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Transforming Pastoralism: A Case Study of the Rufa'a al Hoi Ethnic Group in the Blue Nile State, Sudan

Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed

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Transforming Pastoralism: A Case Study of the Rufa' al Hoi Ethnic Group in the Blue Nile State, Sudan

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Abstract

The pastoral sector in Sudan in general and in the Blue Nile State in particular has been marginalized and impoverished as a result of detrimental state policies, deteriorating environmental conditions and encroaching civil war. In order to survive these assaults, poor households among the Rufa' al Hoi ethnic group were the first to settle and engage in activities only remotely related to the pastoral sector. Although they did so to survive, they found that their circumstances actually improved by gaining access to a number of services previously unavailable to them, such as education, health clinics and clean water. Contrary to the conventional wisdom--that pastoralists forced to settle then accumulate capital in order to return to their pastoral livelihood--these particular Rufa' al Hoi households found their quality of life better in their new circumstances and did not attempt to return to pastoralism. In recent years, such choices attracted other pastoralists from the same ethnic group, even well-to-do households, to settle, engage in agriculture and small business, keep some of their livestock on the move with herders and transform their way of life, having in mind the benefits that might accrue to future generations.

Introduction¹

Pastoralism, a form of natural resource use and management that is commonly combined with other productive pursuits such as small-scale agriculture, gum tapping and wood-cutting, is one of the major features of the Blue Nile State. This production system, like many in other parts of Sudan, is undergoing rapid processes of intensified commercialization. In recent years the livestock sector, which is predominantly in the hands of pastoralists, has contributed significantly to the gross domestic product (GDP) and has emerged as a leading foreign exchange earner in the national economy, second only to the recently established oil sector. Its contribution between the years 2000-2004 averaged 20% of GDP and over 30% of total agricultural exports (cf. Nur, 2001; Sammani and Salih, 2006).

However, the performance in this sector is not a reflection of high growth rates in the national herds but rather a manifestation and consequence of varied and complex marginalization and impoverishment processes, underlain primarily by detrimental state policies, steadily deteriorating

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environmental conditions and intensified insecurity generated by civil war, inter-group conflicts and banditry. These detrimental consequences and environmental conditions notwithstanding, the most serious threat to pastoral production in the Blue Nile State rests in the growing inability of the pastoralists to maintain their rights to grazing lands. They are faced with the challenge of developing adaptable and flexible livelihood strategies composed of activities that generate the means of household survival. Such strategies have to change as the external environment over which they have control changes.

Herd owners endure severe constraints on imperative pastoral movements, the strategy by which they manage to maintain the viability of their productive pursuits (UNDP, 2001). Understanding the performance of this sector under the present circumstances “needs a perspective that takes into consideration broad socio-economic causes, as these are interlinked with factors such as demographic growth, agricultural stagnation, the incorporation of the pastoral economy into the market economy, general insecurity arising from civil war and conflicts, faulty national and international policies, as well as factors linked to climate and ecology. These processes have led to rapid sedentarization and urbanization, the breakdown of traditional structures, transformation of gender relations, degradation of natural resources and growing vulnerability of groups to ecological and economic stress” (Manger, 2001:21). To counter possible negative impacts of pressures arising from such causes and factors, diversifications leading to the incorporation of new activities into the economic portfolio, together with structural transformation of the social and political systems, are essential for maintaining an adaptive livelihood system.

The pastoralists’ movements in the Blue Nile State, like those of many other similar groups in the country, have been severely disrupted in recent decades. The unfettered agricultural expansion on the clay plains has reduced grazing areas, disrupted pastoral routes and blocked access to watering points. The situation has been further aggravated by drought, desertification and overgrazing in the northern part of the areas, which pastoralists use during the rainy season, and by the insecurity due to the civil war in the southern part, which they use during the dry season. This combination of agricultural expansion, drought, overgrazing and insecurity has led to a deterioration in pastoral conditions. They forced the concentration of pastoral herds in substantially reduced grazing areas on the plain; the extension of the movement into the Upper Nile State; intensified conflict pitting pastoralists against village cultivators and rain-fed mechanized scheme owners, as well as conflicts among the different groups of the pastoralists themselves.

Additionally, state policy towards the pastoral sector has resulted in virtual administrative chaos. With the abolition of the Native Administration system, an administrative vacuum ensued, and to date no alternative institution capable of regulating grazing activities, or even of collecting herd tax, has been established. Simultaneously pastoralists have lacked an institution willing to enforce grazing rights and grazing routes in areas which have become dominated by agricultural schemes. Currently, pastoralists follow the routes/tracks of commercial trucks in their seasonal movements through the mechanized schemes. As these routes/tracks are narrow, incidents of crop damage proliferate, consequently intensifying disputes between scheme owners and pastoralists.

The neglect of pastoral interests in policy-making and administration seems to have been facilitated by the ongoing marginalization of pastoralists in the larger Sudanese polity. The current political status of pastoralists contrasts sharply with their power in pre-colonial times and the first decade after independence. Prior to the abolition of the Native Administration System in 1971, the major indigenous pastoralist groups of the present Blue Nile State, namely the Rufa’a Al-Hoi and Kinana, had influential and experienced leaders who articulated their demands and expressed their grievances to regional and central decision makers (Ahmed, 1974). The abolition of the Native Administration system has denied these leaders their traditional powers and influence, leaving them exposed to the unquestioned decisions of the regional and central government authorities. Changes

in parliamentary electorates under different regimes since independence and especially after 1969 have adversely affected their position in parliamentary politics.²

Land, people and the state

Competition over natural resources in Sudan, particularly land, which is traditionally utilized by pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and sedentary cultivators, has been an issue of concern to the state and a source of conflict between its different users. The recurring cycles of drought and famine in the past four decades threatened the lives of the human and livestock population in the whole savannah belt of the country. Since the 1960s competition over natural resources has intensified, particularly in the present Blue Nile State. It is to be noted that activities in the traditional rain-fed sector, consisting of subsistence farming and grazing areas, overlap since sedentary cultivators raise some animals and many pastoralists plant crops, albeit in small plots. Symbiotic relationships between pastoralists and cultivators allowed for peaceful coexistence until this sector came under pressure from rain-fed mechanized farming as well as *gerif* cultivation practiced by settled villagers on the banks of the Blue Nile.³

The British colonial authorities laid the basis for the dispossession of local farmers through the 1899 “Title to Land Act”. With the advent of independence every new law pertaining to land and local administration has increasingly restricted the rights of local people attempting to utilize this strategic resource. In 1970 Nemiri’s regime passed the “Unregistered Land Act”, which stated that any land that was not privately owned could be disposed of by the government. This was followed in 1971 by the “Abolition of Native Administration Act”, which did away with the Native Administration comprising traditional leaders serving as the interface between local communities and the government. It also removed the legal basis for the *dar* which, through customary rules, granted local communities access to land, water and grazing (Coalition for Int. Justice, 2006; Assal, 2006).

