

MODERN OMAN

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**Adapting to Biodiversity Conservation:
The Mobile Pastoral Harasis Tribe of Oman**

Throughout most of the 20th century, pastoral peoples in the Middle East have faced enormous pressure to change their way of life and adapt to a more settled and hence modern existence. During the first half of the 20th century, an ambivalent attitude towards nomadic or mobile pastoralists prevailed with various efforts at private land registration and large-scale settlement schemes being set up with varying degrees of failure. With the consolidation of state power and authority after the Second World War however, most of the nations of the Middle East and North Africa turned to their pastoral peoples with a determined view to making them stay put in one place. People who moved were regarded as a threat to the security of the settled. Settlement schemes, it was assumed, would assure control over these far-flung peoples. Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt all attempted the sedentarization of these communities¹. Indeed the resulting disintegration of the pastoral community frequently created new problems for the nation-state. The international development efforts of this era designed to make nomadic peoples 'modern' also largely

¹ M. Sammane, 1990 *Bedouin Population Development: Findings and Recommendations*. DTCD. New York: United Nations.

failed resulting in a stalemate and often a national policy of benign neglect.

One significant new element in this universe is the budding international pressure for accountability, transparency and respect for human rights among conservation NGOs². This pressure is being translated in some corners into greater effort for sound social policy and concern with respecting the human rights of indigenous peoples through either greater efforts at participation or partnerships³. This move has given some pastoral communities a new voice and leverage in demanding sound social policy from conservation bodies as well as from national government for themselves and their communities in the deserts of the Middle East⁴. In Oman, however, such moves have lagged behind and recent experiences suggest that

² T. Moser, and D. Miller, "Multinational Corporations' Impacts on the Environment and Communities in the developing World: a Synthesis of the Contemporary Debate". In *Growing Pains: Environmental Management in Developing Countries*. Sheffield: Greenleaf Publishing 1999.

³ See for example:

– P. May, A. Dabbs, P. Fernandez-Davila, V. Goncalves da Vinha, and N. Zaidenweber, *Corporate Roles and Rewards in Promoting Sustainable Development: Lessons Learned from Camisea*. Berkeley: Energy and Resource Group, University of California 1999,

– M. Pimbert, and J. Pretty, *Parks, People and Professionals: Putting Participation into Protected Area Management*. Geneva 1995: United nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNIRSD). Discussion Paper 57,

– International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). *Whose Eden? An Overview of Community Approaches to Wildlife Management*. London: IIED 1994.

⁴ See for example:

– K. Irani, C. Johnson (eds), "Making it Pay: Can community based biodiversity conservation programmes be sustained through market-driven income generating schemes". Paper presented at the International Workshop on Community-Based Natural Resource Management, Economic Development Institute of the World Bank, Washington, D. C. 1998.

– D. Chatty, "Environmentalism in the Syrian Badia: The Assumptions of Degradation, Protection and Bedouin Misuse". In *Ethnographies of Conservation: Environmentalism and the Distribution of Privilege*, D. Anderson and E. Berglund (eds). Oxford and New York: Berghahn Press 2003.

– D. Chatty, M. Colchester (eds.), *Conservation and Mobile Indigenous Peoples: Forced Settlement, Displacement and Sustainable Development*. Oxford: Berghahn 2002.

moves to integrate a better understanding of indigenous mobile pastoral societies into the largely natural science focus of its biodiversity conservation effort would now be timely and constructive.

The Nature of Mobile Pastoral Societies

Mobile or nomadic pastoral societies in the Middle East have a number of features in common, and it is possible to formulate some generalizations about them. The definition of pastoralism that is used here is *animal husbandry by natural graze and browse with some access to crop cultivation*. As no pastoral group is ever entirely self-sufficient, it must maintain reciprocal and interdependent relations with sedentary communities on the margins of its grazing areas. The pastoral adaptation to the ecological environment has always presupposed the presence of sedentary communities and access to their products. Today, with even more sophisticated technology in the form of trucks, water bowsers, metal utensils and shelter frames, bottled gas, mobile phones and other trappings of the 20th and 21st century, the dependence on people outside the pastoral group is particularly apparent.

The pastoral way of life is shaped by movement – a mobility that is both philosophical and physical. The combination of seasonal and regional variability in the location of pasture and water makes movement of herds from deficit to surplus areas both logical and necessary. Pastoralists have a double reliance on land in the form of pasture for graze and browse and in the form of access to water resources for themselves and their herds. Each discrete unit or tribe seeks to control sufficient land and water for the livestock holdings of the group. The borders between tribes have always been fluid and subject to constant reinterpretation as the relative political and physical strength of one group vis-à-vis another fluctuated or

as pasture conditions became desiccated. Up until the mid-20th century, tribes were in constant competition with each other for the use of these precious resources, and the weaker units, or less ably represented ones, were often forced to give up their rights to use certain areas. In some cases this meant only minor readjustments in the allocation of resources within the tribe. In other cases it meant extensive tribal displacement.

