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An Urban Defense of Nomads



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The Agriculture and Livestock Transformation Agency – Group discussion with pastoralist groups (August 25, 2021):

"What is the issue with the RSF soldiers? Why do they fight? ", "Do they have no doctrine?", "What does No to War mean? ", "What needs to be done?"

This writing is a monologue and a journey of reflection to attest to the reality of my experience working with the second transitional government (the Juba Agreement government) and my current attempt to interrogate the answers to these questions based on the reality of that experience and to anticipate a political success that can break us out of this vicious cycle. Wherever truth and falsehood are intertwined, I will investigate how to avoid deception. This is what I read, what I saw, what I heard, and how I thought.

I worked as an agriculture and food systems program expert within a seven-person team as part of an alliance between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) to implement an initiative launched by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in March 2021 to manage the design and construction of what was later dubbed the "Agriculture and Livestock Transformation Agency" concerned with catalyzing, accelerating, and achieving sustainable growth and transformation of the agriculture, livestock and food systems sectors in Sudan through the introduction of innovative

solutions to address structural obstacles, and coordinate between institutions and actors by adopting a multisectoral approach to action.

The Prime Minister formed a steering committee that included the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, the Minister of Livestock, the Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources, the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, and the Advisor to the Prime Minister for International Partnerships, under which we worked. Our mission was to manage the process of dialogue between stakeholders to collect and analyze data and present technical options for the institutional design to the steering committee, including the purpose of the institution, its position in the state apparatus, its advantages, its structure and management, its costs and roles, and its relationships with the rest of the state apparatus, as well as options for legal incorporation, establishing its 3-5 years priorities and setting its 2022 plan of action. It was a rich experience filled with wonder, and I may need to sit down with scholars to find the words to describe the patterns I observed, recorded, comprehended, and memorized. In a subsequent presentation, I will discuss my views and ideas regarding the approach we took in establishing the agency, arguing that "butter melts, but what benefits people remains on the ground"

The agency's induction was projected to occur six months after work began in July. According to the set-up plan, discussions between stakeholders began, starting with state agencies from the principal federal ministries; Agriculture, livestock, and irrigation, as well as associated federal ministries; Finance, infrastructure, industry, trade, investment, higher education, research centers, health, labor, and justice... etc., passing through associated state ministries. The discussions were then opened to the private sector, civil society

organizations, banks, development partners, multilateral institutions, and organizations.

By August 25, 2021, the team discussed the Agency and compiled the inputs of approximately sixty institutions involved in the agriculture, livestock, and food systems sectors; the day was devoted to pastoralist organizations. I invited 22 representatives from sixteen organizations, institutions, and research centers involved in pastoralist and livestock issues. In addition to the findings of the extensive discussions held within and outside of state agencies to that point, our team reviewed the initiative and strategy utilized in constructing the institution, including its objectives, structure, institutional characteristics, areas of responsibility, and potential priorities. One of the earliest interventions was made by Ibrahim Al-Dai Ibrahim, Representative of the Youth Organization for Peace and Sustainable Development - Nomad Coordination - Darfur Region, who looked friendly, quick-witted, articulate, and knowledgeable. Ibrahim told us about their attendance at the introduction of an agricultural strategy during the deposed regime era, which was presented by one of the professors (I forgot the specifics he mentioned, but I believe it was the 2015 five-year economic reform program). After attending the three-hour review by the professor who was pleased and proud with their accomplishment, Ibrahim approached the Professor and stated, "We nomadic communities are not mentioned in this strategy!" The professor responded, "Sorry, we forgot you." Then, Ibrahim gently and with a wry smile requested that we change the session's title.

I personally modified the title:

Agriculture and Livestock Transformation Agency – Group discussion with pastoralist and “nomadic” groups (August 25, 2021)

Ibrahim returned to explain the historical exclusion of nomadic communities from the Sudanese state's development strategies despite their significant economic contribution, as well as the threats to the stability of peace and community security posed by the lack of basic services such as water, infrastructure, and education.

Below are some points and quotations from his interventions:

- Our communities suffer in order to secure safe drinking water for themselves and their flocks.
- Farmers were given land that had previously been used as pasture for livestock breeding. There is now no suitable legal structure in place to facilitate and control grazing routes. Because there are no effective rules in place to regulate this, the situation is tense in Darfur and Kordofan in particular, where South Sudan's secession has disrupted grazing routes. Thousands of lives have been lost as a result of these battles, as well as the loss of cattle production enablers.
- Many nomads endure risks to their safety and do not feel secure on pastures. This forces them to sell some of their animals in order to purchase weapons for their personal protection and the protection of their herds, or to migrate to neighboring countries that offer better services and conditions, such as Central Africa, which provides them with identification cards and health insurance for themselves and their livestock.

