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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Sultan Qaboos University

جامعة السلطان قابوس

Sultanate of Oman

سلطنة عمان

8th - 10th January 1995

من ٨ الى ١٠ يناير ١٩٩٥م



Proceedings

المؤتمر الدولي
لإنتاج الحيواني في المناطق الحارة



THE ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS AND POTENTIALS OF EXTENSIVE ANIMAL KEEPING IN ARID AND SEMI-ARID CLIMATES

The Case of the Butana/Eastern Sudan

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In the Old World Dry Belt, the largest semi-arid region of the world extending without interruption, animal keeping plays an important part in the utilization of natural resources by human beings with a view to achieving an income. This also applies to the animal holders in the Butana/Republic of Sudan. As a result of the extreme climatic conditions, their economic system and way of living was optimally adapted to the extreme climate of this locality, whereby animal keeping played a crucial role. Nowadays, animal keeping is unsteadied by crises that threaten primarily the existence of the people depending upon it for their subsistence.

The economic background which caused animal keeping to lose its function as secure existence basis is the topic of this study. One of the main problems in the course of the survey was to ascertain how animal holders act/react in the face of extremely fluctuating amounts of rainfall which cannot be forecast but which are typical of this region. The animal holders in this area must take into account these climatic conditions, and this requires behavioural patterns which are totally different from those prevailing under humid, hardly fluctuating climatic conditions.

Even nowadays, it is possible to successfully practice extensive animal keeping in the traditional way in the Butana. The main problems arising from this form of animal keeping are caused by the social environment and not so much the climatic framework conditions. Without integrating agriculture (irrigated and mechanized rainfed agriculture) and animal keeping on farms, it is, nowadays, no longer possible to manage one's business successfully and lastingly. However, only the very few animal holders in the Butana practicing traditional animal keeping have the possibility to get in on modern agriculture. In the long term, for many animal holders who do not practice agriculture, this will mean giving up animal keeping.

Key words: Extensive Animal Production, Traditional Farming, Sudan.