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**FACTORS OF SCHOOLING DROP-  
OUT AMONG THE BEJA NOMADS  
RED SEA STATE, SUDAN**

**Mustafa Omer M. El Jalli e Omer Ahmad El  
M.Hayati**

**Presentazione di Pierpaolo Faggi**

**Comitato scientifico**

**Giovan Battista CASTIGLIONI  
Dario CROCE  
Adolfo GIRARDI**

## PRESENTAZIONE

La decisione delle Nazioni Unite di proclamare, a partire dal 1998, un Decennio internazionale per l'Alfabetizzazione, costituisce la più recente riaffermazione del valore attribuito all'educazione di base come chiave di volta per lo sviluppo politico ed economico. Quella di dedicare il Decennio alla memoria di Paulo Freire, il pedagogista brasiliano della *coscientizzazione* scomparso nel 1997, indica una precisa scelta di campo, con l'individuazione nell'educazione di base non solo di un bisogno elementare di ogni persona, ma soprattutto del fondamento su cui costruire un percorso cosciente di autoaffermazione, un diritto all'identità. Ciò equivale a dire che i processi educativi, soprattutto quelli di base, devono assumere un ruolo strategico nelle dinamiche sociali dei gruppi marginali, nella prospettiva di una crescita della loro titolarità ad una nuova cittadinanza planetaria.

Oltre a ciò, l'educazione di base deve assumere un'altra funzione strategica: quello di socializzare la conoscenza e l'accettazione dell'Altrove. Di fronte ad ogni ingenua ipotesi di abbattimento della complessità come scorciatoia verso la soluzione dei problemi legati alla nuova *koiné* della globalizzazione, s'impone l'urgenza di costruire una cultura che sappia accettare, fare propria e valorizzare la diversità, come base per la convivenza e lo sviluppo. E la scuola, soprattutto nelle fasce di età dell'obbligo, sembra essere l'agenzia educativa ideale per la costruzione di questa cultura.

Questi tutto sommato semplici ma decisi assunti stanno alla base del progetto "*El Wasl/Communication/Comunicazione*", una proposta di cooperazione decentrata tra le scuole dell'obbligo della Provincia di Padova e quelle del Red Sea State, nel Sudan orientale, attivata, nel quadro del "Forum per l'Educazione nei PVS" esistente presso la Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione dell'Università di Padova, da una pluralità di Enti (di ricerca, Amministrativi, associativi)<sup>1</sup> per il biennio scolastico 1998-2000, con una durata prevista totale di 8 anni.

Non sfugge certo il rischio che presenta un'ipotesi di cooperazione con il Sudan, Paese interessato fin dall'indipendenza (1956) da una guerra interna tra "Nord" e "Sud", in cui la metafora geografica copre molteplici ambiti di contrasto, sia interno (di appartenenza etnica e religiosa, di rapporti politici ed economici), che internazionale (geopolitica dell'Africa centro-orientale, riposizionamento USA/UE, strategie di confronto tra Islam e Cristianesimo). Gli effetti della guerra si stanno sommando a quelli provocati dalle politiche di aggiustamento strutturale<sup>2</sup> in atto nel Paese ed a quelli del blocco dei finanziamenti delle maggiori Agenzie internazionali e dei Paesi occidentali seguiti allo schieramento sudanese durante la Guerra del Golfo. Ai fini del nostro intervento, due effetti sembrano particolarmente significativi: il ritiro progressivo dello Stato dalla spesa sociale (decentramento, privatizzazione, ecc.) con pesanti ripercussioni sui finanziamenti alla Pubblica istruzione; il massiccio spostamento di profughi (*displaced people*) dalle aree meridionali

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1 Gli Enti partecipanti al progetto, che vedrà in primo piano gli Istituti della Scuola dell'obbligo della Provincia di Padova, sono il Dip. di Geografia di Padova e il Dept. of Geography- Fac. Of Education dell'Univ. di Khartoum, che si occupano dell'analisi dei sistemi territoriali in cui si opera; il Provveditorato agli Studi di Padova, che cura il coordinamento delle Scuole italiane partecipanti e la realizzazione di un apposito Corso di formazione per gli insegnanti aderenti; l'Amministrazione Provinciale di Padova, che funge da referente Istituzionale in Italia; dell'Organizzazione non Governativa " Assoc.Amici dello Stato Brasiliano di Spirito Santo", cui spetta di svolgere attività di sensibilizzazione presso le scuole italiane, realizzando una campagna di sostegno finanziario per le attività previste. Le controparti individuate in Sudan sono due Organizzazioni non Governative da lungo tempo presenti sul territorio ed attive nel campo dell'Educazione: i Padri Comboniani, che gestiscono le scuole della periferia di Port Sudan, e la Mezzaluna Rossa Sudanese, che sostiene, con il contributo di Norvegia e Danimarca, le scuole dell'altopiano Beja.

2 Peraltro curiosamente ammantati di continui richiami alle prescrizioni coraniche : si veda la *Comprehensive National Strategy*, cui il Paese ha affidato la propria strategia per il decennio 1992-2002 (Sudan Republic, 1992).

colpite dalla guerra alle periferie urbane del Nord, ove si sono costituite immense agglomerazioni insediative sottodotate in termini di servizi (*shanty towns*). Per sgombrare subito il campo da fraintendimenti relativi all'opportunità delle scelte, si tenga presente che il nostro progetto si vuole porre in interazione con le istituzioni della società civile<sup>3</sup>.

Gli obiettivi generali del progetto sono un'azione di conoscenza reciproca e di educazione interculturale tra i sistemi partecipanti, mediante una comunicazione che veda gli alunni come soggetti principali, e il sostegno alla scolarizzazione di base (8 classi, da 6 a 14 anni) nel Red Sea State da parte delle scuole del Padovano, mediante una raccolta di contributi da parte degli alunni stessi.