The pastoral tribes of the Arabian Peninsula are often referred to as Bedouin, a term derived from the Arabic word, *bedu* (*badw*), meaning an inhabitant of the *badiya* – the large stretch of semiarid land or desert that comprises nearly 80% of the Arabian landmass (see map 1 Arabian Peninsula and Fertile Crescent). They have, for centuries, pushed their frontier regions into border areas of agricultural settlement and have, as often, been repulsed when central governments have had the strength to do so. This tug-of-war between agricultural and pastoral-based modes of existence often encompassed peoples that moved between both types of economic orders. When central authority was weak, the pastoral tribes conquered the land and associated agricultural villages and oases by *ghazw* (raiding) or by collecting tribute of *akhuwwa* (brotherhood)⁵. When central authority was strong, however, the tribes were forced to make payments to the government or retreat into the *badiya*.

For centuries expansions and retreats have characterized the history of the pastoral tribes of the Middle East in their special relations with central authority and have been documented in the works of Ibn Khaldun (1958), Volney

⁵ At one time, tribute (*akhuwwa*) was exacted from sedentary farmers generally in the form of crops in return for protection from raids (*ghazw*) by their tribe or others in the surrounding areas. This tribute-raid relationship was a simple business proposition whereby the pastoralist received a needed produce (grain) and the farmers gained a scarce service (security). In principle, it was not very different from a more widespread relationship whereby animal products were exchanged for dates or grain.

(1787), Oppenheim (1939), and Rafiq (1966)⁶ to mention a few. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, these tribes continued to jostle and fight for control over large stretches of pastureland and associated agricultural villages.

At the end of the First World War, Northern Arabia, nominally an Ottoman province, was partitioned by the League of Nations. The semi-arid lands of the *badiya* were divided up and distributed, under 'mandate status', to France and Great Britain. The southern wedge alone remained in the hands of Abdulaziz al-Sa'ud, the founding father of Saudi Arabia. This step, along with the subsequent establishment of British and French administrations in their respective regions, telegraph and road infrastructure, and the introduction of mechanized transport, had a tremendous impact on the pastoral tribes of the region. Many were to prophesize that these developments spelled out the death of their way of life. Most of these changes, however, were quickly absorbed by the Bedouin and altered to meet their own highly adaptive system.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Western development aid came to be the single greatest export from Europe and the United States to the Third World. Development experts came to regard pastoral peoples with scorn, if not disdain⁷. Pastoral systems of livestock management came to be regarded as minimal – if not controversial – by national and international experts⁸. In addition, many 'development' ex-

⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqqadimah*. translated by F. Rosenthal. New York: Pantheon 1958; M. Oppenheim, *Die Beduinen*, 4 vols. Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz 1939; A. Rafiq, *The Province of Damascus: 1723-1783*. Beirut: Khayat 1966.

⁷ R. Bocco, "La Sédentarisation des Pasteurs Nomads: Les Experts Internationaux Face la Question Bedouine dans le Moyen-Orient (1950-1970)". In *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines*, 1990, p. 26, pp. 1-2, pp. 97-117.

⁸ N. Dyson-Hudson, "Pastoral Production Systems and Livestock Development Projects: An East African Perspective". In M. Cernea (ed.), *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press 1991, pp. 219-256.

perts assumed that the pastoral peoples were ruining their physical environment⁹.

Unlike the more southern parts of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa have never been the focus of mass international pastoral development assistance¹⁰. Governments of the Middle East, perhaps because they regarded their pastoral populations as signifiers of internal political problems, sought local rather than international solutions. Accordingly, government policy in the Middle East has been directed at settling these peoples either by physical force or by economic enticement. Settlement of mobile pastoralists has been seen as the only way to control and integrate marginal and problematic populations that did not conform to the modern nation-state aspirations of the newly created republics and kingdoms of the regions.

Settlement Efforts in the Middle East

In the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula and in parts of North Africa, governments have attempted to lure the mobile pastoralists out of the deserts and arid rangelands to settlement schemes and agricultural pilot projects. These, in large measure, have failed. More forceful approaches have included revoking the traditional communal land holdings of these people. Modern private registration of land has been encouraged, particularly in the marginal areas of the desert adjacent to the agricultural belt, the Fertile Crescent, where dry farming of cereals can be supported in years of good rain. This last ap-

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

¹⁰ Neville Dyson-Hudson reports that the African livestock development programmes of the past two decades have been aimed at increasing livestock production, raising the standard of living of the human population, and improving the environment itself. The entire process could be seen as an effort towards transforming subsistence pastoralism into the beginnings of commercial livestock production, p. 220.

proach has had some success from the governmental point of view. At the time of the various cadastral surveys in the 19th and early 20th centuries, many tribal and sub-tribal representatives were able to register themselves as private owners of land that tribesmen previously had considered to be held in common. Impoverished families who were forced to leave the pastoral way of life through loss of herds or manpower – or both – often found themselves transformed into hired shepherds or, worse, agricultural labourers for their landowning tribal leaders. Even after several generations of uneasy compromise, these families have continued to keep some livestock – generally goats and sheep – and many maintained that they would return to their former way of life if circumstances made it possible¹¹.

