

SOS Sahel UK Public Debate - 3rd February 2009

“The Future’s Mobile: Challenges & Opportunities to Development in Africa’s drylands”

Questions and Answers

Q1. Susan Canney: “I’m working on natural resource management in Northern Mali. Do you think that following the provision of education, pastoralists would still want to lead pastoral way of life?”

A: Jeremy Swift: *“Successful pastoralism includes a natural migration of some pastoralists into other livelihoods. Education plays an important role in encouraging people to diversify into various forms of employment rather than just hanging around.”*

Q2. Hashim Ahmed (SOAT: Sudanese Organisation Against Torture): “I’m from Sudan: what do you think the solutions are for education in Sudan, given the current political problems, and the importance of mobility (people don’t settle as they constantly seek water)?”

A: Jeremy Swift: *“I don’t know what the solutions are – it depends on the specific area. There are so many different types of pastoral livelihood, it would be necessary to go to all these areas and see which methods would be most appropriate. Every method has a role to play, in such a diverse country.”*

Q3. Krish Pushpanath (Campaigns Executive, Oxfam): “Following the quotation on your final slide, should we be thinking about using education to empower pastoralists so that they can market their herds effectively?”

A: Jeremy Swift: *“Yes, this is absolutely crucial. Whilst pastoral knowledge and science are well-advanced (they know many things that others don’t), there are things that they need to learn. Subjects such as political economy certainly belong in the curriculum.”*

Q4. Krish Pushpanath (Campaigns Executive, Oxfam): “What about gender and equality in education?”

A: Jeremy Swift: *“I’m a fan of distance learning & radio, and I feel that these methods favour girls, as they don’t have to leave home. If we can educate girls in the household, then they can also be doing other things at the same time (for example, they can be watching the goats and learning French by radio at the same time!). I think new technologies will help to rectify the gender imbalance in education.”*

Q5. Robin Palmer (Global land rights Policy Specialist, Mokoro Ltd) – “Do you have any comments on the ‘experiment’ of the new Minister of Northern Kenya, Hon. Mohamed Elmi?”

A: Jeremy Swift: *“For those of you who don’t know, Mohamed Elmi (ex-Oxfam) is the head of the new Ministry for Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands (we had an acronym competition for this, which led to Mohamed’s new Ministry being nicknamed Donkey!). He was on good form when I saw him in Nairobi a couple of weeks ago - I think he’ll be happy to be called an ‘experiment’! His ministry acts as a force multiplier, providing support to other technical ministries. He is highly respected within the government, and is solidly behind this new nomadic education initiative – in*

fact it was his idea originally. It is too early to know yet how the 'experiment' will pan out, but I am optimistic of success in the future. Also, I should mention that the first thing he said to me when he knew about his new position was that he would need an assistant, and SOS Sahel UK were able to provide this service within 3 weeks – Izzy Birch is now seconded to sit next to him."

Q6. Ben Knighton (Oxford Centre for Mission Studies): "I was in Karamoja in December [...] Seasons have markedly changed in 2 years, with planting happening up to 2 months later. The predictability of the rains is deteriorating and crops have failed for the past 2 to 3 years. For this reason, the balance between agriculture and pastoralism is shifting markedly towards pastoralism. But the Ugandan government, supported by many NGOs, is encouraging people to settle down and 'become proper citizens'. Therefore I appreciate the work of SOS Sahel UK and other similar organisations that support and encourage the pastoral way of life. Oh, a question, do cattle contribute to global warming [via methane emissions]?"

A: Nick Brooks: *"There are news articles about cattle and global warming – I admit, this isn't my area of expertise, but I completely agree that it is crucial to recognise the advantages of the pastoral way of life."*

Q7. Mario Konyen Joseph (Windle Trust): "I come from a pastoral community myself [in Sudan], and I have a question about insecurity. In many African countries, competition over natural resources is a source of conflict. I believe it's important to address this, and I would like to know if SOS Sahel UK have any ways or programmes around insecurity."