Per il primo punto, si tratta della conoscenza della realtà territoriale e scolastica del "sistema-altro" mediante campagne di informazione e di sensibilizzazione degli allievi, per quanto riguarda sia il rapporto Italia-Sudan che quello tra i due sottosistemi sudanesi (vedi sotto); in Sudan l'operazione dovrebbe portare alla diffusione di una cultura della convivenza; in Italia, oltre a ciò, questo momento dovrebbe portare alla raccolta di un contributo finanziario da parte delle Scuole, necessario al secondo punto.

Quanto a questo, si deve ricordare che la scolarizzazione di base del Red Sea State presenta una problematica particolarmente acuta, nettamente ripartita tra due sottosistemi:

a) l'area interna montagnosa e sub-desertica, abitata da pastori nomadi di etnia Beja, musulmani; le modalità del nomadismo e la carenza di reddito impediscono la frequenza scolastica in assenza di un sostegno alimentare e di "pensionati" scolastici (*Boarding Houses*), servizi che, previsti sulla carta, non possono funzionare per carenza di finanziamenti pubblici;

b) la fascia costiera, imperniata su alcune città (tra cui Port Sudan), con un certo sviluppo economico e con la presenza di almeno 300.000 *displaced*, di etnia Nuer, Dinka, Shilluk, Nuba, prevalentemente cristiani. Questi gruppi, residenti in quartieri suburbani particolarmente carenti di servizi pubblici, soffrono ugualmente di una scarsa scolarizzazione, legata essenzialmente al loro stato di rifugiati.

Il progetto dovrebbe interessarsi ad ambedue i sottosistemi, mediante servizi concreti agli studenti (alimentazione, *Boarding Houses*, materiale di consumo) ed alle scuole selezionate (materiale didattico, aggiornamento degli insegnanti).

Rivolgendosi sia alle scuole "musulmane" che a quelle "cristiane", il progetto vuole assumere un marcato significato di comunicazione interculturale e di mediazione per una cultura della pace.

L'articolo qui presentato è un primo contributo di ricerca per il progetto: presenta la gravissima situazione dell'abbandono scolastico tra i nomadi Beja (soprattutto della frazione Hadendawa) nella regione montagnosa delle Red Sea Hills. Si tratta di gruppi agro-pastorali di tradizionale nomadismo stagionale (colture di sorgo con irrigazione di piena lungo i *kheiran* di montagna; mandrie e greggi misti, svernati nei due grandi delta del Tokar e del Ghash o nella cmosa costiera del *Gumub*) la cui territorialità, colpita dalle ricorrenti siccità degli anni '80, progressivamente polarizzata sui centri della strada Kassala - Port Sudan dalle politiche di aiuto e dalle nuove opportunità occupazionali e da ultimo colpita dall'apertura di un nuovo fronte orientale delle operazioni belliche, sta conoscendo profonde trasformazioni.

Gli autori hanno svolto da anni ricerche nella regione, come membri del Dip. Di Geografia di Khartoum e in collaborazione con la Mezzaluna Rossa Sudanese. Attualmente sono ospiti del Dip. di Geografia di Padova: Mustapha Omer M. El Jaili come Professore Ospite, nel quadro del ricordato Accordo tra i due Atenei; Omer Ahmad El M. Hayati come Dottorando del Dottorato "Uomo e Ambiente")

Pierpaolo Faggi

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3 A questo proposito, e sempre nella prospettiva di favorire gli elementi democratici della società sudanese, l'Università di Padova - rarissimo esempio di Istituto occidentale - ha in corso un programma triennale (1997-99) di collaborazione didattica e scientifica con l'Università di Khartoum.

## FOREWORD

The United Nations have proclaimed, starting from 1998, the International Literacy Decade : this decision is the most recent statement of the significance given to the basic education in order to reach political and economic development. Besides, the decision of dedicating the Decade to the memory of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian pedagogist of the conscientization disappeared in 1997, indicates a precise option, that of qualifying basic education not only as a basic need, but also as the basis on which to build up a process of awareness and self reliance, and to secure the path to the identity. This means that education, mainly the basic one, should hold a strategic role in the social processes of marginal groups, in the perspective of their increased entitlement to a new global citizenship.

Moreover, basic education has to have another strategic function: to socialise the knowledge and the acceptance of the outsidersness. In front of any naïf hypothesis of decreasing complexity as a shortcut towards the solutions of the problems connected with the new globalisation's koine, a new culture for accepting and emphasising diversity as a basis for development and co-operation is urgently needed. The school, mainly the basic one, seems to be the ideal educational agency to build up such a culture.

These simple though such assumptions are scaffolding the project "El Wasl /Communication/Comunicazione", a decentralised co-operation proposal between the primary schools of the Padova Province and those of the Red Sea State, Eastern Sudan, set up, in the framework of the "Forum for the Education in Developing Countries" at the University of Padova's Faculty of Education, by several Organisations (research, Local Governments, NGO's)<sup>4</sup> for an initial two years (1998-2000) period, with a total duration of 8 years.

We are well aware of the risk of co-operating with the Sudan, a Country which has been affected since its Independence (1956) by an internal war between "North" and "South", in which the geographic metaphor covers a manifold stake, both internal (ethnic and religious identity, political and economic relations), and international (central-eastern Africa's geopolitics, relations USA/UE, containment strategies between Islam and Christianity). The effects of the war are increased by those of the structural adjustment<sup>5</sup> undergoing in the Country and by those of the funds embargo declared by the main International Agencies and the Western Countries because of the Sudanese position during the Gulf War. As far as our project is concerned, two effects seem particularly relevant : the progressive State withdrawal from the social expenditure (privatisation, decentralisation, etc.) with heavy consequences on the funding of the Educational system ; the massive number of refugees displaced from the southern regions affected by the war towards the northern cities' suburbs, where they gathered in enormous and underequipped shanty towns. To avoid any

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4 The Organisations participating in the project, which will primarily include the Basic Education schools of the Province of Padova, are the Dept. of Geography in Padova and the Dept. of Geography- Fac. of Education, Univ. of Khartoum, which deal with the territorial systems connected with the project; the "Provveditorato agli Studi di Padova", which co-ordinates the Italian Schools and supervises a specific training Course for the Italian teachers; the Padova Provincial Government, the Institutional partner in Italy; the NGO " Assoc.Amici dello Stato Brasiliano di Espirito Santo", whose role is to mobilise the schools and to carry out the fund raising activity. The counterparts in the Sudan are two NGO's since a long time dealing with education: the Comboni Fathers, carrying out schools in the Port Sudan suburbs, and the Sudanese Red Crescent, supporting, with Norwegian and Danish contributions, the Beja highlands' schools.

