

## 2. THE COLONIAL OFFICER AND THE AID CONSULTANT - A CASE STUDY

By Terje Tvedt

This paper aims to argue in support of the importance of studying British colonial sources and British methods of research and planning in order to improve present day development planning.

The role of information and documentation services in economic and social progress is being appreciated to an increasingly large extent. It cannot be repeated too often that economic development refers to a specific country in specific circumstances and policy perceptions must spring from the recognition of historical uniqueness. The possibilities open to those dealing with development planning and research are, however, restricted in this respect. In quite a few of the countries where NORAD is working the infrastructure, organisation, expertise and financial means are inadequate for bridging the gap between needed knowledge and available knowledge. The administrative history of these developing countries is, moreover, short, and the acquired experience difficult to trace because of political conditions.

But in addition to these real problems, political and ideological attitudes among some people dealing with development questions lead to the neglect of a source of knowledge and information which is easily accessible. Important parts of what is of traditions and experiences are locked up behind a text called: "Colonial papers. Useless."

A common and striking feature in monographs on economic change or development studies is that they chronologically, generally start with the beginning of the post-colonial period at best, or with the establishment of the United Nations and its different organisations. Information and documentation services prior to this are frequently written off with words like those of Francis K. Inganji in his book published last year dealing with such services in East Africa, including the Sudan. They were "exclusively at the service of the colonial power and where situated mainly in the urban centres completely divorced from the needs of the majority of the population".<sup>1)</sup>

By briefly analysing one aspect of the planning history of the Jonglei Project in the Sudan as a case study and by pointing out some "forgotten" consequences of what is called the British "Indirect Rule" policy, I hope to show that it is unwise to ignore the colonial period.

Firstly some information about the Jonglei Project should be given. It is located on the Upper Nile in Southern Sudan. Long-term ecological effects and immediate consequences for human conditions in the Nile Valley are perhaps as important as those of the Aswan High Dam. The Jonglei Project, however, is less known, partly because it has not yet become a topic of great-power struggle as did the Aswan High Dam under Nasser. But it is at the core of the escalating war between the North and South of the Sudan.

The main aim of the project is to increase the waterflow of the White Nile down-stream of the great swamps in the Southern Sudan. The discharge of the river is at present reduced by approximately a half in that stretch of the river. By digging a canal of about 360 kilometres bypassing the swamps, the additional waterflow of the Nile will be about  $4.8 \text{ km}^3$  per year. The second stage will include dams on the Central African Lakes. The finished project will thus augment the waters of the river by  $9.6 \text{ km}^3$ , or about a tenth of the entire discharge of the Nile River. The British published 14 different plans dealing with the project, the first in 1894, then in 1899, 1901, 1904, 1920, 1923, 1929, 1932, 1936, 1938, 1946, 1948 and 1954.<sup>2)</sup> All these reports contain much interesting material. The Nile Basin in seven volumes present such extensive and detailed information about hydrological features that any present day waterplanner will probably feel disheartened if he compares with present day situation. But here we will focus on the report of the Jonglei Investigation Team from 1954. Although the project as planned would have had great negative consequences in the Southern Sudan, this report was the first that seriously took up regional repercussions..

My point is that this report, in five volumes, called The Equatorial Nile Project and its effects in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (1954), is in most respects far better than many of the consultancy reports published today. I will argue that these colonial officers out-do the aid consultant and that in this case the colonial government out-does many aid-organisations today.

The Jonglei Investigation Team was established in 1946 and continued working until 1953. Interim Reports were published in 1946, 1947 and 1948. Their final report was published in 1954. The work lasted for eight years during which their work was under permanent discussion by different political organs.

The Team was multi-disciplinary. Its first chairman was a member of the Irrigation Department. Its second chairman, P.P. Howell, was a former District Commissioner in the Nuer district in Southern Sudan. Howell was educated as an anthropologist at Cambridge. Before the research started he had been living in the area for years. He was fluent in the Nuer language and wrote scientific articles about Nuer law. Among the other British members of the team, five were from the Irrigation Department, two from the Veterinary Service, three from the Survey Department and one from the Ministry of Agriculture. In addition several Sudanese members came, among them two from the Survey Department and two from the Veterinary Service.

