

Peasant Organisations, Participation and the State: Two Case Studies from Rural Sudan

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The multiplicity of Africa's complex economic, social and political is a major preoccupation of national and international development practitioners and thinkers. For the majority peasants the experience of the crisis is a struggle for improvement and survival. Forming the largest part of the world's poorest population, peasants not only experience the continent's persistent socio-economic crises, but their situation is worsened by the direct and indirect appropriation and centralisation of state power. Forming the majority of labour in agriculture and the main productive sector of almost all African countries' economies, peasants bear the brunt of Africa's mounting debt burden while attempting to produce enough to feed themselves and Africa's growing urban population. However, they generate surpluses, which are extracted for reinvestment and future development. In this context they can also contribute to the future curtailment of centralised state power and to building a more open democratic civil society.

In no country on the continent have peasants, particularly the poorest 'among them, been so entangled by overarching state power as Sudan. Through direct tight control over production in the state-owned irrigated agricultural sub-sector and excessive direct and indirect taxation of the rain-fed traditional sub-sector, the Sudanese state maintains excessive power over the peasantry. In spite of these adverse conditions, Sudanese peasants have attempted to organise themselves through collective effort and using their own resources to improve their production and living conditions. Various forms of peasant organisations have evolved over the years. They differ in origin and form, in the tasks they undertake, their organisational structure, their membership basis and their relationship to the state and other outside authorities. Consequently the degree to which they have functioned as forums for peasants' participation and as bodies that serve and promote the interests of their members also differs.

Descriptors : Organizational Structures, Rural Population, Social Participation, Economic and Social Development, Peasant Organizations, Interest Groups, Associative Movements, Agricultural Cooperatives.

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