they would not live anywhere else. They praise the peace and quiet, the lack of crime, the village spirit of cooperation and community. They will survive "development" just as they have survived the other vagaries which nature and governments have put in their path over the centuries.