More than fifty man-years were invested in the reports. The expenditure of the Team was said to be 325,230 pounds for the years 1948 to 1953.<sup>3)</sup> Great parts of the region were surveyed on foot. No doors of secrecy were closed by the Government. On the contrary, their work was given top priority by the Government.

The information gathered is impressive. Let me illustrate with the following examples: the total number of detailed tables in the reports was 594 and the number of figures 241. The statistics on annual rainfall in the Jonglei Area from the year 1948 to 1951 were based on 60 stations of measurements. The Team erected a great number of gauge-stations for measuring hydrological conditions on the many minor rivers in the area. They established experimental stations for grassland production. Even records of catches of fish were taken in different places. The quality of their achievements is further revealed when the lack of roads, the remoteness of the region and the unhealthy climate are taken into consideration.

But what about their terms of reference? Perhaps the aim of the research was to lessen the exploitation of the Southerners? No, their terms of references given by the British Government in Khartoum, re-

quired a thorough study taking as the starting point the interests and needs of the people in the area. To indicate the scope and depth of their investigation, let me show you their programme of work for the three year period of field work from 1948 to 1951:

#### Hydrological Section

- (i) To carry out general and detailed surveys of the hydrology of the flood-plain and swamp formations of the Nile system between Nimule and Kosti in order to determine the hydrological effects of the Project.
- (ii) To carry out a general survey of the topography, climate, and hydrology of the whole area involved, including inland watercourses and tributaries of the Nile.
- (iii) To investigate domestic and stock water supplies in the area; this to include a programme of experimental drilling to determine the availability of underground water resources.
- (iv) To investigate all communications, including navigation on the main channels of the river.

#### Pasture Research and Agricultural Sections Combined

To investigate the general ecology of the area inland and on the flood-plains, to classify the main soil and vegetation types, and to assess the factors which determine their distribution.

#### Administrative Section

To investigate the sociological and administrative implications of the Project and to obtain all relevant information, including vital statistics.

#### Animal Husbandry and Pasture Research Sections

- (i) To study the grasslands of the area and their relative nutritional and feeding values.
- (ii) To study pasture management and to determine the present degree of pasture utilization.
- (iii) To study the livestock of the area, including their management, and the economic aspects of the cattle trade, present and potential.
- (iv) To determine the effects of the Project on riverain pasture and to estimate any losses.
- (v) By observation and experiment, to determine the best means of providing alternative pasture.

#### Agricultural Section

- (i) To study present crop husbandry practice, including local crops, cropping systems, and cultural operations.
- (ii) To study the implications of local environment on the crop husbandry system; and to assess the factors limiting crop production, including floods, droughts, pests, diseases, weeds, etc.
- (iii) To examine all economic aspects of crop production.
- (iv) To investigate the effects of the Project on the present and potential utilization of the flood-plains for crop husbandry.
- (v) By observation and experiment to investigate possible agricultural alternatives which may be needed to meet losses under the Project where alternative pasture cannot be found or provided.

#### Fisheries Section

- (i) To investigate the species of fish to be found in the area, the ecological conditions in which they flourish, their migrations, breeding habits, and distribution.
- (ii) To investigate local fishing techniques, methods of curing, and the part played by fish in the diet of the peoples, and to determine the potentialities of fisheries development in the area.
- (iii) To estimate the effects of the Project on the fish population and on local methods of catching fish.
- (iv) To investigate possible remedies for any losses likely to be sustained.

#### Survey Section

- (i) To carry out ground and aerial surveys required in connection with all aspects of the investigation.
- (ii) To undertake the preparation and production of maps and diagrams required for all reports". 4)

Furthermore, a strikingly modern feature with the 1954-report, is its awareness of unintended ecological and economic consequences and the problem of water allocation, so crucial in most schemes for river utilization.