In Saudi Arabia and the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula, the situation of mobile pastoral peoples has been complicated first by the discovery of oil, and more recently, the tremendous wealth that has come into the hands of these governments. Saudi Arabia has for decades tried to settle its large mobile pastoral peoples. Beginning as early as in the 1920s, settlement schemes were built to house these people. Initially, the urgency of the projects reflected the governments need to consolidate their hold over the country by controlling their far-flung and highly mobile peoples. The association of this way of life with a backward, less evolved human state, also contributed to government's efforts to suppress it. In later decades settlement projects built at tremendous expense were financed locally from oil revenues. Predictably, the schemes (e.g. the Wadi al-Sarhan Project, the King Faysal Settlement Project) failed. The mobile pastoralists, discouraged by at-

¹¹ A study commissioned by CARDNE (Centre for Agricultural Reform and Development in the Near East) in 1995 on the growing phenomenon of hired shepherds among the Bedouin of Syria and Jordan revealed the large extent to which this employment as shepherds and agricultural workers by some of the extended Bedouin family helped the unit to cling on to a pastoral way of life (Chatty, 1995).

tempts to turn them into settled tillers of the soil, flitted away. Some returned to their old way of life; others turned to new endeavours more compatible with pastoralism, such as in the transport industry or in trade.

With the huge increase in the profit from petroleum extraction, which the Arabian Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and the Sultanate of Oman experienced in the early 1970s, came a new approach to the 'problem of nomadic pastoralists'¹². Mass settlement schemes were abandoned in favour of enticements to individual citizens. Control, in a political sense, was attempted by encouraging the individual tribesman to come forward and register himself as a citizen. In return, these governments granted various privileges. In the wealthier states, with very small settled populations, registration carried with it an entitlement to a plot of land, a house, an automobile, and a subsidy for each head of livestock. In other states, registration meant a monthly stipend – generally in the region of the local equivalent of several hundred US dollars – often disguised as a salary for some form of national paramilitary service. As a general rule, two approaches to the problem of mobile or nomadic pastoralists have operated in the Middle East since the latter half of the 20th century: one of disdain and the other of enlightenment shadowed by neglect.

Enlightened View of Pastoral Adaptation Shadowed by Neglect: The Case of Oman

The six largest pastoral tribes of Oman divide themselves into two groups: those descended from Qahtan and those whose origins go back to Nizar (also known under the name of 'Adnan). The main Qahtani tribes are the Mahra, the Jeneba, the

¹² D. Chatty, 1996, *Mobile Pastoralists: Development Planning and Social Change in Oman*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bayt Kaythir and the Harasis¹³. These tribes gradually moved north into Oman from Yemen and the Hadramaut beginning two or three millennia ago. The Nizari or 'Adnani tribes include the Duru and the Wahiba. These tribes as well as other sedentary groups are said to have come to Oman from the north or through the Buraymi pass sometime in the 2nd or the 3rd century AD. There are other categories by which these largely pastoral peoples identify themselves. These include the differentiation between Hinawi and Ghafiri supporters – the opponents in the early 18th century civil war in Oman. In many cases, the Ghafiri supporters tend to believe in their Nizari or 'Adnani origins and the Hinawi supporters tend to hold to Qahtani myths of origin. Increasingly, members of these pastoral tribes have also self-identified themselves as Bedouin. Sustainable livelihoods of all these groups are based on domesticated livestock that can exist and sometimes thrive on the natural graze and browse of the desert. The well-being of these herds, and by association, these peoples, depends upon their continued access to the widely spread-out grass, tree and shrub cover throughout the desert regions they regard as their homeland. Livestock is the key to this way of life and mobility a basic feature in herd management and cultural identity.

For all the pastoral tribes of Oman, the organizing principle of social life is the herd. The well-being of the family depends upon the careful manipulation of the breeding cycle of the herds of camels, sheep and goats in order to have milk available for the family to drink all year round. The daily routine, the seasonal routine, and any migrations are determined by the needs of the herds. Whether living in a cement house, a house of plywood, or one made up of dead tree branches and

¹³ D. Chatty, "The Bedouin of Central Oman". In *Journal of Oman Studies*, 1984s, p. 6 (1), pp. 149-163.

tarpaulin, the organizing principle of their daily life is still livestock and access to natural graze and browse.

Throughout all the desert regions of Oman, life depends on access to water. In the past, survival depended on moving herds and households to water sources. Today, however, in most of Oman, water is moved to the herds and the households by truck or water bowser. The Harasis tribe, which is the focus of this chapter, represents perhaps the community most distant from urban centres and hence, the most extreme case. Up until the late 1950s, the rock and gravel desert plain (Jiddal al-Harasis) which composed of most of their traditional territory of about 40,000 square kilometres contained no water whatsoever. The only source of water available to them was found along the Awta – the lowlands of the Huqf escarpment lying just along the coast of Oman from Duqm north towards al-Hajj. During the winter months, the Harasis moved along the Jiddal al-Harasis searching for pasture and browse for their herds of camels and goats. In the event of heavy condensation, water would be collected by spreading blankets out and later wringing the water from them into drinking vessels. Their water consumption, however, was kept to a minimum with the family relying on their herds to provide them with enough milk for their nutritional and physiological requirements. During the summer the Harasis abandoned the extremely hot Jiddat plateau altogether and moved down into the Awta where their herds had access to the brackish springs of the region.