The process of government appropriation of land dates back to 1940 when the first rain-fed semi-mechanised schemes were started in Eastern Sudan.⁴ The rush to grab land reached a serious magnitude after the large expansion of the rain-fed semi-mechanized schemes in the late 1960s on the clay plains in the savannah belt of the country and particularly in the Fung region (the present Blue Nile State). In 1975 the Mechanized Farming Corporation Ordinance was passed, giving bureaucrats the authority to allocate land and issue licenses to individuals who wanted to invest in farming. This provided an opportunity for urban-based traders and aspiring government officials to obtain land for cultivation even though they had no connection with the region or clear understanding of agricultural land management, especially in rain-fed areas.

The following argument builds on an earlier contribution (Ahmed, 2001) which attempts to show how the Rufa’a al Hoi pastoralists had to struggle to maintain their system of livelihood in order to

² “Prior to 1969, parliamentary representation was almost exclusively drawn from geographical constituencies, with few seats reserved for “Graduate Constituencies”. Members of parliament used to pressurize government to provide services to their respective constituencies – if only for electioneering purposes. The weight of geographical representation in parliament, however, was progressively reduced as more seats started to be reserved for urban-based ‘modern forces’” (UNDP-Sudan, 2001).

³ *Gerif* cultivation refers to the cultivation of lands covered by river flooding. This includes the fertile lands resulting from areas covered by the rising water from the Roseris Dam. This *gerif* cultivation has restricted the access of pastoral groups to their traditional watering points on the river banks.

⁴ The main objective behind this action was to grow sorghum (*durra*) to feed the Sudanese troops that were fighting in North Africa during World War II.

survive under difficult circumstances.⁵ It is argued that all pastoralist groups, as well as the settled cultivators, in the rain-fed plains of the Blue Nile region, suffered tremendous pressure during the late 1960s and the early 1970s. This occurred when the land they used to utilize for their daily living started to be gradually appropriated by the state through its specially designed means for such a purpose (the Land Act of 1970, the Civil Transaction Act of 1984 and the amendments that followed in 1990 and after), or to be grabbed by elites (merchants and retired government officials and army officers) from outside the region through unauthorized means while the state turned a blind eye. The main intention behind such actions, as expressed by government authorities, is to implement their food security policy.⁶ However, in doing so the state paid no attention to the contribution of the traditional land users to its presumed food security strategy.

In response to the process of land grabbing, pastoralists had to divert their migration routes to avoid the risk of conflict arising from damage that their animals might cause to crops in the newly established schemes. This diversion of the routes increased the distance that the pastoralists had to cover every year. Meanwhile, due to the continuing expansion of the schemes the traditional watering points (*hafirs*) came to fall within the boundaries of the schemes. Pastoralists were denied access and had to find new sources for watering their animals while on the move, an activity that required added labor to draw water from dry river beds (*khors*). Covering long distances before reaching water points can lead to drastic losses in herds. Under such circumstances, the grazing areas continued to shrink, leading to competition over a limited resource and forcing the settlement of poor pastoralist households (Ahmed, 1974; Shazali and Ahmed, 1999, 2001). Violent confrontation with those who continued to move and trespass on the schemes started to become a common feature of the relationship between the pastoralists, settled village cultivators and the scheme owners. The symbiotic connections between sedentary cultivators and pastoralists that used to characterize the relationship between the two groups gave way to conflict, which tended at times to turn into violence.

Under the rapidly changing conditions in the region the plight of the sedentary cultivators, especially in relation to the land issue, is far worse even than that of the pastoralists. They suffered heavily from the expansion of the semi-mechanized schemes. When the State Farm⁷ started in the late 1960s, some of the cultivators who happened to live in villages in areas demarcated for that purpose were forced to leave the place and establish residence elsewhere, abandoning their traditional cultivation areas. However, it was not long before they would be asked to move again when more expansion was planned. This was further exacerbated by the unauthorized expansion of the rain-fed schemes where more of the government elite, retired army officers and merchants from the Central Region, who originally grabbed lands under the different Land Acts and were not satisfied with what they obtained by lease from government authorities, forced the villagers out of the space around their villages using different means, including force.⁸

⁵ Ahmed (2001) addressed in some detail the agrarian transformation and ecological stress in the Faj region of Sudan (Blue Nile State). This study touched on the early settlements and the conflict between the old settlers and newcomers. Those involved were poor households who attempted to settle next to villages inhabited by those who traced their origin to the Rua'a ethnic group. However, the settled population did not welcome this move and disputed the rights of the pastoralists to settle near their localities. The whole issue had to be settled in court, as described in Ahmed's article.

⁶ This was the time that the Nemiri regime started implementing its "Bread Basket Strategy" and inviting Arab investors to the region. Companies that responded were given large areas which were never fully put into production. Merchants, retired army officers and senior government officials were granted large areas which they started to claim as absentee landlords.

⁷ The establishment of the State Farm in Agadi and Garabeen areas was part of the implementation of the Government policy at the time to make Sudan the breadbasket of the Arab world. The farm was equipped and run by the state.

⁸ This forced movement of villages meant that the local inhabitants had to clear new farmland in their first move. If they had to move for a second time they mostly found themselves in degraded areas with low productivity, leading to food insecurity and impoverishment, while the land they previously cleared in their first move was now in the hands of the scheme owners, saving the latter the expense of clearing before starting to cultivate.