If these five volumes by the British colonial administrators are compared with the many post-independence reports about the Jonglei Project, whether they are produced by the UNDP's Fact-Finding Mission of 1976, by academic experts from Leiden University, Holland, or by specialists



from Khartoum University, the latter category must generally be described as more fragmented, less accurate, less detailed, more narrow in perspective and, in some cases, even less sympathetic towards the Nilotes.

What can be learnt from this example? I do not argue that imperialism is a better system than independence or that British colonial administrators in general were more successful developers than for example NORAD-personnel are today. What I attempt to show is only that in some instances political requirements of imperialism gave birth to excellent scientific work of such a standard that aid consultants today have a lot to learn. If some aid-consultants writing about and planning hydraulic works in developing countries, for example, were to make a comparison between their work and those of the colonial officers in sun-helmet and khaki-shorts, they would have to admit that they lag behind.

My point is not that the British did this for the sake of development. The Jonglei Investigation Team was established mainly because the British wanted to use their report as a card in an important diplomatic game played in the Nile Valley against Egypt. The British anticipated that the Egyptian Government would have to pay for the research and the cost of the remedies in the South, because of paragraphs in the Nile Waters Agreement from 1929. The more detrimental effects of the project they could find, the more pressure could be put on Cairo, since Egypt was in desperate need of water. It is important to understand that in this case there existed, because of the diplomatic demands of British imperialism in the late forties, more favourable conditions for a report of this kind than existed later.

The Jonglei Report was perhaps unique in scope, but the archive in Khartoum and Juba in the Southern Sudan are rich in other development issues, too. The veterinary files, for instance, are very informative on the battle against rinderpest and other livestock diseases. This struggle was in fact won during the British period. In 1954 1 million cattle was said to have been vaccinated in the Sudan. One stated reason for this lasting priority, was to ensure proper supply for the allied troops during the wars. The recorded agricultural experiences are very extensive and the British put into effect great schemes for

stopping the creeping desert sand. In the Sudan-context many of the proposed solutions to development problems often have a history, they may have been tried before. The British had the habit of writing things down. I think it might be useful to consult their experiences.

Another important aspect in development research and planning with relevance for our topic, is the question of ethnic and tribal contradictions and conflicts.

This problem has been a non-subject in the post-colonial era of pan-Africanism and statebuilding. Generally speaking, the new elites have been reluctant or unwilling to acknowledge it, and few aid consultants have paid much attention to it. During the last decades many have come to accept an interpretation, which in the words of Mafeje, an African anthropologist, states that "tribalism is merely a fiction or false consciousness of supposed tribesmen, it obscures the realities of exploitation and control, the term is the mystification of imperialists".<sup>5)</sup> Such attitudes are understandable in a period when the unity of the new states are at stake, and when mutual conflict with foreign powers is hiding other contradictions. But applied today, it conceals perhaps the main source of conflict in many African countries. One can say that the balance between nationalism on the state level and ethnic solidarity and tribalism has been one of the main lines in their modern history. Without going into historical details, it is obvious that inability or unwillingness to recognize these problems has caused and still cause great troubles, upheavals and severe economic setbacks. One need only mention Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Zaire, Kenya, and the Sudan.

This is not the place to discuss why this is so. But one reason is obvious and important here. The British played on tribal institutions and political institutions of local government, and even in many cases, tried to introduce such institutions where none previously existed. It is a historical fact that the British created tribalism or ethnic rivalry in the developing countries, but they attempted to maintain or strengthen such institutions in order to rule and to counteract the development of a unified anti-British national movement. It was more a policy of "Divide and Rule" than "Indirect Rule" which the British called their policy.

