

The impact of increased food prices on rural-urban-rural relationships. The case of Eastern Sudan.

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ABSTRACT

The global increase of food prices in 2007 has to a degree affected the Sudan like so many other nations and has been a subject of discussion at the national level. However, in the case of the Sudan the food prices increase has happened over a much longer time frame and it is difficult to trace its roots in the current world food crisis.

Price increases in essential imported commodities such as food stuffs, e.g. wheat, are reflected in local prices in the cities but there are also marked increases in locally produced staple foods particularly sorghum which is the most important locally produced food item as far as the rural and urban poor are concerned. The Eastern Region of the Sudan in general and the Kassala State in particular, which are main focus of this study, reveal that the underlying causes for the current local grain price rises have more to do with internal distribution systems, accessibility and policy issues than external factors such as increases in international food prices. Getting reliable information on such issues is politically very sensitive and therefore difficult to obtain.

The Eastern Region and particularly the Gadarif State is considered to be the breadbasket for the whole of Sudan and the Eastern Region is more than able to feed itself. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyse all the underlying factors that led to a situation in which a food surplus region in general suffers from food insecurity. The Eastern Region produces 23% of the total grain production for Sudan.

This study which is mostly based on findings from Kassala State which revealed the following:

- ❖ There is a major livelihood transformation among the pastoral communities who are symbiotically linked to urban communities to the benefit of the rural-urban poor. However, we have found very little evidence that the sedenterisation and urbanisation process is driven by the international food price increases.
- ❖ For livestock owners both rural and peri-urban the availability of animal food is the critical factor in securing their food security. Animal food is the second most important purchase along with human food for the livestock owning population who are the main producers of meat and milk for the urban centres. The terms of trade at present are not in the favour of livestock owners and that are adding to their economic and social vulnerability.
- ❖ From a policy and knowledge perspective at State and Federal levels there is very little understanding as to how the above mentioned rural-urban symbiotic relationships operate to benefit the rural-urban poor. The premise for intervention, be it in food security or other development spheres, is based upon rural-urban dichotomy which stresses the artificial rural-urban divide. There is thus a huge information gap, which needs to be bridged by fresh research that seriously looks at the urban-rural dynamics more seriously.

The authors of this report are of the view that there are a number of opportunities to enhance local food security by putting in place rural-urban inclusive policies which should include: more investment on the livestock sector, more investment on animal fodder, improving the local market infrastructure, revitalising the private sector, introducing better milk/meat processing technologies for home and abroad.