The indigenous inhabitants of the region, especially the pastoralists, had to find different means of livelihood in order to survive under such conditions. The assumption held by those who have studied pastoral communities in the past is that pastoralists who are forced to settle normally strive to accumulate enough capital to invest in herds and start moving again, convinced that the quality of life in their traditional system is better. This argument is based on another assumption, that land in the Sudanese savannah belt is abundant and can always cater for a larger animal and human population.⁹ However, with recent development the validity of both assumptions can be questioned. Firstly, those who settled can barely find resources that allow them to maintain a reasonable quality of life around the areas where they stayed. They are also no longer able to generate significant savings that they could invest in livestock, which could allow them to start moving again. Secondly, land has been put under agricultural production by the state, merchants, the government elite and international investors and what is left for pastoralists and sedentary cultivators can no longer accommodate an increase in the animal population beyond certain limits. At any rate, what is left for use by such groups is mostly degraded and/or contested land.¹⁰

Such pressure has forced the pastoralists to rethink their concepts of the “good life” and hence adjust to new adaptive systems within the realm of the new reality they have had to face. This meant they had to broaden the economic spheres in which they operate and engage in activities they have known little about in the past.¹¹ The political games they used to be involved in have also changed and hence new political alliances had to emerge, changing the shape of the pastoral political system and modifying the ethnic boundaries that used to shape ethnic identities.¹² A new awareness of a future better life for the younger generations, who neither totally deny the old system of life nor strictly adhere to old values, started to guide the approaches of the settled pastoralists in their newly founded adaptation. This led to the emergence of a transformed system that copes with changes at the local and national levels, engages in market activities and recognizes the need for things that the pastoralists rarely considered as essential in the past, such as health, clean water and education.

Although traditional subsistence farming and pastoralism are the principal livelihood systems of the overwhelming majority of the population of Sudan, successive governments from the days of the colonial rule to the present regime have systematically favored mechanization and the modern agricultural sector. As alluded to above, in the name of modernization the state has enacted legislation that removes the land from the control of local communities and at times removes such communities from the land. Yet, this modernization is in reality nothing more than introducing tractors to plough the land and sometimes help in harvesting. The so-called mechanized agricultural schemes are only semi-mechanized and mostly rely heavily on cheap manual labor. In the case of the Blue Nile State, such cheap manual labor comes from the indigenous communities, forced-to-

⁹ The literature on pastoral people in Sudan reflects these assumptions (see Ahmed, 1976). The main idea is that building herds is the only investment opportunity open for people who have developed a tradition in animal rearing in the past. Some of the traditional cultivators may also attempt to convert their savings into animals and adopt a pastoral style and start moving with pastoralists in their areas. Such cases of cultivators turning into pastoralists have been documented for the Fur (Haaland, 1969) and the Ingessana (Ahmed, 1974, 1976).

¹⁰ Until recently, the government kept giving licences to new scheme owners and pushing both villagers and pastoralists into new areas for the use of which they had to compete. International investors from Arab countries have also been granted land which they have not utilized as expected. The security situation in the civil war in the southern part of the region has also restricted the areas of land available for different groups.

¹¹ Although traditionally pastoralists had to cultivate small plots of land, they have very limited experience in cultivation and are new to the type of business practiced by sedentary people. They found that they had to start learning new ways and develop new means of survival.

¹² Having had to settle on land outside the traditional Rufa'a al Hoi *Dar*, such groups had to submit to the administrative authority of the leader in charge, in this case the Funj *Mak*. However, they do not necessarily become Funj for that matter and still keep their identity as Rufa'a and respect the moral authority of the Rufa'a *Nazir*.

settle pastoralists, Western Sudanese, West African migrants to the region and villagers displaced by the civil war.¹³

Nemiri's regime persisted in its effort to grab the land and hence came the enactment of the 1984 "Civil Transaction Act", part of the September laws which later paved the way for the present regime's perception of natural resources, including land. Under this Act land is conceived as belonging to God "and the state is made successor and responsible for it and owns it. All lands are deemed to be registered under the name of the state and that the provisions of land registration and settlement acts were reconsidered". The present Islamic regime moved even further in undermining the rights of rural communities. Amendments to the 1984 "Civil Transaction Act" in 1990, 1991 and 1993 removed any chance of legal redress against the state. "No court is competent to deal with any suit, claim or procedure on land ownership against the Government or any registered owner of investment land allocated to him".

Figure 1 below gives an approximate map of the expansion of the semi-mechanized rain-fed schemes. A corollary of this expansion has been the intensification of charcoal making for commercial purposes. The Government grants licenses for woodcutting and charcoal making, often in areas earmarked for rain-fed schemes. However, vast areas seem to have been cleared without permission from the authorities. The deforestation of the clay plain in the Blue Nile State and other parts of the country is thus mainly a consequence of the expansion in semi-mechanized farming and woodcutting. This deforestation process has adversely affected the pastoralists. Pastoralist households not only need the tree cover because some animals prefer to browse, but also because animals need shade. In bad years, moreover, herds tend to depend almost exclusively on forests, and branches are lopped for cattle and sheep, which do not browse.

¹³ The role of Western Sudanese and West Africans is described in detail by Sharif Harir (1981). The migration of these groups into the region has increased in the past few decades due to drought and desertification in the Sahel region as well as the conflicts resulting from this, in addition to other factors that include the wars over the decades in Chad.

