
Preface

For countless centuries, river basins have been fundamental to the survival of peoples residing in the vast drylands of Sub-Saharan Africa. The water, soils and living resources of these river systems—punctuating what are otherwise aridic and often harsh conditions—provide for human settlement, livestock grazing, seasonal flood (recession) agriculture, wild food harvesting, fishing and a host of other activities central to livelihoods. What happens to river basin systems determines the fate of millions of people. Predominantly pastoral in history economy and culture, the extensive drylands of eastern Africa are also where some of Africa's most ambitious economic development programs, including hydrodam, irrigated plantation, mineral, oil and gas projects, are being implemented.

One cannot experience the rhythm of daily life among pastoral villagers for any length of time without realizing that such developments have profound impacts on these longstanding survival systems and that there is an obvious disconnect between the life conditions of these pastoralists and the decision-making in the financial centers of Washington D.C., Brussels, and Beijing, as well as in the major cities of their own nations. Almost inevitably, one begins to question how these traditionally oriented peoples can possibly survive in the face of such development pressures and whether or not they can truly have a voice in determining their own futures.

This book is the outcome of a lengthy effort to answer these and other difficult questions as they pertain to sweeping changes in the semi-arid borderlands of Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan—changes already extending to the broader eastern Africa region. It is here that the Africa's largest hydrodam to date, the Gibe III dam, has recently been completed, on the Omo River in southwestern Ethiopia, and is moving into early operation. This megadam, together with its closely linked and extensive irrigated agricultural enterprises and a hydroelectricity transmission system for power export to the eastern Africa region, amounts to a multi-billion dollar development that is radically transforming the entire transboundary human and environmental systems. More than 500,000 indigenous pastoralists, agropastoralists and fishers reside in the lower Omo River basin, around Kenya's Lake Turkana in the easternmost segment of South Sudan's Ilemi Triangle. Most of them face partial or complete destruction of their means of survival, with no available livelihood alternatives. Already among the most marginalized peoples in the continent, the multiple ethnic groups in this region face impacts that are unimaginable to most outsiders.

From early on in the endeavor to understand changes underway in the region, the questions became more detailed. For example, what are the types of economies, or survival systems, in this vast, tri-nation transboundary region and how do they interact? How adaptive are these systems to changes in their environments and what are their main vulnerabilities in the face of major shifts in the resources available to them? What are the specific forces of government, international aid and private development now impacting the region and how have these come about? From what institutions and social priorities have they emerged? What account of the hundreds of thousands of indigenous residents has been taken—with what concerns and accuracy? What impacts have unfolded so far and how have the pastoralists attempted to cope with them? What human rights are pertinent to these changes and do the developments underway constitute violations of those rights? Finally, is there a positive way forward for such peoples to have a genuine voice in what economic development and other changes will be brought to their lands in the name of 'progress'?

I first came to know the peoples of this region many years ago, as a young ecologist with the international paleontological Omo Expedition, led by F. Clark Howell, Richard Leakey and Yves Coppens, in the lowermost Omo River basin of southwest Ethiopia. Basing a good deal of my work in pastoral villages in order to learn about the region's ecological change and its relationship to the indigenous land use patterns, I learned in the most concrete terms about the inseparability of 'environmental' and 'social' realities. Much of this effort is summarized in my book, *Pastoralism in Crisis: the Dassanetch of Southwestern Ethiopia*, and in several papers. Moving on to research and practical policy work elsewhere in eastern Africa

(within Ethiopia, Somalia, northern and coastal Kenya and elsewhere), I experienced multiple contexts where river basin developments, including hydrodams, have fundamentally transformed local socioeconomic and environmental systems and influenced entire nations. Everywhere I engaged in policymaking circles—from African ministries, international aid organizations and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences to remote administrative offices and grassroots organizations struggling to effect change, the enormous impacts—and often, the conflicts generated—from major river basin developments were apparent.

When invited to return to southwestern Ethiopia in 2008, I eagerly accepted the opportunity—this time with private foundation support to investigate the social and environmental conditions there. Surprised to learn about the virtually unprecedented development planned for this region, my efforts evolved into a multi-year, intensive investigation of the changes underway and their likely impacts on the region. Early on, it was necessary to form a research team, identified as the South Omo/North Turkana Research Team (SONT), with local residents from two of the region's major ethnic groups—the Dasanech and the (northern) Turkana. SONT was able to work cooperatively with elders from many locales throughout the transboundary region. Meanwhile, I and several colleagues co-founded the Africa Resources Working Group (ARWG)—an informal network of scientific and policy focused professionals with experience in the region. Both of these efforts proved essential to the complex tasks at hand.

Conditions for field-based research in the border region were difficult, both logistically and politically. Within Ethiopia, it was necessary to carry out all investigations with extreme care due to the Ethiopian restriction of independent investigators from the region, as well as extensive government political surveillance and repression—measures generating pervasive fear among villagers throughout the area. In Kenya, the situation was far less difficult, with community members far more able to participate openly in our work. Information gathering included settlement area mapping, ecological reconnaissance, village survey, male and female household head interviews, recording of elder life histories and recording of livelihood shifts and available resources. Local government authorities, aid officials and technical personnel active in the area (e.g., in fisheries/Beach Management Unit, water development, health relief work) provided vital information and perspective. In 2009, the Africa Resources Working Group released a preliminary report concerning the Gibe III dam and its likely impacts; I subsequently released a lengthy report on the matter, based on my investigations with SONT and the ARWG (Carr 2012)—a report first posted at the ARWG website and later at www.academia.edu.

It is my hope that the information and perspectives presented in this book will promote further understanding of the sweeping changes underway in this eastern Africa region and their significance, as well as contribute to discourse and possible solutions. If it is useful to inquiring government and aid officials, villagers, nongovernmental organizations, students, concerned scholars, and other citizens within Africa and abroad, it will have been worth the effort.

It has been a profoundly moving experience and an honor to work toward accomplishing these tasks in the company of so many wise, persevering and courageous people.

River Basin Development and Human Rights in Eastern
Africa — A Policy Crossroads

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2017, XIX, 240 p. 74 illus., 66 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-50468-1