In the late 1950s the national oil company which had been exploring for oil in the northern desert of Oman, moved into the Jiddal al-Harasis and drilled two water wells, one at al-Ajaiz and the other at Haima. Within a few years, several families began to remain on the Jiddat during the hot summer months relying on their access to the water well and some sporadic delivery of water by tankers under the direction the oil company. For the Harasis tribe a revolution was in the

making – as had happened earlier in other tribal areas, like that of the Duru near Ibri. Wells for water were being sunk, animal troughs built and oil company bowsers were occasionally delivering water to key households.

The 1970s were a period of tremendous transformation for Oman as a whole. Disillusionment with the enforced backwardness of the state and medieval nature of previous government under the reign of Sultan Sa'id reached such alarming proportions that rebellion was inevitable. In July 1970, the thirty-eight-year-long reign of Sultan Sa'id ended, when he signed a formal abdication document in favour of his son, Qaboos bin Sa'id. Oman was kick started into the 20th century with significant road building and other infrastructural development. The country's development budget in 1971 for example, during Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id's first year as ruler was \$60 million. By 1975 it had grown to \$1,000 million. By the mid-1970s, the country had established modern road, sea and air communications with the rest of the world. Telegraph and telephones were becoming widespread, as were schools, health clinics and hospitals. Social welfare services and the water and electricity provision services were also rapidly expanding in ever growing circles from Muscat and Salalah.

By the early 1980s, with basic social services rapidly and methodically extended into the rural countryside of Oman, Sultan Qaboos issued a number of decrees of vital interest to the remote mobile pastoral communities. These peoples were to be targeted for development. The Sultan's wishes, reiterated in a number of speeches, were that the desert regions of Oman were to receive the same care and attention as the villages and towns of the rest of the country. This mandate was interpreted by the leading government ministers to mean that a way was to be found to extend the same social services to pastoral nomads without forcing them to give up their traditional way of life. Plans were drawn up to create a number of tribal administrative centres throughout the desert where the basic social func-

tions comprising health care, education facilities and welfare services would be available.

In 1981, the first UN project aimed at the development needs of a pastoral population in the Arabian Peninsula was initiated at Haima in the central desert area of Oman (see Map 2, Sultanate of Oman). The first year of the project was devoted to conducting an anthropological study of the indigenous population and identifying their felt needs and problems. The second and further years were focused on recommending and implementing practical programmes that would extend basic social services to this remote and marginal mobile pastoral community. The pastoral tribe associated with this region was the Harasis, a South Arabian speaking people, whose 3,000 members occupied a large, nearly waterless gravel and rock plain – the Jiddal al-Harasis – about the size of Scotland¹⁴. Raising herds of camel and goat, mainly for the production of milk, these communities migrated across the vast arid expanse of the Jiddat. By the mid-1970s, the Harasis had engaged in a major technological change shifting from camels to trucks for transport. By the early 1980s every household of the 17 sampled in the UN study had a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Such a transformation required a fundamental shift in household economic organizations. Each household had to find means of keeping these vehicles running and 'local' employment for one member of each family became a significant survival strategy.

The Harasis had become first exposed to opportunities for wage labour as early as the late 1950s when the oil company was exploring for oil in their territory. After two decades of unskilled and poorly paid work in this sector, the Harasis were eager to improve their opportunities. When the joint United Nations-Omani government effort to extend permanent

¹⁴ For a full ethnographic description of the Harasis tribe and their encounter with development planning, see: Chatty, 1996.

and outreach (mobile) social services to these people commenced its work, it was met with great support and enthusiasm by the community. Their logic was that this project would be able to offer schools which would transform their youth from potentially unskilled labourers into skilled, well-paid professionals. They saw this institution as a way out of the 'non-jobs' that were currently available to them as well-guards and installation watchmen. Instead, they looked to future employment with the oil company, the border police and the army. But these forms of employment required literacy in Arabic, high school diplomas and, in some case, English fluency.

Within two years and with the full support of the community, the joint UN – governmental project was capable of setting up a boarding school for boys – girls were admitted on a day basis, two mobile primary health care units, a welfare office for social affairs, and a veterinary clinic with an outreach programme. School enrolment, which began with 42 boys and 3 girls in 1982, climbed yearly. By the mid-1990s the boarding school, which covered primary and secondary education, had over 150 boys and girls in attendance. Some of the graduating boys succeeded in obtaining jobs with the police, the army and in the government civil service.

Efforts to develop their economic base, to improve their animal husbandry practices or to help to develop their marketing and trade interests did not appeal to the government. Instead, what government administrators did notice was the increasing number of pastoral people coming forward to request monthly welfare assistance from the government. These officials could respond to it as it fit in with patterns of engagement already established with sedentary communities in the towns and villages of Oman. However, these same officials came to regard such requests as proof of increased poverty among the pastoral sector of the country's population, evidence which required solutions in order to make these people 'economically productive'.

The pastoral tribes of Oman came to be increasingly classified by government administrators as a 'poor' people who were making no productive contribution to the national economy. They are seen as a drain on the country rather than an asset. This assessment was not derived from any particular facts of empirical study, but rather from the long-standing ambiguous nature of the relations between the urban, settled societies of the towns and cities and the mobile, remote, pastoral peoples of the desert interiors. Hence government 'income-generating' schemes were put forward which ignored the livestock livelihood base of these communities. Instead government focused on developing or teaching regionally acceptable craft skills (sewing, weaving and spinning) which might result in goods for sale at annual government-sponsored cultural events. Government schemes for pastoralists, generally an imitation of "community development programmes" for oasis farmers were regarded as a way to turn these 'poor' debt-ridden communities into productive contributors to the country's gross national product.

