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SUDAN

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL REGION OUTLINED

Khartoum AL-AYYAM in Arabic 19 May 83 p 9

[Article: "Minister of Agriculture in the Region Says There Are 35 Million Arable Feddans in the Central Region"]

[Text] Coordination between the regional and central ministries is essential for determining investment projects.

[The sum of] 750,000 [pounds is required] for the reclamation of forests in the region that were cut down.

Dr 'Uthman Khalifah, the region's minister of agriculture, food and natural resources spoke about the achievements of the plans and programs of his ministry. He spoke about the difficulties that impeded these programs and the new view for conserving natural resources in the region. He also spoke about encouraging investments in agriculture nationally or regionally in the Central Region.

The minister said, "There is no doubt that the Central Region is rich in natural resources. There are about 35 million arable feddans, and there are the two rivers, the Blue Nile and the White Nile. There are small rivers--al-Rahd and al-Dandar--and there is ground water which is waiting to be put to profitable use. Besides, the quantity of rainfall which is large may amount to 1,000 millimeters a year.

"These factors have collectively placed the region in a position of distinction compared to other regions. It thus won investments from all over the nation. The Central Region also has the lion's share of investments. There are more than 8 million feddans that are being put to profitable use under national investment projects that are irrigated [by man] or by rain. There are also more than 4 million feddans in the Central Region that were distributed as private sector investment projects. However, the general situation in the irrigated organizations, which are affiliated with the central government, has created many problems for us throughout the region. The region has no authority and cannot determine performance or set it on the right course in these national organizations. Since these organizations have an area of over 4 million feddans in the Central Region, all the workers and farmers rely totally on the region for all services: health, education and other services. This is in return for the fact that the yield from these projects, whether it is cotton or cottonseed production, is advantageous to the region. This is in addition to the yield earned by the farmer from the final individual accounting.

"All these reasons put us in a position of hoping--and I do not say asking--that we have in this region a leading role in setting performance on the right track so that wealth would prevail among citizens and farmers, in the region and in all of Sudan.

"We in the region encourage investments, and we support the provisions of the 1980 law that encourages investments. In our opinion, however, there are some drawbacks to this law. We set forth this matter in the course of numerous meetings with the fellow ministers of finance, agriculture and irrigation. We also presented this problem at the Fourth Conference for the Socialist Union of Sudan. We are pleased that the conference came out with a specific recommendation that the region play a role in encouraging and determining investments throughout the region or in Sudan as a whole. We hope that the provisions and articles of the law that encourages investments will provide the region with a leading role in this matter.

"We do not accept [the notion] that the central government approve projects and relay those approvals to the region. It is our opinion that the role for investment and investment requests must stem from the region first. An investor is to submit a request for a particular investment to the governor of the region or to the region's minister of agriculture. We would then study that request and ascertain that it is compatible with the regional plan in the context of the national plan for investments in agriculture. After that we would turn over this study to the governor because he is the one who knows all the problems that result from agricultural expansion, from cutting down forests and from conferring on others pastoral resources and other natural resources. Governors would study these matters with the councils of the districts in question. The [investment] request is to be submitted to the district council, and it is to be looked into so that the recommendation that is made would not conflict with the interests of nomad Bedouins; would not encroach on forests by having forest trees cut off; and would not limit the areas of villages, the havens of tribal units and the areas set apart for traditional farming by ordinary citizens. After that the district council would issue its recommendation, and that would be turned over to the general secretariat for its final endorsement.

"In our opinion this method will spare the district and the region many disputes [such as those] we are facing today between shepherds, citizens and nomad Bedouins. Therefore, we support the law that encourages investment, but we think that it would be more beneficial for Sudan to examine this matter carefully and to have new rules and controls that would give the region the role it is required to play in setting investment on the right track throughout the region. In our financial policy we began contacting international organizations for all of Sudan. This is because if we are not able to draw up an investment map for the Central Region, which is rich in natural resources, we will lose our way and we will make the same mistakes that we made when investments were made in the early days of local and national government. Land, agriculture and ground water experts are to draw a map identifying arable land in the region; land that is suitable for irrigation; crops and areas that would be suitable for rain irrigated land; and areas that are to be preserved as natural pasture land for animal resources, particularly since the region is rich in animal resources. This land must be determined by the district councils so that it may be designated for pasture and for the nomad Bedouins."