A: Jeremy Swift: *"I think I know the specific geographical area you're talking about, where the discovery of oil has contributed to conflict. But to address this question from a general perspective, my understanding is that any minor disagreements can escalate into much larger conflicts when there is competition over natural resources. My experience of conflict research, largely in Mali, and also Oxfam's programme in Wajir (Northern Kenya) are good examples of ways of addressing natural resource-based conflict. The process of bringing together at least 3 key groups of stakeholders, (e.g. community organisations, the police and the army), seems to have been effective in making them operate in common and help each other. But if the conflict is over businessmen stealing cattle (for example), then it's really out of the league of local organisations. More work is needed at a higher level, across state boundaries. Lots of work has started, but not much has yet reached fruition. IGAD and the African Union are now taking a serious interest in cross-border issues."*

Q8. Tim Treacher: "I worked in Syria in the early 90s [Head of Livestock at the International Centre for Research on Dryland Agriculture], and I wanted to mention the relationship between pastoralists and farmers. In the Middle East, more and more pastoralists are dependent on farmers for food. There has been a movement (post-harvest) towards pastoralists utilising grain – this is related to the recent livestock crises. Pastoralists are using lots of material from outside, from farming areas. I think this is important – are there still 'pure' pastoralists, who graze their livestock in situ?"

A: Nick Brooks: *"In the Sahelian context, there are periods (can be years or even decades) when large areas of agricultural land are productive or unproductive. In order to achieve long-term sustainability, there must be redundancy mechanisms that allow people to exploit existing resources without locking into patterns that lead to collapse. Flexibility is an important part of this, for example pastoralists traditionally move south in lean periods. But we are entering a time of extreme climatic uncertainty, when the varied environment presents a major challenge. There is a trade off between maximising output and building resilience. If this issue is not addressed, we will continue to see*

cycles of overstretch leading to collapse, and there will be repeats of the 1970s famine. I don't have all the answers, but I think the solution must be linked to co-existence."

Q9. Dawn Chatty (Oxford Department for International Development): "Do you have any comments on trans-nationalism and pastoralism? I think it is important to consider mobility across state borders in the context of how education can contribute to the sustainability of pastoral livelihoods."

A: Jeremy Swift: *"The question of trans-nationalism is an interesting one for me. In terms of education, a radio-schooling programme is very expensive at single-state level. Of course, many countries share languages across frontiers, but I thought joint initiatives would never fly. Happily, I am beginning to be proved wrong: in fact we've recently had long conversations with the Ministry of Education in Kenya about the possibility of using the Boran language in transmissions both sides of the border (with Ethiopia). Of course, it remains to be seen whether the Ethiopians are interested, but there certainly looks to be a real potential for using cross-border languages. For example in West Africa education materials are provided in common languages such as Fulfulde. This is a step in the right direction."*

Q10. Peter Wood: "National boundaries mean that mobile communities are often regarded as foreigners everywhere. Not only do they have no political status, but the attitudes of settled farmers towards pastoralists are often hostile (from my experience in Ghana and Burkina Faso). Government/commercial interests can override the needs of the people in the country – look at uranium in Darfur."

A: Jeremy Swift: *"Yes, oil and minerals can quite easily take priority over everything, including people. But look at the battle with the Chinese in Sudan, where pastoralists are using the law to fight against the land grab – who knows whether they will be successful, but at least they are in a position to try."*

Q11. Peter Lokuju (Water Engineer): "I am from the south of Sudan. I have seen communities using spears, now they are using guns that can be bought for less \$100. Armed groups are increasingly using pastoralists. I have also grown up witnessing our land being turned into national parks, with no understanding that pastoralists rely on this land. Governments don't see that pastoralists know how to use land and resources properly – when we go hunting, we don't kill all the animals!"

A: Jeremy Swift: *"I live in a beautiful national park in South Wales. We have hosted visitors from all over the world, with the idea of showing them pastoralism in a developed country. We take them to the HQ of Brecon Beacons National Park. Africans are flabbergasted to learn that it's possible to live in a national park – this simply doesn't happen in Africa. So my message is to bring more people to show them the possibilities!"*

A: Nick Brooks: *"Transnationalism is an important question. There are plenty of instances where people can freely cross borders (for example my experience in Algeria, Niger, Mali), and they are effectively open. On the other hand, it is claimed that an impact of the war on terror is the US apparently trying to help patrol borders and thereby limit mobility. It's hard to say where this might lead in the future, but it all comes back to the idea that we need to reinforce pastoralism in the eyes of the government, so they see it as a legitimate, viable, effective and sensible way of life in the Sahel type of environment."*