5 By the way, the structural adjustment policies are curiously disguised by repeated quotations of the Quran: see the Comprehensive National Strategy, to which the Country appointed its development path for the decade 1992-2002 (Sudan Republic, 1992).

misunderstanding about the choice opportunity, let's keep in mind that our project is intended to cooperate with the society of the Sudan<sup>6</sup>.

The general objectives of the project are a reciprocal knowledge and an intercultural education action among the participating systems, by means of a communication engaging the pupils as the main actors, as well as the support of the Red Sea State basic education system (8 grades, from 6 to 14 years) by the Padova's schools, with a fund raising action by the pupils themselves.

As far as the first point, we deal with the knowledge of the territorial and educational systems of the « others », to be reached by information and motivation campaigns of the pupils, both regarding the relations between Italy and Sudan and those between the two Sudanese sub-systems (see below); in Sudan this should spread a culture of tolerance; in Italy, this should also lead to the fund raising process within the schools, in order to fulfil the second task.

As far as this, we should remember that basic education in the Red Sea State is overwhelmingly problematic, and clearly subdivided:

the internal hilly and semi-desertic area, inhabited by Beja Islamic nomadic shepherds. The nomadic movements, the scarcity of income, the cultural attitudes prevent pupils from attending schools, specially with a lack of Boarding Houses and food supply, which, though available, cannot work because of the scarce Government's funds.

the coastal area, with some cities (among whose Port Sudan), featured by a certain level of economic development, were at least 300.000 displaced (Nuer, Dinka, Shilluk, Nuba, etc.) mainly Christians are settled. These groups, living in the quoted suburban shanty towns, suffer as well for the low schooling rate, mainly due to their status of refugee.

The project should deal both with the two subsystems, by providing students with food, boarding facilities, stationery and the selected schools with teaching facilities and training of the teachers.

Focusing on both the « Muslims » and the « Christian » schools, the project aims at having a specific role of intercultural communication and mediation towards a peace culture.

This paper is a first research contribution to the project: it presents the severe situation of school drop-out among the Beja nomads (mainly Hadendawa) in the Red Sea Hills region, in Sinkat Province. They are agro-pastoral groups practising a traditional multi-resources nomadism (sorghum cultivated with flood irrigation in the main *kheiran*, mixed livestock, passing winter season in the two large deltas of the Tokar and the Ghash or in the *Gumub* coastal fringe), whose territoriality, affected by the heavy droughts of the 80's, more and more polarised on the centres of the Kassala - Port Sudan asphalt road by the relief policies and the new work opportunities, and finally hit by the recently open east war front, is facing deep changes.

The Authors have carried out since some years researches in the area, as members of the Dept. of Geography, Faculty of Education, Univ. of Khartoum and in collaboration with the Sudanese Red Crescent. At present, they are hosted at the Dept. of Geography in Padova University: Mustafa Omer M. El Jaili as Visiting Professor, in the framework of the above quoted Agreement between the two Universities; Omer Ahmad El M. Hayati as PhD Students in the "Man and Environment" postgraduate Course.

Pierpaolo Faggi

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6 In this concern, and to foster the rare democratic processes within the Sudanese society, Padova University – almost the unique western Institution – is carrying out a three years Agreement of didactic and scientific co-operation with the University of Khartoum..

# **FACTORS OF SCHOOLING DROP-OUT AMONG THE BEJA NOMADS, RED SEA STATE, SUDAN<sup>7</sup>**

**Key words:** School drop-out - Beja nomads - Sudan.

**Parole chiave:** Mortalità scolastica - Nomadi Beja - Sudan

## **Abstract**

The Red Sea Hills in Eastern Sudan, sparsely populated by the Beja nomads, suffer from frequent droughts and famines, and a complexity of socio-economic implications. Services and education are extremely poor and lacking; illiteracy ratio is high and schooling drop-out rates are outrageous. Depending on survey results, conducted on basic schooling in the area, this paper investigates factors of pupil drop-out. It demonstrates that cultural forces of identity, gender, inherited values, language, and other social attitudes are more decisive on the drop-out mechanism than the economic factors. If plans are to have greater roles, more attention and funding should be mobilised to establish social-change interventions to initiate a cultural breakthrough.

## **Riassunto**

Il territorio delle Red Sea Hills nel Sudan orientale è abitato dai nomadi Beja e soffre di frequenti siccità, carestie e complesse implicazioni socio-economiche. Servizi e scuole sono estremamente poveri e scarsi. L'indice di analfabetismo è alto e la percentuale della mortalità scolastica è gravissima. Questo lavoro, in relazione ai risultati di indagini condotte sulla scuola di base, analizza i fattori dell'abbandono scolastico. Esso dimostra che le caratteristiche culturali dell'identità, del genere, dei valori ereditati, della lingua e altre attitudini sociali sono più decisive sul meccanismo dell'abbandono scolastico che i fattori economici. Perché i progetti di sviluppo abbiano un'efficacia maggiore, dovrebbero essere impiegati finanziamenti per attivare interventi di mutamento sociale che possano ripercuotersi sul piano culturale.

## **Introduction**

International and regional data records show that educational systems in Developing Countries suffer from a complexity of problems, the most important of which is the high ratio of educational drop-out. It has been estimated that half of the elementary school pupils, around the globe, either leave schools, or are delayed for more than 3 years, before completion.