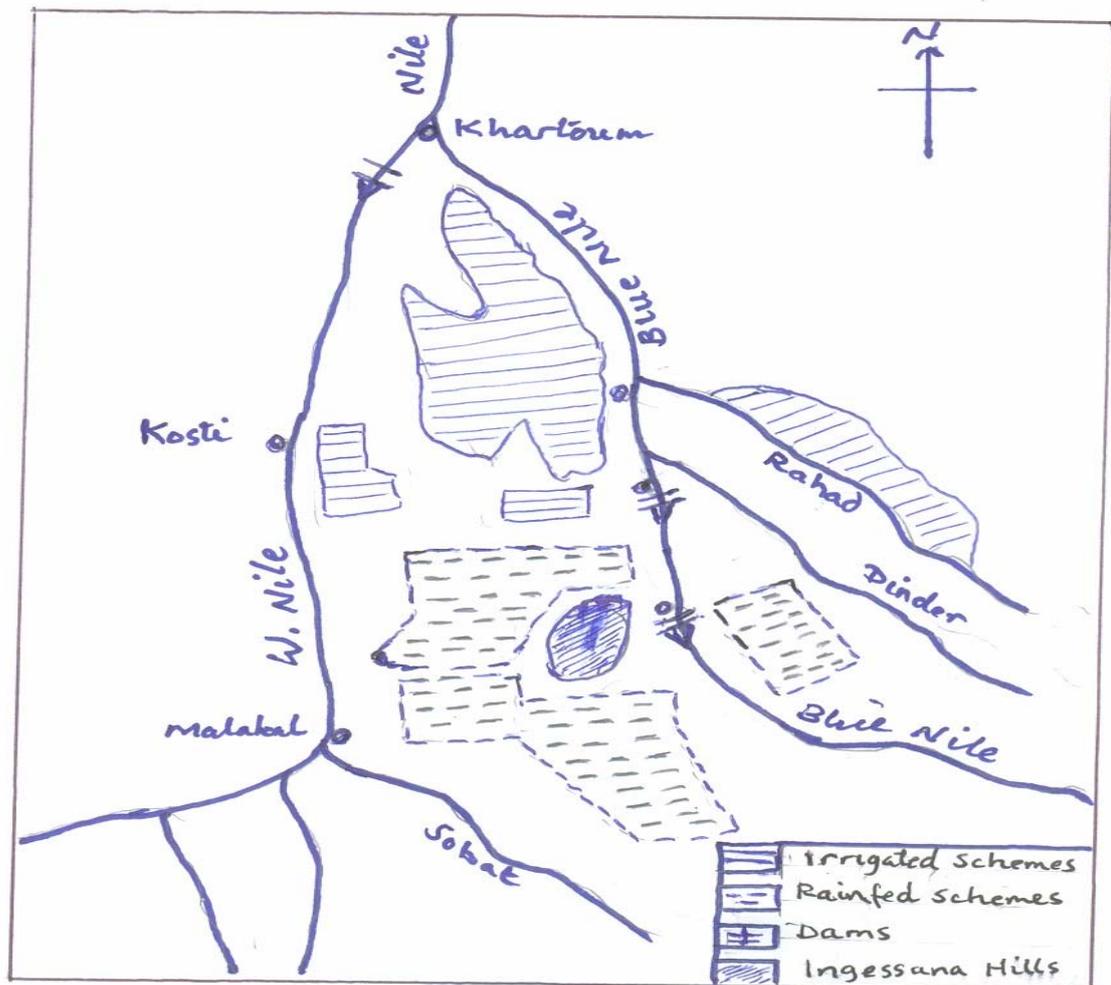


Figure 1: *The irrigated and rain-fed schemes between the Blue and White Niles*

In theory, the state leases land to investors within designed perimeters. In practice, the mechanized sector is an economic free-for-all. Private investors gain access to land through political connections and bribes, and farm the land with little regard for the soil or its local inhabitants. As already mentioned, most of the clay plains rain-fed areas that used to be utilized by agropastoralists and pastoralists in the Blue Nile State has been offered to investors favored by the regime through the previously mentioned mechanisms. This is, at present, emerging as a major source of conflict in the Blue Nile State. However, the Deputy *Wali* (governor) representing the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) has already acted in contradiction to the amendments of the “Civil Transaction Act” and its recent amendments and has frozen approvals of semi-mechanized rain-fed schemes as well as starting to review the status of existing ones and to terminate the lease of those which are not put under cultivation. This action is bound to lead to confrontation between the “partners” in the State government, namely the National Congress Party (NCP) and the SPLM, since the NCP considers the scheme owners an important part of its constituency.¹⁴

¹⁴ Investors, whether these are companies or individuals, have received approval for large areas covering thousands of feddans, which they rarely use. One company, for example, was granted over 200,000 feddans, of which not more than 10% is cultivated annually.

From surviving under stress to investing in the future

In order to address the changing system of livelihood among the Rufa'a al Hoi it is essential to start with the household unit, concentrating on the dynamic of the daily activities of its members, before addressing the impact of the semi-mechanized schemes and other factors that led to the process of transformation in progress. To illustrate the magnitude of change in economic values and political alliances, a brief comparison of the situation in the 1970s and today regarding the pastoralists' way of budgeting their time, allocating their labor force and directing their investment and consumption will be made in the following sections.

Though many of the factors mentioned above are influencing the livelihood systems in the Blue Nile region, the land issue remains the most significant one since all other factors rest on it. The expansion of the semi-mechanized rain-fed schemes authorized by the Government as well as the unauthorized ones have forced the pastoralists, especially the Rufa'a al Hoi and the Kinana, to change their migration routes; abandon their watering points, which are now in the vicinity of the schemes; stop cultivation of the small plots of land used for supplementing their food requirements; and lose the gum gardens they used to tap whenever distributed to them by their leaders (Nazirs) (Ahmed, 1974). Coupled with drought and deforestation in the late 1970s and early 1980s, these factors have forced many poor households to settle around villages on the plains or villages and small towns on the banks of the Blue Nile. Some of those who settled managed to start cultivating small plots of land or to find employment in the informal sector and struggle to maintain subsistence, poor though it may be. Under such circumstances, the pastoralists had to go through a slow process of transformation in order to adapt to their new setting.

The process of sedentarisation that such households experienced at the start was not easy to cope with. It brought to life the issue of conflict over land between the non-Rufa'a al Hoi sedentary cultivators, the semi-mechanized scheme owners and members of the Rufa'a al Hoi ethnic group, who consider the plain, where the semi-mechanized schemes have expanded, as well as some of the lands on the bank of the river, which is mainly populated by groups of West African origin, as their Dar. They recognize the fact that the act abolishing the Native Administration system has deprived their leadership of any powers to defend the interests of the group against the intervention of the government. As a result, formal rules for the management of grazing lands have ceased to exist and the land has become accessible to non-Rufa'a newcomers. However, the recent measures re-establishing the Native Administration system, which is thought to address this issue, has not helped much in solving this problem. On the contrary, it seems to have worsened the conflict after the newly appointed leaders contradicted government policies, and argued for and supported their Rufa'a group interest in free access to land.

The Rufa'a al Hoi leaders started to encourage their group members to settle, pitch their tents or build their huts first and later try, if necessary, to argue their case in court with whoever opposes their actions, based on their traditional claim that the land is their Dar. With this understanding some camp members took over parts of the schemes that had previously been leased to absentee landlords who failed to put them under cultivation. The situation is further complicated by the feeling of the Rufa'a al Hoi members and their leaders that they are under the domination of a regional government whose leadership is non-Rufa'a, and in many cases comprises non-Arab migrants from Western Sudan or West Africa. In the state government established after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement the pastoralists were not represented on the grounds that since they only spend the dry season in the Blue Nile State and the rest of the year in Sinnar State, they should be represented in Sinnar government. One more noteworthy reason in relation to national politics is that the pastoralists in this region have traditionally supported the Umma party and hence the NCP sees them as part of the opposition, even though at times during the civil war their own

militias collaborated with government forces against the SPLA. The SPLA saw them as part of the government forces that they were fighting and hence both parties have no interest in sharing power with them.

