

DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH IN THE SUDAN

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In 1977, a conference on philosophy, religion and development was organized by the department of philosophy at the University of Khartoum. Håkan Törnebohm (who was the first professor of philosophy in the University of Khartoum, from 1957 to 1963) and I (who lectured there from 1961 to 1966 and received my Ph.D. there in 1965) saw this as a welcome opportunity to reestablish contacts with the University of Khartoum and the Sudan. The conference was unusually stimulating, and we decided to pursue some of the themes of the conference. We formulated a research project with the title "Research, Ethics and Development - Research Policy in the Sudan". The aims of the project can be summed up as follows (this is the text included in the Norwegian Development Research Catalogue 1981):

The aim of the project is to work out a conceptual apparatus which is adequate for analysis of the relations between research and development. One of the starting-points of the project is current theories of scientific development. By generalizing the concept of paradigm, which is taken from the theory of science, to all development, it is hoped to shed some light on existing ideologies and practices of development, particularly with regard to the sciences (in a broad sense, including the humanities and the social sciences). The empirical material consists of interviews and various printed and mimeographed material from the Sudan. The project is intended as a step towards the development of a philosophy of development.

With economic support from NORAD (and in the initial stage also NAVF and SAREC), Håkan Törnebohm, Dr. Ibrahim Ahmed Omer (head of the department of Islamic studies at the University of Khartoum) and I interviewed some twenty-five researchers and research administrators at the four national universities and the National Council for Research in the Sudan. On the basis of the transcripts of the interviews, we have now put together an edited version of the interviews and provided them with introductions, which help to give a historical and systematic perspective on the research scene in the Sudan ("Development and Research in the Sudan", edited by Tore Nordenstam, manuscript, 476 pp., 1984). A number of working papers and research reports have also been produced by Håkan Törnebohm and myself.

(Cf. the list of references below.) The project was concluded with a conference entitled "Queries about Development", which was organized by Håkan Törnebohm in Göteborg in September 1984, with participants from Scandinavia and the Sudan representing such fields as theory of science, folklore, Islamic studies, social work, human geography, business administration, and literature.

A red thread in our work is the contrast between technocratic and humanistic practices of development. In the kind of development practices which have spread notably after World War II, the emphasis lies clearly on the technical and economic aspects of the enterprise, and the planning procedure takes place above the heads of those who will be immediately affected by the changes in the environment, for instance the herdsmen living around a river. We use the term "humanistic practices" as a general name for attempts to break this pattern. In humanistic practices, the emphasis is on the people concerned; human concerns are the focus of the development projects; and technical expertise is called in to assist with certain aspects of the project only. In our interviews, we found a general dissatisfaction with current development thinking and a willingness to search for alternatives to the established patterns. "One of the difficulties of development is that you employ people to advise you as experts who don't really know", said one of the leading researchers and research administrators in the Sudan, Professor Mohammed Omer Beshir at the Institute for African and Asian Studies in the University of Khartoum. "What happens is that people who are foreign to the country and its conditions give you say two million pounds for feasibility studies. At the end you find that two thirds of this money goes back to the country which gives the aid and the money, directly or indirectly. It is not developing the Sudanese. It is developing others." Similar ideas were expressed in so many words by most of our interviewees. For details, I have to refer to the volume Development and Research in the Sudan.

- Tore Nordenstam and Håkan Törnebohm, "Research, Ethics and Development", *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1979, pp. 54-66.
- Håkan Törnebohm, *On Complexes Capable of Development with Special Attention to Fields of Research*, Report No. 141, Department of Theory of Science, University of Göteborg, 1984.
- Ibrahim Ahmed Omer, Tore Nordenstam, Håkan Törnebohm et al., *Development and Research in the Sudan* (ms., 476 pp., 1984).
- Göran Wallén, ed., *Queries about Development*, report from the conference in Göteborg in September 1984 (forthcoming).