Defining drop-out as "leaving a school level before completion after being enrolled", and examining elementary schooling figures in 58 countries, Ibrahim (1994: 33) reported that "the schooling drop-out is 75-80% in Africa, 60-75% in Latin America, 55-60 for Asia, and 50-20 in Europe". In India, it is expressed, those who reach the fifth grade are only 35% out of the total enrolled at the start. The UNESCO held a series of conferences to improve educational performance and systems, with a major objective to decrease the drop-out rates (Elsheikh, 1990).

Rates of pupil drop-out are high in rural areas, and even are higher among nomadic societies and displaced communities. These sectors share many characteristics, such as low

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incomes, insatiable settlement, the need for all-family labour, and a comparative isolation from the surrounding society (Galal Eldin, 1980).

The connection between economic standards and school leave has been well documented in literature (Byrd, et al., 1997). On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that income, physical assets, and access to education and health are major determinants of the status of any individual vis-a-vis poverty (Desai, 1992). Thus, low-income parents are mostly uneducated or unskilled, and have no access to better means and methods to improve educational standards of their children (Hossain, 1990). Also, to a great extent, low-income is linked to malnutrition, weaker body growth, and, at worse, mental handicapping. Finally, a low income family may be compelled to draw its children off school and hire them as wage labourers (Islam, 1991). Despite this well established trend in literature, the paper argues that the feature of pupil drop-out is more a result of culture and social determinants than of economic forces. It is true that cultural factors are encountered in literature (e.g., Elsheikh, 1990), but with less importance and weaker stress than those given to economic determinants.

Depending on a field survey, this work investigates the great influence of culture and social forces on schooling drop-out among the Beja people in the Red Sea State<sup>7</sup>, Sudan. The fieldwork was conducted in December, 1997 and January, 1998. The analysis relied on three types of information focusing on different area scales in the study area: (1) the schooling drop-out figures, collected from official records in the Ministry of Education at the State level, which used to encounter: a. the whole East of Sudan, and b. the present Red Sea State (Figure 1. A, B), as well as in administrative offices of the study focus area, i.e., Province of Sinkat (Figure 1. C); (2) a 150 sample questionnaire directed at both boys and girls who quit schooling, with emphasis on major settlements of the sparsely populated Province of Sinkat, the headquarters of the Areas Council (*Mahalliya*) which are the towns of Haya, Durdeb, and Sinkat. The sample is confined to interviewed people found in these towns, both sedentary and nomads, for the difficulties associated with interviewing mobile nomads in the country side; and (3) group discussions using PRA<sup>8</sup> techniques, in the vicinity of the selected school sample in Sinkat Province.

## The area

The Red Sea State lies in the north east of Sudan. The narrow Red Sea coast shapes the eastern limit, the dry Red Sea Hills occupied a central north-south strip, while the sand deserts make the vast west-ward extensions (Figure 1. C). The region is composed of deserts, bare hills and mountains, valleys, as well as depressions, limited flood plains and deltas. The climate is generally hot and dry, with few summer rains which accumulates in flood valleys running fast down the hills towards the east and the west. The soil is composed of loose desert sand, with clay in flood pockets. The dispersed rains are enough to produce few grasses, scattered shrubs, and some Acacia trees (Bakhit and Hayati, 1995).

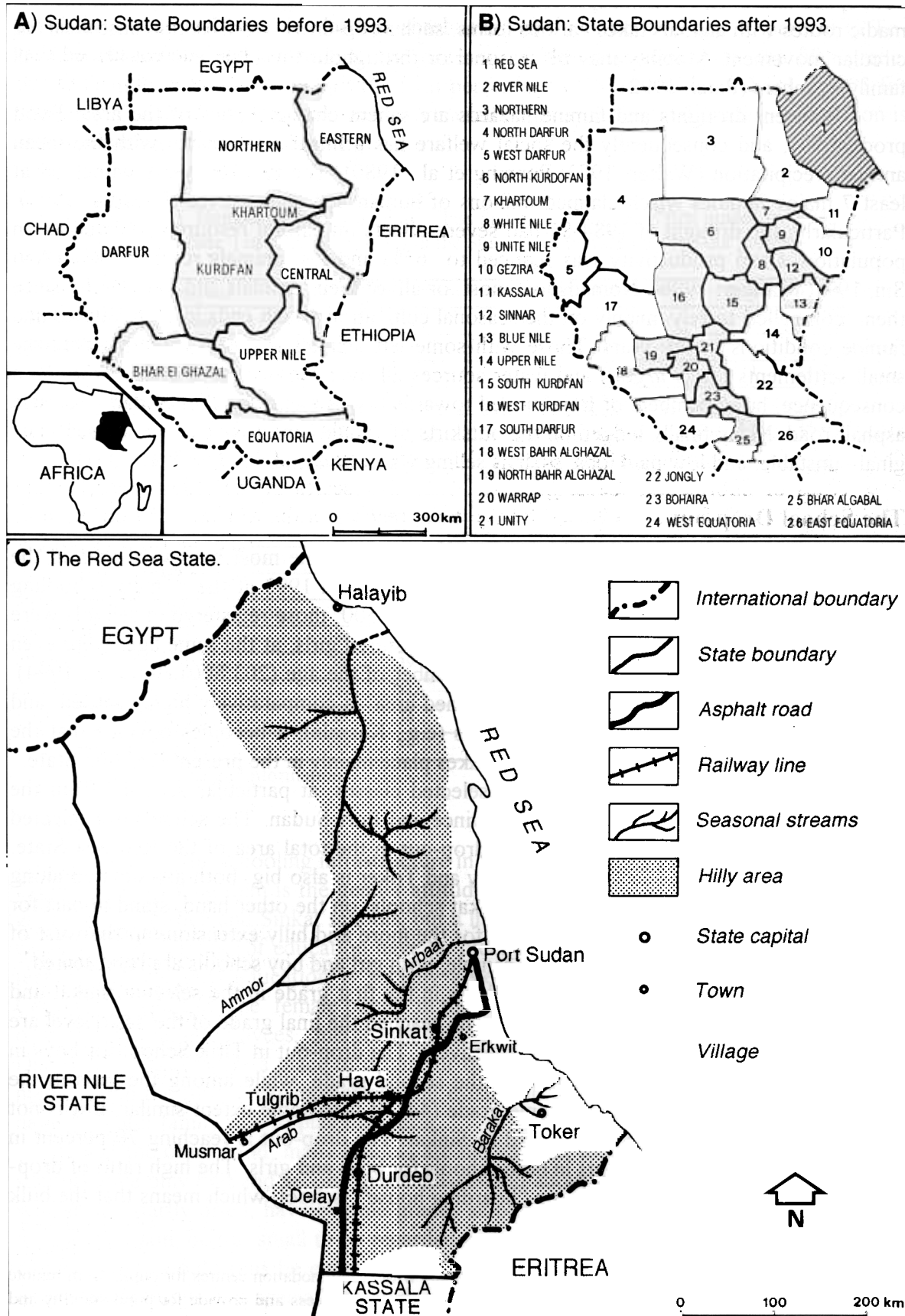
The area is inhabited by Beja tribes, who are nomads possessing camels, sheep, and goats. Many of them practice subsistence sorghum cultivation in flood plains. Animal husbandry and cultivation is governed by (1) land ownership, which is decided by tribal chiefs