The Harasis' initiatives to persuade government – and its most visible associate, the oil company – to 'develop' their traditional homeland has been met with resistance or rejected outright. Tribal requests for government support of a system of water distribution which would rotate and change as households shifted their campsites around the desert were denied in favour of creating a system of 'fixed' facilities around brackish water wells where permanent water purification plants would be set up. Local Harasis' pastoral efforts to grow fodder in the desert and to introduce salt resistant plants were met with disinterest by Ministry of Agriculture personnel who continued to subsidize fodder farming and improved water spreading systems in the agricultural regions of the country.

The Harasis have been changed by these experiences. Their expectations of government support and assistance have grown and their political consciousness has been raised as they

experience and compare their lot to that of their settled neighbours in the north and the south. They have taken, and perhaps will always take, every opportunity to plead their case, to ask for assistance, to request help from the large society on the fringe of their universe. Their pragmatic position has been that sometimes they succeed and sometimes they do not. Although some of their material expectations – mainly centred on their acceptance of the motor vehicle and the way it has transformed daily life – have grown, their cultural integrity remains.

For the Harasis, subsistence animal husbandry livestock remains the central focus of their lives. A short study completed in 2001 revealed that over the past two decades household herds have remained remarkably stable with 100 head of goats and 25 head of camel remaining an average figure¹⁵. Employment of at least one male member of each household remains crucial for the well-being of the group. What has changed, is the development of a growing sense of frustration at the kinds of employment available. Having engaged wholeheartedly with the government effort to provide education to them, the Harasis now ask why they see so little return. They question why the oil company and its subcontractors still employ so many unskilled labourers from abroad, when they themselves seek employment and they are puzzled as to why so few of their educated youth seem to be able to manage to gain training and employment in the oil sector, or in government. There is a perceptible sense of being “left behind”, of not benefiting from the wealth which oil –

¹⁵ Household figures for livestock numbers derived from 1981-1982 and 1991-1992 (Chatty, 1996: 94-100) are generally comparable with figures derived from a social impact assessment carried out for the national oil company in the region in August 2001 (See: Rae and Chatty, 2001). These figures show that although human numbers are rising, livestock numbers have been maintained at reasonably steady numbers, in keeping with the Harasis assessments of what a sustainable size of animal herd is in the Jiddat.

extracted from their own tribal land – has generated for the rest of the country's citizens.

How the individual tribes people will adapt to the recent developments in the middle of the Jiddal al-Harasis is problematic. Here are a people caught in the modern post-colonial world of development and planning. In spite of the remoteness, the marginality and the isolation that characterizes the Harasis and their tribal lands, they are now beginning to face problems similar to the nomadic pastoral tribes of the rest in Arabia. Their lands have been, in a sense, confiscated and are controlled *de facto* and *de jure* by the nation-state. Recent infrastructural growth means that they have access to and are affected by development hundreds of kilometres away. Motor transport and motorized water pumping facilities have revolutionized their lives, as have telecommunications. Some have had the opportunity to leave and take up new lives. Yet, many have chosen to remain.

Biodiversity Conservation in the Jiddal al Harasis

Unlike Africa, the Arabian Peninsula does not have a long history of interest in conservation. Its neo-colonial period was very short, and only lasted a few decades in the middle of the last century. Its land mass is, in the main, arid and not suitable as a wooded reserve. It has limited large mammal species, making it unattractive for wildlife or tourist reserves. The earliest expression of interest in conservation in Arabia came about a decade or so just after the Second World War as the alarming rate at which gazelle, Oryx and other 'sporting' animals were being caught or killed became clear. In 1964, the Sultan of Oman issued a decree banning the use of vehicles for

hunting gazelles and Oryx¹⁶ the south east corner of Arabia. He also commanded the establishment of a "gazelle patrol" to protect these graceful mammals in the central Omani desert which borders Saudi Arabia and the Trucial States. Hunting parties from outside Oman were most probably taking advantage of its wide open and indefensible borders to enter the country for sport hunting outings. Despite the Sultan's ban, the Oryx was declared extinct from Oman and the rest of Arabia in 1972. The loss was lamented by the only human population to inhabit this region, the Harasis tribe. Nearly two hundred years earlier the Harasis tribe had been pushed into the remote and desolate region which came to be known early in the 20th century as the Jiddal al-Harasis. There, they found few large mammals other than the Oryx and the gazelle which they occasionally hunted for food. As Stanley Price makes clear, it was unlikely that sporadic Harasis hunting pressure – in open country with only ancient rifles and camels to hide behind – could ever have eliminated the population¹⁷. It was the motorized hunting parties with automatic weapons from outside the area that succeeded in doing so, despite the indigenous tribe's wishes to preserve the animal in its vast shared arid environment. In 1976 Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id put into effect a ban on the hunting or capture of all large mammals – specifically the Oryx and the gazelle. The following year a second decree was issued clarifying this ban. It unequivocally stated that no permission would be given to foreign hunting parties to enter and operate in Oman.