Forests

"The region and Sudan as a whole rely on forest revenues. Forest revenues in the region may be in excess of 2 million pounds. Therefore, it is essential that the forests we must take possession of and safeguard by law be designated so that investors won't seize them even if they had authorizations from the central government. If we were to do away with all the forests of the region, the region would be threatened with desert encroachment and defoliation, and we would face a major crisis [in the efforts to provide] fuel, furniture and support for the various districts from the products of these forests. Therefore, the policy that we are following now is that of not cutting down a single meter of forest unless we plant two meters first. We can thus reclaim the forests that were sorely damaged by major investment projects. This is because an investment project finds out where all the forests and lumber in the project area are located and does not leave a single meter of that forest behind. Therefore, the laws that will be enacted must determine a certain area that any investment project has to leave as a forest to protect the land from wind and defoliation and to serve as a resource for the animal cycle and as a source of revenues for citizens.

"Therefore, we are encouraging investments. This map that I mentioned will define the proper course for an urgent investment plan and for a long-term investment plan for the region. We cannot distribute all the land in the region in 1 or 5 years. We must be prudent and prepare a large area of land for future generations. We must also get our hands on pasture areas and forest areas so these can become sources of revenues for Sudan, for the region and for the districts."

Graduates of Colleges of Agriculture

The region's minister of agriculture had this to say about taking the graduates of colleges of agriculture into the various activities of his ministry and the possibility of giving them farm land so they would shift [their attention] from seeking government employment and employ their energies and scientific capabilities in farming and production.

"There are in the region qualified agricultural specialists in both areas of agricultural production: plant and animal. There are also qualified personnel in the area of agricultural services. There is a main office in the region, and there are major agricultural research stations which offer services in the areas of scientific research. Therefore, we consider the region a basic site where graduates can be utilized. This is a normal phenomenon because there are resources available in the region, and these are provided to workers in the area of agricultural and animal production and to graduates so they can produce and work. Many applications were submitted to us when we began forming the regional government. These applications were submitted by qualified personnel. Besides those we found in the various governorates, we recruited many graduates.

"A problem has emerged in recent years involving the first chapter of the budget in Sudan's constitution. We were therefore inclined to seek the assistance of graduates. We asked the district, on the one hand, to designate for us grade positions for the graduates and, on the other hand, to fill the shortage that some districts in the region continued to suffer from.

"We have apportioned all the graduates who are agricultural inspectors to the 20 districts. There is a shortage, however, in some districts such as (al-Karmak), Qaysan, Yabus, Tandalti and (al-Damazin). But we will end this shortage, as I mentioned, by finding work for [the graduates]. We are encouraging graduates to turn to production, and we are not asking them to go work in government offices as we did before. Instead, we are encouraging graduates by what we do: we approve small investment projects limited to 25 feddans. We designated scores of approved projects for new graduates in the Central Region. Most of these projects are in the district of al-Rahad. We are also pleased that some graduates of agricultural institutes, such as the Abu Hiraz and Abu Na'amah institutes have submitted applications for acquisition of automated agricultural projects. We are in the course of determining such projects for those graduates so they can make an effective contribution to the modernization of conventional agriculture throughout the region, particularly in the southern part."

Expanding the Process of Cutting down Forests

"There is a fact that must become known to everyone. There is a technical department in the chief forestry office in Khartoum which is charged with the task of determining the forests that must be cut this year, the following year and so on. This means that forests are cut down according to a central plan. In my opinion this is a normal policy, but it must be accompanied by actions to put the land from which the trees were cut to profitable use to provide revenues for the executive people's council which was accused of cutting down those trees."

"On the basis of the policy that was approved by the regional Council of Ministers and followed by the regional Ministry of Agriculture, we are now leaning towards cultivating these forests whose trees were being cut during the past 10 years. We saved the necessary funds, and we allocated more than three fourths of a million pounds to reclaim these forests. We began planting the acacia nilotica forests particularly in the Blue Nile [Province]. We planted very large areas in the provinces of al-Jazirah and the Blue Nile, particularly in the areas of irrigated projects such as the Blue Nile and White Nile Organizations and at the sugar farms and refineries. In Kinanah and ('Aslayah) we began planting camphor trees, because in 4 or 5 years these trees will yield a return equal to 2,000 pounds per feddan. If we plant more pine trees in the land that was appropriated from al-Jazirah Project or from the irrigated organizations, we will be able to provide considerable revenues and returns for the region and for residents of the various districts. There is also a policy that we are following in the region: we will not cut 1 meter of any forest until we plant 2 meters. With this equation we will be able to restore the splendor and the vegetation to some districts in a few years. These trees had been cut down either arbitrarily or for major investment projects authorized by the region."

"The governor will also make it legal for us to appropriate from any investment project, beginning with a 25 feddan orchard to an authorized project of 100,000 feddans, a part of that land so that a certain percentage of the land be planted with forest trees. We will begin putting this program into effect next season, God willing, even for small orchards."

"We laid down a plan in the 1983-1984 budget, and it was approved by the regional People's Assembly. We set aside about 700,000 feddans of forests in the Blue Nile Province."