

## Preface

Henrik Secher Marcussen,

International Development Studies, Roskilde University.

In 1992, a Ph.D. researcher course, funded by Forskerakademiet, the Danish Research Academy, on *Institutional Issues in Natural Resources Management* was held at Holbæk, Denmark (see the proceedings from the meeting, published as *Occasional Paper No. 9, 1993*). The researcher course proved to be very successful both in addressing a pertinent issue and in attracting Ph.D. students from the Nordic countries, coming from both natural but in particular social science fields. A number of invited foreign guest speakers contributed heavily in making the seminar a success, and when evaluating the course towards the end, the recommendation came up strongly as to trying to arrange yet another Ph.D. researcher course, focusing on some of the issues which for obvious reasons had only been partially touched upon in the first seminar.

Among the issues left over from the first meeting was the role of the State versus that of the local community, indicating both that cutting back in State functions had gone too far, *and* that the principles of decentralization and participation, however well justified, were a bit more complex than anticipated.

Thanks to another grant from the Danish Research Academy, a new (quite successful) researcher course was held at Jyllinge, Denmark 1 - 4 November 1993 on *Improved Natural Resource Management. The Role of the State versus That of the Local Community*. Again we succeeded in attracting a number of foreign guest speakers, heavily contributing to the success of the seminar.

*James Thomson* from Associates in Rural Development rejected the state - civil society dichotomy and preferred national government to the State, as there in the concept of State inherently was an elitist notion. To him, the level of national government was far less important compared to the decentral level, where there was a "gigantic waste of local knowledge and local institutional capability". National governments should confine themselves to

creating the enabling legislation, having an encouraging role, but not take on the responsibility of establishing the rules of the game. How user-based governance was to develop given the heterogenous local structures was touched upon by Thomson in a second intervention.

*Tom Painter*, CARE International, Atlanta stressed livelihoods and strategies for survival as essential strategic concepts. What was important for the producers in the Sahel was how to manage risks, not how to optimize gains. He also stressed the many factors outside the household, heavily affecting survival possibilities and strategies, such as regional markets and world market influences. In particular he advocated for a broader action space and the changing action field in which - in time and space - the producers were allowed to develop and define *their* resources, possibly in some form of self-help organisations. Also he pointed at certain biases in studying the highly fluid categories in the Sahel, of which the bias towards farming (against pastoralists), gender and homogeneity were mentioned.

"The State *must* engage", said *Paul Mathieu*. And often we see decentralization as top down decentralisation. The proper functioning of the State is needed and a precondition, and in too many instances we witness the actors playing the participation game, without any real empowerment.

*Thomas P. Reardon* stressed the importance of income diversification in Sahelian agriculture, where nearly half of total income is coming from non-farm sources. Of particular importance to the natural resource management aspects was his pointing at that farmers will not adopt productivity and conservation measures unless paybacks are higher or faster than alternative off-farm income opportunities. In this light he underlined that natural resource management is *not* a priority either with people or with structures.

With balance-of-payments problems and government budgets costs, how then, with cuts and negative balances, to pay for natural resource management?

*Adrian P. Wood* addressed the issue of national sustainable development strategies, of which there are several being offered

governments in the region. A number of preconditions should be met for viable strategies: institutions should be functioning, with clear mandates; tenure laws should be in existence and clear; and an institutional demand assessment should be carried out prior to strategy formulation, to assess the exact nature of data needs. In particular he criticised the orientation towards projects in most plans, also in World Bank supported National Environmental Action Plans. And he asked for a better integration of environment plans with national economic planning, which was missing, in part due to cuts in state budgets and the erosion of state legitimacy.

*Johan Helland* and *Leif Manger*, based on each their field research in Ethiopia and the Sudan respectively, gave accounts as to the complexities involved when dealing with institutional structures and principles of decentralization, when it comes to pastoral groups and people.

Finally, *Amiya Bagchi* gave his evaluation of global sustainability issues, stressing global inequality as the most important factor to take into account and address when determining outcome of current international political-economic developments, where in particular structural adjustment and other market liberalization policies were eroding possibilities for more balanced future developments.

In the last minute, *Göran Hyden* had to cancel his participation in the seminar. However, he forwarded his paper prepared in time for distribution to the participants in the meeting - and for inclusion in this volume.