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7 Sudan is a Federal Republic divided in States. The States are subdivided in Provinces (*Muhafaza*) and downwards there are Area Council (*Mahalliya*). Eastern State, according to the 1991-1993 Administrative System, encountered both of the present Red Sea and Kassala, States (Fig. 1. A and Fig. 1. B).

8 PRA is a research methodology that is mainly composed of informal, mostly qualitative, group interviewing, which negotiate information, analysis, and solutions from the local people.

Figure No. 1. The Study Area





according to local regulations; and (2) rainfall amounts, which are extremely inconsistent in both space and time. As an adaptation to the vulnerable ecology in the study area, the nomadic routes with animals takes various forms, such as up-down, north-south, east-west, or circular movement. Mobility may be seasonal or throughout the year, and mostly with all family members (Patel, 1992).

Frequent droughts and famine hazards are salient characteristics of the area. Food productivity, and consequently the social welfare has a linear relationship with the mean annual precipitation (Walter, 1973; Penning et al., 1980). The last 100 years witnessed at least 7 major famines which claimed millions of human and animal lives (Elsiddig, 1992). Particularly, the drought of 1984-85 had severe effects on natural resources, as well as on population. Crop productivity was reduced to 65% and lost animals reached 90% (Abu Sin, 1991; Manger, 1996). Nomads lost most, or all, of their animals and have been, since then, compelled to rely mainly on the seasonal cultivation which ends in crop failures and famine conditions in dry years. Those with some left animals move in groups across the small settlements (Ar. *Furgan*) and water sources all over the district (Patel, 1992). As a consequence, huge numbers of Beja moved towards towns along the Port Sudan - Kassala asphalt road. Many finally lodged on the outskirts of villages and towns and practised marginal, unstable, and low paid jobs, such as selling water or wood.

### **The School Drop-out**

In terms of education, the Eastern Sudan is one of the most backward area in the country. According to Ibrahim the total number of boys in 1993 at the primary schooling age (7-15 years), in the whole Eastern State was 265,500; those registered in schools were only 122,160, that is less than the half. School registered girls, at the same age, were even less (77,450) in proportion to the total girls number of the age (203,800) (Ibrahim, 1994). Realising that the southern part of the concerned area is comparatively highly settled, and that the above figures encounter many towns (e.g., Kassala), it becomes obvious that the low enrolment levels in the Eastern region takes place mainly in the present Red Sea State.

Table (1), detects the drop-out in selected classes, at particular schools, from the first grade to the eighth, of the Sinkat Province and Port Sudan. The schools are selected to represent different levels and scales of drop-out in the total area of the Red Sea State. Port Sudan is the capital and the largest city and Toker is also big; both are situated along the coastal plain of the State. Haya and Sinkat schools, on the other hand, stand in part for small town and village schools and in part for the more arid hilly extensions to the west of the coastal plains. At each centre of the sample, both girl and boy schools are represented.

Out of the total number of the students in the first grade in the selected Sinkat and Haya schools, in the high land area, those who reached the final grade of the basic level are about a seventh and less than a tenth respectively. The drop-out in Tirik School for boys in Sinkat is showing a high percent (29) in the second grade, while among the girls in the Milek School is even higher in the same grade (44). It is to some extent similar, if it is not worse, the situation in Haya with regard to Sinkat. The drop-out is reaching 70 percent in the 4th grade among the students in both schools for boys and girls. The high ratio of drop-out is explained by the fact that it is a "boarding house"<sup>9</sup> school, which means that the bulk

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<sup>9</sup> The boarding houses schools, in the study area, are schools with accommodation centres for pupils from remote or nomadic settlements. They keep the existence of the educational process and provide for pupil stability and food security all over the school year.

of its pupils are from nomadic families. This high ratio of drop-out is because pupils are basically nomadic, as will be discussed later. On the contrary the coastal area schools mark a lower drop-out: those who reached the final grade of the basic level are 20 percent in Toker and 34 percent in Port Sudan. The drop-out in Toker springs up in the fifth grade. However in Port Sudan it reaches the final percentage of 67 for Elnur School and 65 for Elshuruq. The drop-out for both sexes is generally higher on the final grades; the reason is mainly marriage for girls and work for boys.

Table No. 1. Number of Pupils in Single Class Samples ( from 1987 "first grade" to 1994, "Eight grade") in selected Schools in the Study Area to trace the drop-out process.