For several decades before the extermination of the world's last herd of wild Oryx in 1972, plans had been imple-

¹⁶There are only three species allocated to the genus *Oryx* in contemporary taxonomy although there are commonly believed to be five forms: *Oryx gazella gazella* (gemsbok); *O.g. beisa*; *O.g. callotis*; *O. dammah*; and *O. leucoryx* (Arabian Oryx or white Oryx).

¹⁷M. Stanley Price, *Animal Re-introductions: the Arabian Oryx in Oman*. Cambridge Studies in Applied Ecology and Resource Management. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, p. 42.

mented to create a World Herd in captivity, at a number of zoos around the world, for eventual reintroduction into the wild. In 1974 Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id gave the green light to his expatriate advisor on the conservation of the environment to explore the potential for restoring the Oryx to Oman as part of its natural heritage. In 1977 and 1978 a consultant attached with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) toured extensively throughout the interior of Oman, with a Harasis guide, searching for the best location to set up the reintroduction effort. Two unpublished reports were produced for the IUCN¹⁸, both concluding that the ideal habitat for the Oryx reintroduction project should be in the Jiddal al-Harasis, and concentrated in an area known as Yalooni, as it had "the best vegetated pan on the Jiddal, with resources of grazing, shrub and tree browse"¹⁹. The reports also recommended that the whole of the Jiddal al-Harasis should be proclaimed a wildlife reserve or sanctuary. These recommendations were accepted, and in 1980, the first Oryx from the World Herd were flown back into the country and released into the main Oryx enclosure at Yaluni. Ten Harasis tribesmen were hired to serve as Oryx rangers, tracking these animals and generally keeping accurate daily records of their movements.

The project experienced a prolonged "honeymoon" period, and for the first three years there were no conflicts between the indigenous Harasis population, the growing expatriate conservation management team, and other Omani employees. Gradually, however, difficulties began to appear. The first of these difficulties manifested themselves in terms of competition over grazing between the herds of domestic goats and camels and the reintroduced Oryx during prolonged

¹⁸ Jungius, 1985.

¹⁹ Stanley Price, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

drought²⁰. That was followed by conflict between the lineages of the Harasis tribe over access to employment and special benefits, and later between the Harasis and neighbouring tribes sharing borders with the Harasis who had been ignored in this conservation effort²¹. Although the goodwill with which the project was initially accepted remained evident among the older generation who had grown up with the Oryx, others began to express their lack of commitment. The appearance of poaching (first reported for gazelle in 1986), and its yearly increasing level caused by rival tribesmen pointed to the flaws in planning, design and implementation which top-down conservation projects all too often share.

The Harasis were greatly saddened by the extermination of the Oryx. They had shared the same ecological niche with the Oryx for centuries. The tribe had been pushed into the remote, waterless plain of the Jiddal nearly 200 years earlier by stronger pastoral tribes²²; the Oryx, which had once graced the whole of the arid desert regions of south Arabia, had been pursued and hunted until, by the middle of the previous century, it too was found only in the Jiddal²³. The Harasis had seen the progressive decline in numbers take place and had recognized the looming tragedy. Their stories and campfire tales spoke about this decline. But they had been unable to stop the motorized hunting parties that descended upon them from the Emirates and elsewhere in their search for Oryx herd. The idea of setting up an Oryx sanctuary in their traditional territory had never been discussed with them, nor had they

²⁰ Stanley Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.

²¹ The Harasis are one of six major nomadic pastoral tribes in Oman: the Mahra, the Bayt Kathir, the Jeneba, the Duru, the Wahiba and the Harasis. The Harasis are locked into an extreme and harsh landscape which, until the 1960s, had no source of water. To the west of them is the Empty Quarter (the *Rub'a-il-Khali*), to the south are the Mahra tribe, to the east are the Jeneba tribe and to the north are the Duru and Wahiba tribes.

²² *From Camel to Truck*. New York: Vantage Press 1986, p. 81.

²³ Stanley Price, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

been consulted on the most suitable area to place such a sanctuary²⁴. The aims of the project, its goals, the implied restrictions on infrastructural development, and even the importance of their cooperation were never put forward to the tribal community. Once this internationally supported project had actually commenced, however, the Harasis went along with the spirit of the enterprise; they were sincerely pleased to see the Oryx returned to the Jiddal al-Harasis. And for a limited number of men there was the opportunity of paid employment as "Oryx rangers" tracking and generally keeping an eye on the reintroduced animals²⁵. As long as the Harasis were perceived to have no aspirations of their own, no desire to see an improvement in their access to water, no desire to have regular road grading, or infrastructural development in their traditional homeland, relations with the Oryx reintroduction project remained untroubled. But the Harasis, like people everywhere, are opportunistic. They wished to improve their lives, and had no special desire to remain in some sort of pristine traditional state just for the sake of remaining unchanged. Slowly, at first, and later with greater speed, the Harasis came to realize what was being expected of them and what constraints they were under. They came to understand that, in drought conditions, they were expected not to camp within the vicinity of an Oryx herd, even when all other grazing areas were depleted²⁶. At

²⁴One Harasis tribesman was consulted. He was known to the biodiversity conservation advisor through his work for the national oil company. Yet, he was not part of the political leadership of the tribe, who were not consulted, in fact, until the handover of Yaluni was a *fait accompli* (see Chatty, 1996: 136).