The extension of the civil war in the region towards the end of the 1980s fostered the emergence of military trends among the pastoralist groups in the area. They managed to acquire arms, mainly from across the border in Ethiopia, and train themselves in using them. At the same time they had to change their system of grazing; to be cautious in their movements in order to avoid damaging crops in the semi-mechanized schemes; keep their distance and not to come in contact with rebel groups; and to resort to armed tactics, when necessary, to defend themselves and their herds. During certain periods in the civil war the government attempted to benefit from the situation and armed some of these pastoralist groups to fight on its behalf. Although the Rufa'a were cautious in their dealing with the government and the rebels, some other groups such as the Fulani have given their full support to the government and created their own defense force, which collaborated with the government.¹⁵ Such developments have accelerated the process of settlement among the Rufa'a and many of them have now settled in villages on the plains or near the banks of the Blue Nile.

The transformation of the household economy

The appropriation of land by the state, the expansion of the unauthorized semi-mechanized schemes and the continual waves of newcomers from Western Sudan and West Africa, especially after the drought of the 1980s and the violent conflicts in Darfur and Chad, have intensified competition over this strategic resource. The increasing numbers of animal herds and households among the pastoralist groups, owing to the growing number of different Fulani groups arriving in the area, have had a negative impact on the grazing lands and grazing methods¹⁶ and have led to frequent conflicts between the herd and scheme owners as a result of crop damage caused by the herds. Settled villagers also suffered from this competition, which reduced their ability to expand their fields as well as to keep the pastoral herds from damaging their crops. The civil war has curtailed the movement of the pastoralist groups and hindered their ability to reach their dry grazing areas around *Khor Yabus* and surrounding places. It also led to the displacement of some villages, whose members had to resettle in areas far from the war zone and for that matter had to compete with the rest of the indigenous inhabitants for the limited free space. It was within such a competitive situation that the Rufa'a al Hoi households had to start the slow process of transforming their economy.

Animal herds, grazing lands and water remained the basic sources of the Rufa'a al Hoi household economy. The abundance of these resources represented the "good life" that a Rufa'a household would aspire to. Before the expansion of the rain-fed semi-mechanized schemes, the planting of small fields, which could be left unattended after cultivation for some household members to harvest later in the season, was a practice that many families used in order to supplement their daily consumption. This was undertaken in addition to tapping gum gardens, which the leaders used to distribute as political favors to those whose support they needed. The gum produced was sold to

¹⁵ A leading SPLA commander in the region explained that some arrangements were made with the Rufa'a al Hoi in the mid-1980s that allowed them to move into their dry season grazing areas up to the Yabus River. This, however, did not last long since the SPLA realized that the government was using the pastoralists to collect information and was also supplying them with arms (personal communication). This collaboration went even further in the case of the pastoral Fulani, who organized their own section of the National Defense Force nicknamed "layanom" (meaning "never sleeps"). The Rufa'a recall having 24 young herders killed by the SPLA and 24 herds of sheep and cattle being looted at the time. A herd of sheep and cattle numbers approximately 300 animals.

¹⁶ For the difference in grazing methods and its impact on the land and its significance in the competition over grazing resources in this region see Ahmed, 1973.

obtain cash, which was used to satisfy other needs in place of an unnecessary sale of animals for such purpose (cf. Ahmed, 1974). Under normal conditions pastoralists carried out a screening process in their herds, sorting out animals that they could offer to the market to obtain cash. The focus here would have been on deformed, infertile and aged animals, and on males that were well beyond the capacity of the household to manage (Nur, 2001:143). Figure 2 below illustrates the way in which the household used to budget its time in relation to the available resources, showing what part of the output was consumed and what could be invested.

The shrinking of the available land areas meant that the Rufa'a al Hoi had to compete for its use with other pastoralists and settled cultivators. Furthermore, villagers displaced as a result of the civil war forced some of the Rufa'a al Hoi members, especially those in the southern Badyia (see Ahmed, 1974, 2001), to settle either on the banks of the Blue Nile south of Singa or on the plains around places like Agadi, Wad Abuk and Roro. This settlement process was started by poor households that did not have the minimum size of herd needed to maintain a pastoral lifestyle. The early settlers encountered some difficulties in acquiring land for cultivation and hence were forced to hire their labor to scheme owners or other villagers to obtain necessary resources for their daily living. Those who opted to settle around large villages near the banks of the Blue Nile had to engage in various activities available in the informal sector. A few of those who had the chance to settle with what was left of their cattle were able to start selling milk and to become part of the category "pastoralists in town" that is becoming a conspicuous feature of many towns in central Sudan (Mohamed Salih, 1985; El Nagar, 2001).¹⁷ Although these new settlers counted among the urban poor, they have been able to enjoy a lifestyle different from what they were accustomed to when they were on the move. They can now have easy access to water, health services and education for their children. Additionally, some of those who managed to save some capital, after a long stay in a semi-urban setting, have been able to develop small businesses. They no longer think of building more herds and returning to their old pastoral life given the difficulties that the pastoral sector is facing.

¹⁷ Mohamed Salih, 1985 and El Nagar, 2001 give a detailed account of the way pastoralists adjust in town. Although the account is based on Omdurman, their observations are valid for other places, including the Blue Nile region.