Class-year	1st.1987	2nd.1988	3rd.1989	4th.1990	5th.1991	6th.1992	7th.1993	8th.1994
	70	50	47	29	20	14	12	10
(%)								
Toker/boys								
								20,7
Elshuruq/girls (Port Sudan)	76	73	75	71	72	55	30	27
(%)	100	96,1	98,7	93,4	94,7	72,4	39,5	35,5
Haya/boys	38	39	13	12	8	6	9	2
Haya/girls	20	16	14	6	2	0	1	2
(%)	100	80	70	30	10	0	5	10

NOTE: \*\* Missing information

Source: Field work 97/98

Analysing the schooling infrastructure in the Area Councils in Sinkat Province (Table 2), the most striking item is the gender attitude. The boys enrolment is three times that of girls in both Durdeb and Sinkat schools, but a little less than the double in Haya, mainly because: (1) the services of education have an older history which refers back to early fourteenth. Yet the girls education is socially accepted compared with the other two Area Councils; (2) part of the female pupils in the selected schools in Haya belongs to families of governmental employees, merchants, and town's labour population; (3) finally, Haya District is considered as a place of origin for the whole Beja nomads, in which the real nomadic life in the rural areas intensively still exists and boys at school age in these societies have a greater family role to play than girls.

On the other hand, many schools are incomplete: more than a third of the Province schools have only first and second grade classes and about a half have only 4 classes. Some schools are partly dried, having some grades skipped. Classes may, at a particular season, for some reason, be too small to be regarded as separate classes. Because of the limited facilities, pupils would thus be either transferred to another nearby school or put with pro-, or pre-grade pupils, but specially treated.

Table No. 2. Schooling Infrastructure in the Province of Sinkat

Area Council	School No.				Classes No. Of Complete/ Incomplete Schools								Students No.			Teachers No.		
					G	r	a	d	e	s								
	girls	boys	mixed	total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	girls	boys	total	female	male	total
Durdeb	2	2	6	10	1	4	1	0	1	0	0	3	284	817	1101	41	34	75
Sinkat	5	6	9	20	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	10	1173	3191	4364	108	72	180

Source : Field work 97/98

On the contrary, female teachers exceed males. This is mainly attributed to the underpayment of teachers, and to the fact that males are escaping the job to work as traders or labourers, and the bulk migrate outside the country. For the low number of male teachers, females are compelled to teach in boys schools, which was not the case some years earlier. This female majority teacher structure worked to increase the rate of drop-out, because in the Beja male dominated community it is not accepted for male adolescents to be taught and supervised by females. Though this is the case, currently and in the short time-span, in the long run this female majority would definitely stimulate more respect and higher social status for females.

A case of drop-out records in dry nomadic regions is best represented by schools in rural Sinkat Province (Table 3). However, the data here do not trace single classes, as

Table No. 3. Enrolment by Class in Selected Schools in the Province of Sinkat in 1997/98

Area council	Class-year	1st.	2nd.	3rd.	4th.	5th.	6th.	7th.	8th.
Durdeb	Elshargia/girls	31,0	25,0	27,0	25,0	27,0	23,0	16,0	20,0
Haya									
Sinkat									

Source: Field work 97/98

was the case in the previous example, but state the 1997/98 class enrolment of pupils at all grades in the sampled schools. The total pupil enrolment in all the selected schools shows a 40 percent drop-out by the end of the first grade. Half of the first year enrolled pupils remain apparently stable for the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. A decrease is remarkable at the 6th grade and remain unchanged up to the 8th. The figures are not steadily slopping because of some seasons, such as the 1993/94, are more rainy, productive, comparatively stable, and thus receive a larger number of pupils.

Trends of schools enrolment show steady drop-out of varying intensities depending on location of schools and enrolment of nomad pupils; higher rates are recorded in girls' schools and in rural and more nomadic hinterlands. The lower rate of drop-out in Durdeb Girls School, however, is mostly attributed to the insignificant enrolment number at the first year (31 pupils compared to 83 in the boys school). Nevertheless, for the nomadic societies, the rates are greatly unstable and unpredictable shaped by mobility trends and rainfall amounts. The best example for this is Tulgrib, which is located in the desert extension to the west of the Red Sea Hills.

### *Household Economy*

According to the survey results economic factors, though very essential and decisive, come second after cultural determinants. Data analysis shows that while the cultural forces shape over 50 percent of the drop-out reasoning, economic determinants, mobility, and school costs make a third (Table 4).

In their economic behaviour, households adopt diverse strategies to cope with frequent droughts, crop failures, famines, and mass loss of herds (Hayati, 1995). These strate-

Table No. 4. Stated Reasons for Drop-out

Culture			Household economy			Education			Unexpressed			Total	
Factors			Factors			Factors			Factors				
Resp.			Resp.			Resp.			Resp.				
G B			G B			G B			G B			G B	
Family de-	15	13	Family	14	23	Infrastr. &	3	5					
sire			income			services							
Pupils de-	14	29	School	13	6	Curricul.	3	3					
sire			expenses										
Irrelevance	13	11	Family	9	1	School	1	5					
			mobility			environm.							
Marriage	5	1											
Arabic	4	1											
weakness													
	51	55		36	30		7	13		6	2	100	100

Note: Resp.: Respondents; G: Girls, B: Boys.

Source : Field work 97/98

gies, in turn, influence the social attitudes towards the schooling system in many ways, including the followings:

1) nomad households incomes are confined to elementary subsistence needs; incomes are mostly at minimum standards. The purchasing power is almost nil which affects the schooling needs of books and clothes, while school breakfast costs are hardly affordable by the parents;

2) being always on the move, for those who possess some animals, implies instability for all family members. Since it is in the nomadic tradition not to be in one place for more than a few months, and since the routes often change, especially in years of drought, it becomes obvious that the commitment to one particular school is extremely difficult, if ever possible;

(3) for sedentary households, because cultivation is risky, using primitive techniques on small plots and with very little return, and in order to attain higher returns, children are intensively involved in agricultural operations;

(4) among migrant families in towns the school age members are also economically active, mostly working on cash earnings activities along the Kassala-Port Sudan asphalt road; sources of cash are limited to the selling of cheap materials, directly collected from the wilderness, such as fuel wood, char-coal, and animal fodder, or to occasional jobs in the local restaurants;

(5) the birth rate is high, which implies lower standards of living and less care for the demands of children as individuals. Meanwhile, the high mortality rate in the adult population causes many young members to be responsible for the living of the family (Hayati, 1994).