²⁵Ten Harasis men were given jobs as rangers in 1980 and the number grew to 17 by 1986 (Stanley Price, 1989, p. 203). These jobs were well paid by local standards. But more significantly they were meaningful, and involved using skills already honed after a lifetime in the desert tracking animals, cars, and people.

²⁶A confrontation over grazing competition in the mid 1980s should have raised the alarm with conservationists. Several Oryx calves had been frightened either by the Harasis camps or the presence of their goats and the Oryx reintroduction manager requested that the Harasis move away. Some refused. They simply could not

about the same time, the tribe's long-standing campaign to have a water well dug by the Ministry of Water and Electricity in a promising area north of Yaluni, appeared to be blocked by the staff at the Oryx reintroduction project. Furthermore, the Harasis felt that efforts to have the national petroleum company regularly upgrade roads in the vicinity were also being thwarted. At the same time, the long-standing rivalry between the Harasis tribe and their neighbours, the Jeneba, found new expression. An old blood feud between the two tribes had been settled by the Sultan's representative in 1968, and relations between the two tribes cooled down. More numerous and better educated, and having had longer exposure to schooling, the Jeneba tribesmen managed to obtain most of the skilled jobs available in the tribal centre of Haima, the administrative capital of the Jiddat al-Harasis. Some wanted the better paying jobs at the Oryx project, but discovered that these positions were restricted to Harasis tribesmen. Although the relationship cannot be proved, the fact that there had been a tremendous rise in the rate of poaching (by 1998 only 130 animals remained of the herd estimated at around 400 in 1996) and that those caught were all Jeneba tribesmen, suggests that inter-tribal rivalry was on the rise²⁷. Furthermore, to many disaffected, largely unemployed men and rival tribesmen, the Oryx

understand that the survival of their herds of goats was less important than a few wild Oryx.

²⁷ The estimated number of Oryx poached in 1996 is drawn from several informants both on the Jiddat itself and in the capital, Muscat. In 1997 poaching of mainly female Oryx increased dramatically and in 1998 only 30 female Oryx were reported to remain in the wild. In 1999 the project management team brought all the 30 female Oryx back into the camp enclosure while it reconsidered how to keep the project alive. Omani soldiers were then posted at the Oryx Sanctuary in order to protect the female Oryx in the enclosure at Yaluni and also to discourage any further illegal capture. Poaching for live Oryx was spurred on by the large sums (sometimes in excess of \$30,000) which the wealthy elite in neighbouring countries are offering for wild Oryx to add to their private zoos. The pattern of poaching in the Jiddat is suggestive of traditional tribal raiding. The Jeneba obviously see the Oryx as "belonging" to the Harasis. So the act of poaching can be regarded as an expression of economic and political rivalry.

sanctuary makes no sense other than to put wild animals first, before people and domesticated herds. They see no benefit to themselves, their families or their community. The opportunity to make some money by illegal capture thus becomes a temptation difficult to resist, especially as they have no sense of ownership or participation in the animal sanctuary or the larger, national biodiversity conservation effort in general.

Nearly a third of the Jiddal al-Harasis was identified for a national nature reserve in 1986 as a preliminary step in turning the area into a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site. In 1994, the northern and eastern section of the Jiddal al-Harasis, an area of 27,500 square km was established by Royal Decree as the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary. The Harasis tribe was not consulted nor educated as to the significance of this decree. Few, if any, Harasis understood that the decree was the first step towards dividing the Jiddat into three land use zones: a core area with the strictest environmental protection; a buffer zone, with fairly strict protection, in which a limited number of activities would be permitted if they were compatible with conservation objectives; and a transition zone where most activities would be permitted unless clearly damaging to conservation objectives. Nor did they know that a land use and management plan was being prepared for the entire area²⁸. A cursory examination of the preliminary report clearly revealed that the Harasis, were still not being consulted or integrated into the conservation scheme in any way other than as passive participants²⁹. This lack of consultation with the indigenous population was defended by some of the conservation advisors in the country with the claim that the tribe would not have under-

²⁸ See the *Preliminary Land Use and Management Plan: The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary* report commissioned by the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment (1995), Sultanate of Oman. It has since been superseded by further studies, none of which are available to the general public. Further information is available periodically on the UNESCO World Heritage Site's web pages.

²⁹ Oman, 1995. *Preliminary Land Use and Management Plan: The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary*. Muscat: Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment.

stood the 'sophisticated' issues involved.

Working quietly and consistently for the past ten years, the Harasis tribe have begun to challenge this conservation zoning system. They have succeeded in overcoming strong resistance to having a reverse osmosis water plant built by the government in an area that is considered a buffer zone of the sanctuary. This has created some difficulties for the Oryx sanctuary management team. A similar situation is likely to occur in respect to local roads. The management plan intends that a careful network of local roads be established "in consultation with the stakeholders' requirements in the area". These are listed, in the following order as, wildlife conservation, tourist access, mobility of government staff, and finally the "*legitimate movements* of the indigenous pastoralists" [the Author's emphasis]. The Harasis and Jeneba tribes are unlikely to allow themselves to be considered the last, and they are likely to challenge who has the right to determine the "legitimacy" of their own movements. Quietly and persistently, as in the past, they will work to achieve what they feel is necessary for the needs of their communities.