But one result of this policy was that the British collected an enormous amount of detailed information about the history, traditions, land use, water use, ways of life and so on of hundreds of different ethnic, of tribal groups or of groups numbering millions of people which today are "forgotten". In the archives in Khartoum there are, for instance, only in the "Indirect Rule" files or the "Devolution files" which they are called, more than 3000 pages of rather empirical observations about conditions of the Darfur province and report after report on the Nuer. It has been used as an argument against collecting or applying data recorded by the British, that the material is biased. Since they were the colonial power their files are full of useless data collected to serve colonial aims. This type of critique has been raised by the "New Anthropology" school.

There is, in a way, a widespread "double standard" regarding attitudes to colonial research. On the one hand the British anthropological findings are written off because of the scientists' connection with the Empire, as argued in the book Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter.<sup>6)</sup> But when research is actually carried out, then we find that both some contributors to the book, as well as other social scientists, often rely on British data.

Perhaps the situation as to knowledge about ethnic and tribal conditions can best be explained by giving an example: When in the seventies, the Sudan Government decided on a redivision of the provinces of the country, they started off by spending three months reading British files in the archives. Not because they were particularly fond of their colonial past, but presumably because they acknowledged that these files contained the most detailed information at hand about the tribes of the country.

In political terms the situation can be described as a paradox: The reactionary British policy-line which was followed by the progressive political line of the nationalists has created a situation where the old British information is necessary - and the only available for implementing development schemes today.



Quite a few of the projects supported by NORAD deal with water, be it the digging of wells or taming of rivers. Since most rivers pass through areas where people of different ethnic and tribal affiliations live, any sort of project which implies water control will have consequences for the power relationships among these groups. Even a river project with the best of intentions to reach the poor can have bad, unintended effects if it alters a balance of such group power. The same is, of course, true of road building, which also seems to be a common NORAD-undertaking. If one is unaware of these local and often silenced contradictions in the recipient countries, the aid can reinforce them.

Without going into details, one can safely assert that quite a few of the plans drawn up by Norwegians for water research and planning in Africa, disregard this ethnic aspect totally. Long-term research plans are drawn up as if there were no human element influencing these strategies. Social scientists will only be involved in preparing the short-term plans, perhaps to fill the same role as the British imperialists said about their social anthropologists: "blunders" made by them are usually better "blunders".

To conclude: It is pure dogmatism to merely close ones eyes to the knowledge and experience to be found in archives from the British colonial period. There is, of course, much that is of no use to development planning. I would suppose that the bulk of the files can best remain in their drawer. But on the other hand there also exist good reports on a great number of fields. The colonial administration lasted in many places for more than half a century, and it ended just a few decades ago. And rhetorics apart, the power of the aid consultants is in important respect not less than many of their colonial counterparts and their affinities to the administrative set-up and the funding agencies are much the same. "Little Norway" for example, as the Norwegian centre in Torrit, not far from Juba, in Southern Sudan is called by some people, has probably more influence on local life than the British ever had in the same area.

One consequence of drawing a too sharp line between the colonial officer and the aid consultant is that one escapes a comparison. My opinion is that it does happen that some Norwegian aid consultants are less able, less knowledgeable, less informed, more bureaucratic and even less sympathetic to the people than many of their colonial predecessors. And in a situation where the trend seems to be one of increasingly more short-term jet-set missions, we have something to learn from the findings and research practice of the members of the Jonglei Team who spent years walking around in the swamps of the Upper Nile.

#### NOTES

- 1) Inganji, F.K., Status of Information and Documentation Services in Eastern and Southern Africa and Future Prospects, I, 1983, Bonn.
- 2) For a discussion of the historical development of the project plans see, Tvedt, T., Water and Politics; a History of the Jonglei Project in the Southern Sudan, "Invedoppgave", University of Bergen, 1984.
- 3) Ibid., p. 91.
- 4) Jonglei Investigation Team, The Equatorial Nile Project and its Effects in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, VI, 1954, Khartoum.
- 5) Mafeje, A., "The Ideology of Tribalism", in Journal of Modern African Studies, pp. 253-261, No. 9, 1971.
- 6) Asad, T., (ed.), Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter, 1973 London.
- 7) Johansen, S.S., Water Research in Kenya, 1983, Oslo.