- We lack best-practice guidelines for animal production. Most children in nomadic communities do not have access to a basic education; therefore, we have to find ways to educate them. The Ministry of Education is dedicated to educating students through the fourth (or fifth) grade of Primary School. Our uneducated children continue to work as nomadic shepherds, while our educated children move to cities and find employment there. Our children with a fourth-grade education, the majority of whom do not own any livestock, fill out the Rapid Support Forces Entry Form.

The subsequent interventions were diverse, addressing the dialectic of stability and migration, the effects of extractive industries such as mining and petroleum, the impact of climate change, and institutional gaps on the lives and activities of pastoralists and nomads. We thanked the audience at the conclusion of the day after noting all of their comments and interventions. In the following days, I observed how the political winds of the Sudanese state, which is far more compatible with trade, agriculture (specifically irrigated), and sedentary grazing than with nomadic grazing, pushed nomadic priorities such as organizing pasture paths and providing nomads with the fundamental services such as water and education to the bottom of agency priorities.

The next time I saw Ibrahim was shortly after the coup on October 25, 2021, on Al-Hadath TV channel. He appeared as a spokesperson for the putschist military council and particularly representing the Rapid Support Forces. I checked his Facebook page prior to the war and saw that he was attempting to get civil groups to do something about the killing of two sons of nomads (Bashir Abdel Wahed Hamdan and Ali Hussein Abboud) with stones, knives, and sticks on the first morning of Ramadan, as documented by a video.

The incident was condemned by the Higher Coordination of the Valleys and Villages of the Nomads in western Jebel Marra, which accused the police of the Tandelti region of complicity with the murderers. In a post dated March 28, 2023, Ibrahim was wondering:

"Where are the leaders and cadres of parties, movements and pressure groups from these crimes against humanity? No condemnation, no consolation, no demands to stop the violations against innocent defenseless nomads. Where is patriotism, humanity, morals? Where are you, people? Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best trustee. Humanity is absolutely indivisible"

I do not know if Ibrahim is now a gunfighter, but I know he is aligned with the Rapid Support Forces in this battle of annihilation. This moment brings to mind what Magdi El Gizouli wrote on March 22, 2023:

" During the years 1983–1985, Sudan was struck by a continuous famine that was officially declared in November 1984 after a government delay, affecting between 8.5 and 10 million people, or nearly half of the country's population at the time, primarily in the western provinces and the Red Sea plateaus. Since 1980, levels of rainfall have been lower than anticipated, and cereal production has declined in all production regions, particularly in traditional rainfall production areas, which typically provide 80% of the grain harvest. The level of rainwater during the 1984 season was only 60% of the average, and cereal production dropped to nearly 50% of the average. 1984's maize production was roughly a third of that of 1983. The total deficit that year was estimated at about 30% of the country's grain needs.

The most severe impact was felt by the farmers of North Kordofan and North Darfur, whose harvests that year were completely ruined, causing thousands of families to flee east in search of pasture or urban refuge. In 1983, approximately 300,000 people escaped North Darfur for South Darfur, and this number doubled in 1984. Among them was the young Mohammad Hamdan Dagalo, who ended up in Nyala. Conflicts over land rights prevented the displaced from North Kordofan from reaching the south, so they migrated to Omdurman, where the number of indigent displaced people in 1984 reached approximately 42,000 individuals. Regarding the Red Sea, starvation and the loss of livestock compelled ten thousand Beja shepherds to seek refuge in relief camps along the road between Kassala and Port Sudan.

[...]

In 1985, international organizations monitored the availability of adequate amounts of food aid, but the catastrophic state of the transportation infrastructure prevented this aid from reaching those in need. Aid piled up in Portsudan. The port's handling equipment had repeatedly broken down, resulting in a five-day delay between the docking of ships and the beginning of offloading operations. Provisions were loaded onto freight locomotives to be transported from Port Sudan to Kosti and then via the railways to Darfur and via trucks to Kordofan, but the lack of fuel impeded the transport operations, and the profit-driven railway administration favored transporting consumer goods to urban centers over transporting food aid to the starving western countryside. Moreover, the floods severed the railway line between Kosti and Nyala at multiple points.

The commercial sector seized the opportunity presented by starvation and malnutrition without delay. Its proprietors vied to double their profits from relief contracts from Kosti to El-Obeid. The cost of transportation was exorbitant, and capitalists refused to agree to a fixed price. The prices reached the top of the ladder.

As the profits poured in, people viewed the entire relief effort negatively. Violence erupted in Kosti, the principal transport hub for humanitarian aid to western Sudan, and was repeated on the roads. That has become an additional justification for the price increase in transportation. The rains hampered transportation operations even more, exacerbating the misery of the hungry displaced by the spread of contagious diseases.