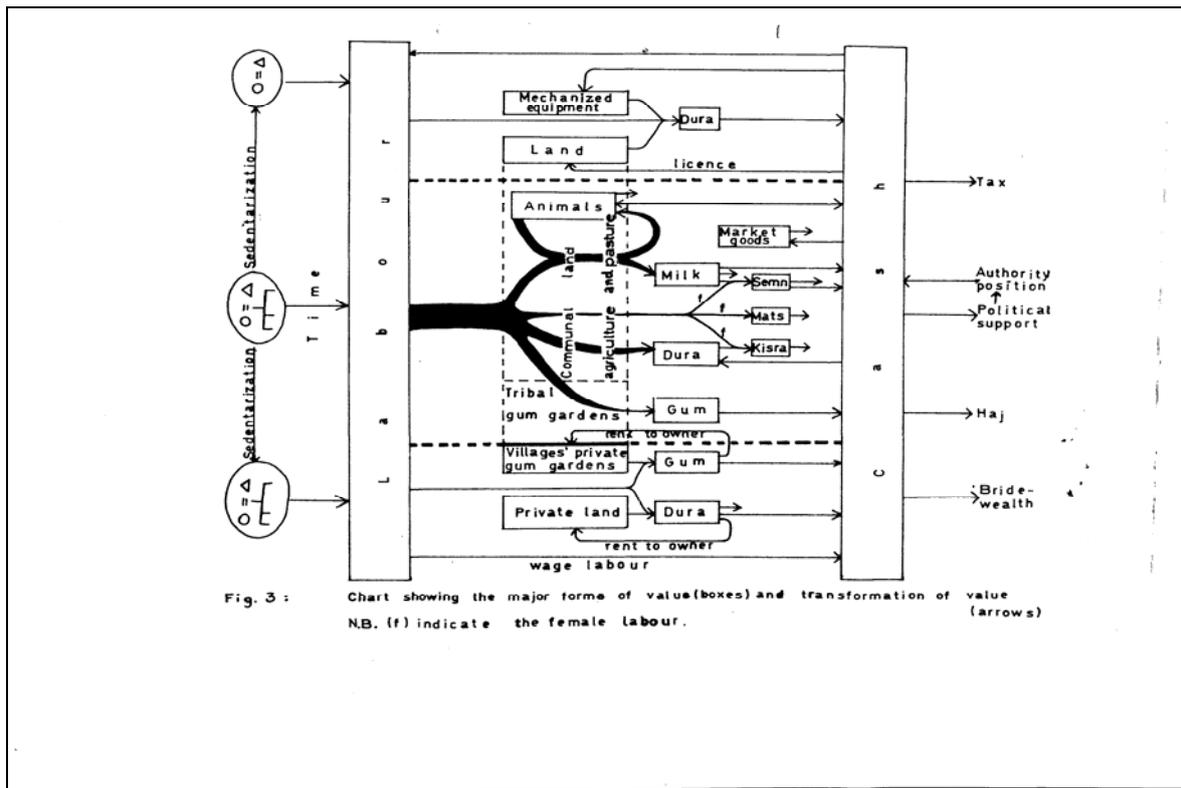


Figure 2: Household time and its transformation in early 1970s.

The experience of a new lifestyle emerging among the settled pastoralists encouraged others who were on the move to think of the possibility of changing their system of livelihood and to adapt to a modified form of pastoral life. This meant a change in the way they managed their available resources such as land and herds, as well as choosing new ways of dividing their household labor over time. Taking into consideration the government plans that denied them access to land by leasing it to scheme owners, and the curtailment of their movement imposed by the civil war in the southern part of the region, some camps thought of settling in or near villages on the plains and near the river banks. To do so, they accepted the advice of their leaders and took over some unused schemes and started cultivating the land. While keeping most of their herds moving with their young men or hired herders, they sold some and bought agricultural equipment, which they used in their newly acquired fields and also rented out to other camp/village members who could not afford to buy. A few have started small businesses, namely small shops in the villages where they settled.

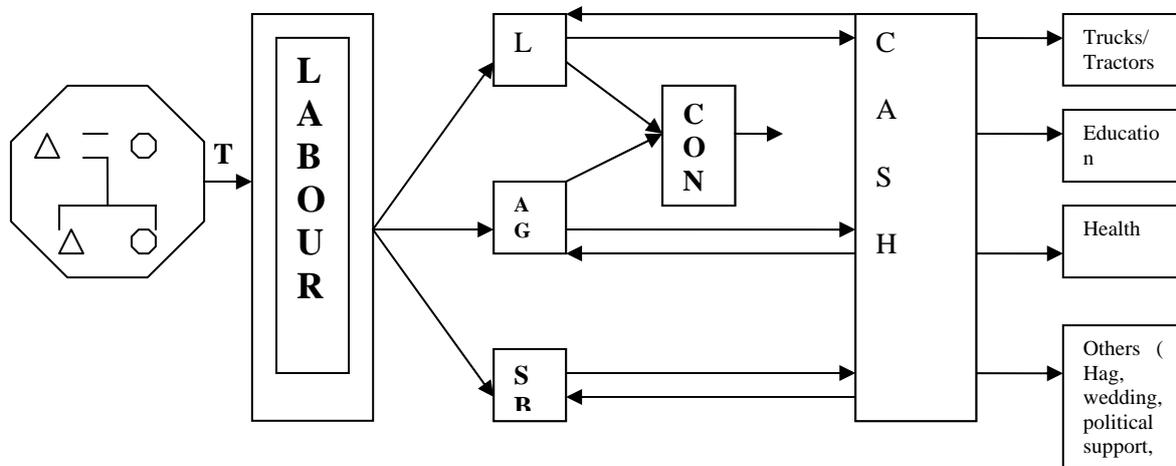


Figure 3: Household time and its transformation at present. *T* = time; *L* = livestock; *AG* = agriculture; *BS* = business; *CON* = consumption.

Figure 3 shows the way in which the new settled pastoralist households budget their time/labor. It is to be noted that cultivation and small business has started to gain the same prominence, if not more, compared to the accumulation of herds. While in the past the grazing and planting of small plots used to be on the plains in what was then recognized as *dar* Rufa'a al Hoi, now this is no longer the case and the agricultural lands and grazing areas can be far apart, since under the new Land Acts the concept of *dar* is no longer recognized. The cultivated areas can produce more than is needed for household subsistence and such extra produce is sold to provide for newly emerging needs or reinvested in modern agricultural equipment or other businesses. Those who still keep moving with their herds no longer use camels to carry their household furniture and equipment but instead employ tractors for this purpose, which makes the moving of their families easier and quicker. This change, in many ways, resembles that which took place among the Rashaiyda of Eastern Sudan.

From camp to village: the case of the Wanasab *Farig*:

In the last three decades the pastoral communities in the Blue Nile/Fung region have experienced a general crisis, namely increasing sedentarisation, a shift from pastoralism to transhumance, the forced switching to new sources of income, a high incidence of poverty and continuous marginalization. Their response has not been different from that made by the Ahamda of the *Butana* east of the Nile, as described by Casciarri (2002). They gradually shifted from their long-distance pastoral movement to transhumance where herds are followed by young men from the household and/or hired herders. They changed their residence patterns and built permanent houses of mud next to each other, unlike the way they used to organize their tents. Greater diversification of activities inside the household unit and the involvement, by some of its members, in wage labor and other economic activities became conspicuous, together with the sale of animal products to the settled

rural and urban population.¹⁸ The way in which one *farig*, namely the Wanasab, reacted in response to this crisis is illustrative of how the process of transforming the system is taking place.