Fortunately, the goodwill of the Harasis tribe remains largely in tact. Being a small, marginal tribe, for decades far removed from the seat of government, they are used to long protracted battles until their points of view are recognized. However, for the long-term sustainability of biodiversity conservation development, it is in the interest of the state and the conservation authorities to try to bring the Harasis population and neighbouring tribes into a truly participatory relationship with the project. Otherwise, the project has no long-term future. With ever-increasing numbers of Harasis youths attending the high school at Haima (the first class graduated in 1993) there is still the possibility that the local population could be drawn gradually into the conservation project – through concerted education, curriculum development, and skilled employment – in a more significant capacity than the "passive

participation"³⁰ of the past. Truly interactive participation may prove to be the solution to the current malaise.

Sustainable conservation requires, above all else, the good will of indigenous populations. As McCabe³¹ and others have demonstrated, linking conservation with human development offers the most promising course of action for long-term sustainability of nature and human life. McCabe argues that nature reserves and other protected areas must be placed into a regional context. If the economy of the human population is in a serious state of decline, the establishment of a wildlife reserve in their midst does not auger well for long-term sustainability. On the other hand, if the problems of the human population are addressed and the community envisages benefit from a combined conservation / development scheme, cooperation and long-term sustainability is possible. It is this lesson which the Oryx Sanctuary management team now seem to be heeding with its newly-found interest in bringing a social scientist on board to work with its largely natural science oriented staff³².

Conclusion

Although each country in the Arabian Peninsula has to face different sets of economic, political and social factors, a feature that is found in common throughout is the plight of the

³⁰ J. Pretty et. al., *A Trainer's Guide to Participatory Learning and Interaction*. IIED Training Series no. 2. London: IIED 1994.

³¹ McCabe, et al., "Can Conservation and Development be coupled among Pastoral People? An Examination of the Maasai of the Ngorongoro Conservation area, Tanzania". In *Human Organization*. 1992, vol. 51 (4), pp. 353-366.

³² Although the Oryx Sanctuary website still maintains very little focus on the indigenous mobile pastoral peoples in their midst, information from recent Omani graduates studying in the UK indicates that the Oryx management staff are concerned to understand better the pastoral tribal systems and is considering hiring a social scientist to join their team.

subsistence of mobile pastoralists. Without exception, their territorial usufruct is no longer recognized by the central government; their struggle to subsist has required that they acquire modern forms of transport that can only be supported by a form of wage labour. By accident, mismanagement, and force of circumstances, these pastoral peoples have been left to find their own solutions. Their dependence upon government has remained superficial, and these communities continue to adapt to changes in their environment; ever searching for a meaningful and viable existence for themselves and their herds. What remains to be seen is whether international pressure for accountability, transparency and respect for human rights among international conservation agencies will continue to hold weight³³. Within the global conservation movement, concern for the human rights of indigenous peoples has been translated into a local search for more participative forms of natural resource management so as to exhibit greater respect for indigenous livelihoods. How effective that recognition becomes depends on the continuing demand internationally for accountability and transparency. All indications are that the global environmental movement is making strides in that direction most notably with articles 8j and 10c of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992), the Statement of

³³ In 2001 the national oil company seemed to be responding to international pressure to integrate the local stakeholders, the mobile pastoralists, into participatory social development. After commissioning a series of social impact assessments, the company hired a Shell Nigeria employee who had experience of social development. Her recruitment and terms of reference were managed at the highest level of the oil company, but her performance on the job was severely lacking. After less than two years in post, she was dismissed and all activity in the realm of social performance has come to a stop. Some of the more cynical Omanis have commented now that she has come and gone, they can go back to managing affairs as they did in the past (personnel communications). This view is not far from that which can be gathered from the work of Judith Kimmerling in her assessment of oil company practices in Ecuadorian Amazon. (Judith Kimmerling, "Uncommon Grounds: Occidental's Land Access and Community Relations Standards and Practices in Quichua Communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon", *Law and Anthropology*, 2001, vol. 11, pp. 179-247.

Principles on Indigenous Peoples and Conservation, (World Wide Fund for Nature, 1996), the World Conservation Congress resolutions on Indigenous peoples (IUCN, 1996) and most recently the Dana Declaration on Conservation and Mobile Peoples (2002)³⁴, which was fed into the World Parks Congress Recommendation 5.27 on Conservation an Mobile Indigenous Peoples in Durban, South Africa in 2003 and in the World Conservation Congress in Bangkok in 2004.

In the remote and largely arid lands inhabited by mobile pastoralists in the Middle East, indigenous human rights movements are non-existent. Good social policy recommendations by international conservation and pressure on national governments to respond will depend upon continuing global efforts to promote sound social policy and prioritized local partnerships. Without such external efforts, it is unlikely that the mobile pastoral communities of the Middle East alone would be able to leverage support for their rights, interest, and desire to see investment in their traditional territory take on the shape which they, themselves, feel would benefit them.

³⁴ (www.dana.declaration.org).