The heavy rains in 1985 did not resolve the devastation of the famine. Whoever did not leave his land and seek cultivation, did not find the seeds. And whoever found the seeds lacked an animal for plowing. And whoever found the animal was vanquished by the soil, which has been washed away by tremendous rains and devastated by overuse.

[...]

Famine is a byproduct of the relationship between food and people, and it is largely the result of a distributional imbalance that reflects the disparate purchasing power of different social groups competing for available resources. In other words, it derives from the market. The violence that broke out in Kosti and on the transportation routes is merely a protest against this crookedness. Consequently, the ratio of cereal production to population cannot adequately explain the famine. Bengal (1943), Wulu-Ethiopia (1973), and Bangladesh (1974) were the most devastating famines of the era, ravaging the population despite an

abundance of total food harvests and sometimes an apparent increase in production.

Cereal production decreased between 1980 and 1984 in total by 13%, so the question is, was this relatively limited decline the cause of the famine that affected 10 million people? By calculating the losses, North Darfur's shepherds suffered the most devastation, followed by farmers of maize and millet, agricultural workers (those who could find work), and cash crop farmers, with decreasing rates of food reaching their tables of 82%, 80%, 75%, and 65%, respectively. In Kordofan, the same pattern is repeated, but with a more severe impact due to the greater increase in grain prices, as the tables of herders decreased by 99%, farmers of cash crops (beans and sesame) by 95%, and farmers of maize and millet by 80%. In the Red Sea, these rates decreased by 99% among pastoralists, 84% among cash crop producers, 60% among grain farmers, and 48% among agricultural laborers.

Shepherds were particularly vulnerable to the market. They moved to sell their animals in order to buy grain, but livestock prices declined due to increased supply in the market and the exploitation of grain dealers of the desperate necessity that motivates the shepherds to sell what they had at any price. As a result of the famine, the wealth of the shepherds as a social group was transferred to the coffers of commercial capital, into which the earnings of relief transportation contracts also poured. The steady decline in the average number of heads of livestock owned by one family in North Kordofan, from 700 heads of sheep in 1975 to 40 heads in 1985 and 1.5 heads in 1992, and from 600 heads of camels in 1975 to 40 heads in 1985 and 0.4 head in 1992, is evidence for this forced transfer of wealth. For agricultural employees, either unemployment entirely depleted their tables, or commercial capital

enforced low fixed salaries in exchange for increased food costs. As the impacts of the 1983-1985 famine are difficult to attain with love and dignity, the vaults of commercial capital may be the resources from which dictatorship emerges every other time."

(End quote)

Rapid Support Forces is the gate of all those in whose faces we closed the doors until they were stunned about the value of life and played dice with it, and their creed became "let it rain stones." When I asked myself where these people came from, who made this dark possibility a reality? I found my answer: we all did.

As their specters and shadows haunt them, I find myself able to comprehend the inability of both adversaries and their followers to envision a future that does not involve completely eliminating the other at any cost. But I find myself closer to the spirit of the December Revolution, its love of life, and its peaceful preference for change, like the son of Adam who said, "If you do stretch your hand against me to kill me, I shall never stretch my hand against you to kill you, for I fear Allah; the Lord of the worlds." As its first demonstration went out for bread, I believe more in its ability to create an alternate reality in which energy is not spent on anything other than providing for people and meeting their needs.

No to war means to me moving in order to empty both sides of their soldiers by providing other alternatives that allow for the possibility of a better tomorrow, by providing people and meeting their needs. No to

war, a magnificent reality, for which I am willing to pay the most expensive price... Pardoning.

As for now, when the state has vanished, I am among a team that has been working to establish an emergency room for agriculture and livestock and a fund to achieve food sovereignty; The right of peoples to obtain healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced through environmentally sound and sustainable methods, and their right to determine their diet, agricultural and pastoral systems, and policies through dialogue between producers, distributors and consumers instead of the demands of markets and companies. This work is being carried out in coordination between cooperatives, resistance committees, demand bodies, research centers, organizations, companies, former officials, and everyone who finds a role for himself in upholding the issue of food sovereignty.

To Ibrahim Al-Dai and everyone who seeks to break the cycle of evil, your cause is higher and more noble than a number of Sudanese issues that sparked armed conflict. You are the furthest from the state's radar for development and the closest to the state's radar for violence, sometimes as instruments and sometimes as targets. But things should not be this way! I address you in your own words: *"These are crimes against humanity. No condemnation, no consolation, no demands to stop violations against innocent unarmed civilians. Where is patriotism, humanity, morals? Where are you, people? Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best trustee. Humanity is absolutely indivisible."*

This is a direct invitation to lay down your arms or to stop blowing into the fire, and to pay attention to what is good for your people and for all people. Join us in the emergency room and we will help you create the

nation of your dreams. Be the initiator of the establishment of the nomadic herder's unit so that everyone who can repair the crook can participate in the subsistence of the nomads and provide for their needs.

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