The Wanasab is one of the *farigs* of the Rufa'a al Hoi (Bani Hussain section) southern *Badiya*. Traditionally, this southern *Badiya* used to utilize the grazing lands in the Blue Nile, Sinnar and the White Nile States, maintaining long-distance migration between its wet season grazing lands east of Kosti and dry season grazing areas on the plains in the Fung region, Kurmuk and Yabus, as well as east of the Blue Nile up to the Ethiopian borders (cf Ahmed, 1974). As a result of the government policy allowing the expansion of the rain-fed semi-mechanized schemes, and the competition over grazing areas with other pastoralist groups and with sedentary villagers over access to land and watering points, as early as 1982 members of this and other *farigs* were forced to settle. The first to settle were the households who had lost most of their herds and were left with a small number of animals that did not justify an annual movement. Such households opted to settle around villages with the small number of animals they had and at the same time seek other means of gaining additional income, such as selling their labor or engaging in any possible activity in the informal sector. Some managed to produce and sell milk to urban dwellers from the small number of animals they were left with. Other better-off camp members, who kept on moving, started to see some positive changes in the lifestyles of those who had settled. The later group could see how those who settled were able to have access to many services that were not available to those on the move, such as health facilities, clean water and education, to name the most significant ones. This encouraged them to settle as a group and set up their own villages next to established ones in order to make use of the already available facilities before they gradually managed to obtain their own. Aware of the fact that the government planned to take over what was left of their grazing areas, and of the civil war curtailing their movement south, they found it important to consider new forms of adaptation and follow in the footsteps of those who settled earlier.

The Wanasab *farig's* decision to settle was taken by the household members as a group. Having a fair knowledge of the area, they decided on a place next to Serajiya village on the western bank of the Blue Nile north of Damzin, where they found agricultural land that had been distributed to one absentee landlord and had not been put under cultivation. It is in this area that they established their permanent residence and started to cultivate the land while at the same time keeping their animal herds around during the rainy season and sending them south during the dry season.¹⁹ During this dry season migration the herds were looked after by young men from the camp or hired herders from poor families, local people or migrants from Eastern Sudan.²⁰ Those who had large herds sold off some of their animals and bought agricultural equipment, such as tractors and trucks, for their farm use and to hire out to others who could not afford to buy their own. This same category of individuals bought tankers to carry water to their cattle and sheep herds which, in this way, could use the agricultural residues in the semi-mechanized schemes nearby and reduce the range of herd movement as well as saving labor that used to be required for drawing water for animals during the dry season. However, such residues, which were at the beginning could be accessed free of charge, now-a-days have to be paid for since most of the scheme owners want to use the residues for the

¹⁸ Casciarri's paper on the response of the Ahamda pastoral system to state pressure and capital dynamics is a very detailed description of the reaction of pastoralists under pressure and applicable to almost all groups in the Butana and Fung regions.

¹⁹ According to the Omda, they decided to take over the land no matter who owned it and were willing to use force to defend their action. Luckily no one has interfered and now the land is recognized as theirs. As far as the village inhabitants are concerned, there was no objection since they are also not from the region but originally from West Africa (Fellata). In comparing the Wanasab case with the one report for the Wad Karar Farig, who settled around Wad al Nayal village, it is interesting to note that the latter settled next to a Rufa'a village which asserted a right to the land and could argue against new settlers even if they were from the same ethnic group (Ahmed, 2001:181).

²⁰ A number of Hadendowa young men come to seek employment as herders. Before the civil war started in the region the Rufa'a employed many young Ingeessana and Uduk young men to assist in looking after large herds. However, most young men from these two ethnic groups have joined the war on the side of the SPLA.

animals they themselves started to keep on their schemes. Although combining the cultivation of a small plot of land with animal herding is not a new experience for some of the Rufa'a al Hoi pastoralists, the combination of livestock herding with large-scale semi-mechanized cultivation is a recent activity in which some households have successfully enrolled. To diversify their income sources some have started small businesses such as village shops or engaged in the livestock trade. The pattern of daily consumption has changed in comparison to that of the 1970s as indicated in Figure 2 above. New categories such as expenditure on different food items, health services, education, and agricultural equipment and its maintenance started to take a prominent place in the household budget.

The Wanasab new village has a population of approximately 1000 individuals, who share the health facilities already available in the Serajiya village health center. There is also easy access to the school in the same village where young children, boys and girls from the new settlement are able to attend classes. Since their settlement in the early 1980s most of their children have been able to go to school. However, as the 'Omda expressed, girls do not progress very far in their education because of the tradition of early marriage practiced by the group. It is thought that this might change now that they have convinced UNESCO to give them a "nomad school" by arguing that they are still maintaining their traditional style of livelihood. In such a case girls who are enrolled in this school may have the chance to go further in their education since they are doing so among their own people and are not exposed to "outsiders". Three female teachers are in charge of this "nomad school" and the village is responsible for providing them with accommodation and helping with other daily needs such as water supply and bringing food from the village market. There are 145 boys and girls attending the school, divided into five grades with ages ranging from 7-8 years in the first grade to 12-13 years in the fifth grade. Older boys and girls have joined the upper grades in the school in the original Serajiya village.

The new village is located immediately north of the old Serajiya not very far from the banks of the Blue Nile. Houses are mostly made of mud with grass roofs except for a compound of red brick houses belonging to the 'Omda's son-in-law, who is also his brother's son. The number of household units is approximately 200, each occupying two to three huts with one or more *rakubas* (rectangular structure made of wooden poles with a grass roof). Three small shops sell daily consumption goods such as sugar, salt, soap and other items. The area cultivated by the village members is a few kilometers away to the west of the village. It is approximately 26,000 *feddans* in area. They mainly grow durra, part of which is used for household consumption and the surplus sold in nearby markets. The 'Omda and his close extended family members own five tractors. These are driven and maintain by young male members of the family. When they are not used for agricultural activities during the dry season they carry water to the herds in the distant grazing areas. There are two lorries within the vicinity of the village but no one wanted to tell to whom they belonged.