### *Culture*

Table 4 presents sufficient evidence to claim that cultural factors represent the major cause for pupils drop-out. Plans to combat this phenomenon should aim at a cultural breakthrough beside a financial support or relief supply, as is usually considered the case.

The most prominent item in the Beja culture, which clearly manifests itself in the survey results, is that the males are sensitive towards, or discriminate against, female society (Vågenes, 1995). Female neither mix with males, nor do they interact with strangers of both sexes. Mentioning women names in a males gathering is taboo, let alone being equal partners in the broad society. Other than their traditional duties within household members, female work is generally not accepted, especially in the market sphere, and their education is not encouraged (Table 4). For girls, leaving schools is a family desire for 15 percent of the sample. 13 percent referred the schooling drop-out to a perceived irrelevance of the schooling system to the local traditions, and 5 percent left schooling to get married. For males, it is the lack of desire by pupils themselves that springs up as the top determinant to leave the school.

According to Beja perception, schooling weakens the ties and loyalty to the inherited values and norms; a considerable percentage is enacted to quit schooling because of this belief. Local experience showed that educated members migrate to towns and seldom return back, and when they do they live apart from the traditional system of duties and obligations. The spoken Beja language is an other educational obstacle; children face tremendous problems learning Arabic, the official schooling language.

Beja people are also known for being highly dignified with an outstanding tribal prejudice, reflected in strong obligations to tribal relationships, inherited norms, and language; they are sharply resistant to change (Hayati, 1995). The failure to be integrated into the commonly shared Sudanese culture have to do also with the dry and tough environment, with the sparsely distributed and living apart population. Table 5 presents the strong kin and tribal ties: the influence of relatives to quit schooling is even stronger than that of the immediate family. The stress on girls is noticeably greater: it is preferred that they un-

dertake a traditional schools (*Khalwa*)<sup>10</sup> education just enough to provide them with necessary religious information. As said before, boys mostly decide the school leave for themselves. The comparatively larger figure of mothers' influence on boys is mainly because mothers often go with the desire of their sons.

Table No. 5. The Person who Pushed Most the School Leave

the person	for girls	for boys
Relatives	33	26
Father	26	4
Brothers & sisters		
Pupil disinterest	29	54
Total	100	100

Source: Field work 97/98

One major factor of pupil drop-out is the illiteracy of parents. Half of the fathers, in the sample, had no schooling (Table 6). This comparatively small illiteracy ratio, and the considerably large percentage of fathers with primary education (38 percent), is due to the fact that the sample is taken from an urban population. For the Beja population, at large, illiteracy rate is considerably high. Concerned with mothers of interviewed pupils, 91 percent had no schooling, 7 had primary, and only 2

Table No. 6. Fathers' Education and Family size

Fathers Education		Family size			
	%	-3	4-5	6-7	+8
no schooling	47				
primary					
intermediate					
					2

Source: Field work 97/98

percent had schooling above that level.

The average size of the family is a little more than 5; one tenth is less than 3 members and an other tenth is more than 7 members, which is the usual distribution pattern in rural Sudan. Most of the uneducated have large families: more than 80 percent of the above 4-member families belong to parents with no, or only primary, schooling.

### Education

Factors of education that contribute to pupil drop-out may be discussed under the following headings: (1) infrastructure and services; (2) the system and curriculum; and (3) teachers and teaching equipment (Table 4).

<sup>10</sup> An informal, traditional school for all-age and both sex to teach Quran and basics of Arabic language.

1) Infrastructure and services. The dry and tough nature of the region has as well as the level of development shaped the sparse distribution of population activities, as well as health and educational services. Some pupils may walk for more than 5 miles to reach the school, which represents a considerable cause of drop-out. Low standards of living, primitive practices and habits, and lack of health-care units caused a high rate of malnutrition and Anaemia, beside Malaria, Tuberculosis, and other illnesses. It has been reported by school headmasters that many pupils are habitually weak and sleepy because they are not well fed.

Also, rural schools are mostly structured in instable materials (i.e., wood, sticks, and thatch), which neither keep out rain water, nor do they ensure enough shelter from sun rays. Also, many suffer from water shortage in summer. The poor school environment and the long distances to schools have some role in the drop-out.

2) System and curriculum. Curriculum, book production, and training is provided by the Federal Ministry of Education in Khartoum. They are prepared to achieve national goals, which hardly fit for the isolated Beja culture and harsh settings. Some interviewees have presented this observation as a major cause of pupil drain.

The Sudanese educational ladder has been changed several times; the elementary level was 4 grades up to 1971, 6 until 1993, and 8 grades right now. Nomadic children can hardly wait for 8 years in one place of no tangible benefits. Secondly, at the teen ages the nomads become productive, and schooling becomes a waste of the valuable time of pupils.

Pre-school education is very limited (Table 7). It is composed of either kindergartens, which are confined to those in cities, or traditional religious schools (*Khalwas*), of which both the content and context are altogether not related to the schooling system.

Table No. 7. Pre-school Institutions in the Red Sea State

	P r o v i n c e s				total
	Port Sudan	Sinkat	Toker	Halayib	
institutions					
kindergartens	54	13	6	0	73
khalwas	163	86	88	6	343

Source: Ibrahim, 1994

(3) Teachers and teaching. Teachers in the whole Red Sea State are only 1946, of whom 543 are untrained, distributed over 282 schools, making an extremely small average of 3-4 teachers for an elementary school of 8 grades. Of course, many of these schools are incomplete, having only a few classes (see for Sinkat Table 2). A prominent feature in the region's schools is being partially dried: some grades are skipped out altogether, and some with only 2 or 3 pupils because of massive pupil drop-out.