This change in lifestyle through the adoption of a new form of residence and the use and management of old and new resources, including social services, has been followed by structural rearrangements in the traditional political structure. Considering kinship and descent relations, the Wanasab *farig* is one of the major sections of the Rufa'a al Hoi ethnic group. Administratively, they used to be under the Rufa'a al Hoi *Nazirate* of the Abu Ruf family, where the *Nazir* administered the different sections of the northern and southern *Badiyas* from his head office, previously in Abu Hugar, now in Wad el Nayal. When settling in its present locality this Wanasab *farig* found itself in an area geographically outside the Rufa'a *Nazirate*, namely one that of the Fuj under the administration of the *Fuj Mek*. They had to adjust to the new administrative setting and accept the authority of the *Mek* in order to be able to access resources under his domain while still recognizing their identity as Rufa'a and expressing a nominal allegiance to the Rufa'a *Nazir* and Abu Ruf family. The *Nazir's wakil* (deputy), who used to be responsible for the southern *Badiya*, is now settled in the same village with no responsibilities and his position of authority seems to have faded

away.²¹ The 'Omda of the Wanasab *farig*, accountable to the *Funj Muk*, is the one officially recognized in the new administrative arrangement. The government authorities officially recognize this.²²

Regarding the national political scene, the Rufa'a al Hoi used to be devout Mahdists and supported the *Umma* party during previous parliamentary elections. However, they seem to keep tactful and safe relations with the National Congress Party (NCP). At one point during the early phases of the extension of the civil war from South-Eastern Sudan into the Funj region, they managed to reach an informal arrangement with the SPLA that allowed them access to their traditional grazing areas in *Khor Yabus* and beyond. However, this arrangement did not hold for long and the Rufa'a al Hoi organized their own militia to guard against SPLA attack on their herds in their movement south. The SPLA accused them of being pro-government and curtailed their movement south. After the signing of the CPA they tried to negotiate their way back south but the authorities in the area controlled by the SPLA in the Kurmuk county are reluctant to allow them to go back on the pretext that their animals used to damage the village fields. A recent meeting to discuss this issue was held early this year in Kurmuk and attended by officials representing the Government of National Unity, the National and Regional Pastoralists' Unions, the semi-mechanized scheme owners and representatives of the local villages, but did not resolve this question. It is to be noted that a younger brother of the Wanasab 'Omda is a member of the Regional Pastoralists' Union and attended this meeting.²³ The main resistance to the return of the pastoralists, whether Rufa'a or Fulani, comes from the young generation of Uduk, Jumjum and Brun ethnic groups who fought for the SPLA, as well as from the indigenous population who went as refugees to Ethiopia and are now being partly repatriated.

Concluding remarks

Different Land Acts have given the government the power to appropriate and redistribute the land to different users from outside the region and investors from outside the country, denying the local inhabitants and pastoralist groups access to this resource, which is basic for their livelihood. The traditional agricultural and livestock sectors suffered tremendously. Due to changes that led to the shrinking of grazing areas, resulting in intensive competition among the different pastoralist groups in the region, many Rufa'a al Hoi households were forced to settle. The settlement process was started by poor households and eventually attracted many of those who were well off. The increase in the numbers of those who opted to settle came out of an awareness that many changes were taking place within the region and that new adaptation systems were needed in order for different groups to survive. However, such decisions necessitated major changes in livelihood systems and a new way of budgeting the time of the household unit.

The camp members that settled had to shift from only keeping herds to combining this with cultivation in rain-fed areas. This has, so far, worked successfully, especially for those who are well off and can sell some of their herds and invest in agricultural equipment. This represents a considerable change in the lifestyle which was practiced in the past and has led to the recognition of other important advantages of settlement, such as access to social and health services. Although

²¹ This is Shaykh al Na'eem Idris whom, in 1971, I had the opportunity to accompany on his tax collection tour (*gut'an*) among the Northern Badiya. He is now very old (almost 96 years) but still strong. When I visited him on 9 October 2006 I found out that he still remembered that tour and the people we met, especially those who were in the photographs which I sent back to him at the time.

²² For more details on the traditional administrative system of the Rufa'a al Hoi, see Ahmed (1974). For more information on the new changes, see Ahmed (2005).

²³ The information on the arrangement between the Rufa'a and the SPLA is based on personal communication with Commander Malik Agar. The conference referred to was held in Kurmuk on March 21-23, 2006.

such a change has required some adjustment in the pastoralists' administrative structure, it does not seem to impact negatively on their allegiances and identity. They see no conflict between shifting ethnic allegiances and being administratively under the authority of the Fung *Mek* as long as they can have easy access to resources in the region. The nominal identification with the Rufa'a group becomes part a tradition that individuals insist on keeping alive. The transformation of their system of livelihood, especially in making use of the social services in the settlement areas, is considered an investment in the younger generation and hence the future. As far as national political issues are concerned they still see themselves as devout Mahdists who can still survive under the present regime and perhaps support the *Umma* party if a new election is organized.

The way these Rufa'a al Hoi responded to the government appropriation measures seems to be paying off in a positive way. The transformation of the system is offering an opportunity to planners, decision makers and students of rural communities to rethink their stereotypical views of pastoralists as resisting change and unable to adapt to new systems of livelihood meant to improve their lives. The way the Wanasab *farig* managed the process of transformation is seen by its members as an investment in the future of the younger generation.

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SUMMARY

The pastoral sector in Sudan in general and in the Blue Nile State in particular has been marginalized and impoverished as a result of detrimental state policies, deteriorating environmental conditions and encroaching civil war. In order to survive these assaults, poor households among the Rufa'a al Hoi ethnic group were the first to settle and engage in activities only remotely related to the pastoral sector. Although they did so to survive, they found that their circumstances actually improved by gaining access to a number of services previously unavailable to them, such as education, health clinics and clean water. Contrary to the conventional wisdom--that pastoralists forced to settle then accumulate capital in order to return to their pastoral livelihood--these particular Rufa'a households found their quality of life better in their new circumstances and did not attempt to return pastoralism. In recent years, such choices attracted other pastoralists from the same ethnic group, even well-to-do households, to settle, engage in agriculture and small business, keep some of their livestock on the move with herders and transform their way of life, having in mind the benefits that might accrue to future generations.

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Research addresses main challenges to peacebuilding in Sudan, with a particular focus on (a) the political economy of the transition, including institutional and governance issues, and (b) the role of third party engagement and issues related to the management and coordination of aid. The programme is multidisciplinary and combines macro level studies with research in selected localities and states. It covers basic and policy-oriented research as well as competence building.