The bulk of the teachers are females; in the Eastern State they are 1125 (Ibrahim, 1994). This forms an additional reason for the drop-out in the Beja male-dominated society; 64 percent of boy respondents, clearly expressed their preference to male teachers over females. Strangely enough, 81 percent of interviewed girl pupils also expressed preference for male teachers which suggests that the performance of female teachers may trolley, for the cultural consideration, be lower in standards than that of male. Obviously, the culture had a strong influence on pupils' views, but it has definite impacts on the performance of both male and female teachers. However, this may have a positive impact of stimulating

more respect for females, but the positive impacts can only be expected on the future generations.

Teachers salaries are extremely low; a trained teacher working over 15 years receives about LS 45000 (equivalent to US \$ 27), which is, by local means, just enough to provide one meal for a single person for a month's duration. Moreover, the salaries are not paid in time; sometimes they are several months late. As a consequence, teachers are escaping the job, especially the males, or considering it a secondary source of income. Thus, they became disinterested and indifferent as to schooling performance and improvement. Teacher training is an important concern, but it becomes secondary once the salaries are considered.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Rates of pupils drop-out in the Red Sea State are among the highest in Sudan, and consequently in the world. A complexity of factors are involved; because of the clear link between economy and schooling attainment, most plans to combat the phenomenon are directed at economic reactions (such as fees exemptions, food provision, school needs, subsidies, and financial aid). As the economic problems are already acute there, the plans do achieve success. Yet, it would have been more efficient if the financial support is mobilised to start a cultural breakthrough, especially in perception and attitudes towards schooling. Nonetheless, such a recommendation is only meaningful, if there is a strong will and ability to make the change.

Post-independence Governments expanded schooling and spent generously on it. Since the late 1970s, economic difficulties have been on horizon, and the self-help building of services have been introduced. The Government share has declined steadily since then, till it is almost confined to an overall supervision and salary payments. Lately, The Comprehensive National Strategy (Sudan Republic, 1992) has publicly announced: "Making educational cost a responsibility of the whole society, and working to diversify its sources" as one of "seven pillars" of the plan of action, "each pillar became a focal point of the strategy...with defined goals, programs, and execution stages". The persistent deficit in budgets of local councils, and their failure to provide the simplest and most prominent needs such as essential furniture, textbooks, and teaching aid, tells that the government has reached its limits to be able to provide any more support. Given this background, in 1996, a State Ministerial Decree announced the closing of schools "Boarding Houses", which resulted in an enormous drop-out of pupils. Obviously, the apparent trend that is more likely to prevail in the future is further pull-off in official inputs and supervision.

The support by international and non-government organisations (NGOs), on the other hand, can hardly be more than partial projects, such as to add buildings, offer school equipment, support teacher training, or provide relief aid, in some selected areas. In other areas of Sudan, the role played by local people grew rapidly to cover basic aspects, such as school buildings, furniture, equipment, and even teachers salary incentives.

However, for the Beja population, because of non-supportive cultural attitudes and because of the almost nil expenditure power, the system can not depend on any sort of contribution from the locals. Thus, if there is any source of external support, it should be mobilised to cause a change in the cultural outlook, especially towards education.

This work, therefore, concludes that plans should include cultural interventions, at priority, beside, of course, economic initiatives. Despite the socio-economic hardships and losses, channels that have caused massive changes in the closed nomadic system, such as



the rural-urban migration had clear positive impacts with regard to schooling. The recent severe droughts and famines have already accelerated the process of cultural change. Thus, plans to slow-down the migration rates are recommendable, as seen from one angle, and not recommended, from the other. They are not needed because the social change implies settlement and liability to education, health, and other services leading to better living standards, and needed, on the other hand, to provide for social security and stabilise cultural attitudes.

The cultural change, among those who remained in rural areas, is limited, for there still exist a diversity of adaptive mechanisms and coping strategies. *Salif*<sup>11</sup>, for example, serves to endure the cultural structure and holds the local identities. Thus, there is a strong need to support the basic elements of culture through integrated cultural programmes. The local language (*Tebedwi*), the systems of traditional leadership and social institutions, values, positive attitudes, customs, and ethnic art are areas to be explored. As the schools are the centres for the projected social change, they should be prepared and better equipped to play that role. Particularly, the traditional system of informal education for both the young and adults needs further investigations in order to be strengthened.

Provided that there is the will and the ability to make the change, whether by external or internal sources, and weighing the effects of various factors on the process of drop-out, the specific plans of action may be prioritised as follows, with more emphasis put on girl schools:

- 1) the introduction of T.V. sets into the larger basic schools, where electricity exists and broadcasting is accessible. In remote parts, battery radios and loudspeakers serve as an alternative to initiate a school broadcast. The facilities also help to maintain public lectures and programmes by teachers, officials, and key persons in the community. Such a device may also be mobilised to establish the local languages, beside helping to overcome the severe Arabic language difficulties;

- 2) the provision of food, clothing and free school needs is a priority, given that parents have no cash exchange;

- 3) to establish a rehabilitation plan for the most deteriorated buildings and equipment;

- 4) to provide for teacher cash incentives and to develop a training programme that may also act as a motive and non-cash incentive for teachers to be stabilised in the job;

- 5) to introduce the experience of mobile nomadic schools, which has helped to reduce drop-out rates in Western Sudan (Eljaili, 1996);

- 6) in order to be adaptive with the local culture and system, the school curriculum and system need to be continually developed and revised.

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<sup>11</sup> *Salif* is a system of cultural mechanisms that regulates the community's exploitation of the local resources in order to maintain sustainable level of living, as well as represents the code of honour and proud tradition. It plays a tangible role in keeping the existence of Beja's culture, especially among the Hadendawa people (Bakhit and Hayati, 1995; Vågenes, 1995).

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