

Preface

This Special Issue of Danish Journal of Geography presents selection from the scientific outcome of the research activities conducted within the framework of SEREIN - The Sudan-Sahel Environmental Research Initiative. The work reported has been funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administered by 'Det Strategiske Miljø-forskningsprogram' (The Strategic Environmental Research Programme).

SEREIN was created in 1994 in response to a call for proposals for research on sustainable use of natural resources in developing countries. The African component of this research programme emphasises agriculture in semi-arid regions and two main areas of interest were identified: 1) physico-biological processes in agro-ecosystems and 2) socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors' influence on human management of natural resources.

With the aim of addressing these issues, SEREIN was created as a combined effort of researchers within the fields of botany, soil science, agro-climatology, land use systems, socio-economy, and anthropology. Four university departments worked together to provide a multidisciplinary research effort within the field of natural resource management in the West African Sahel with specific emphasis on human land use strategies. These were analysed with respect to: their nature determined potentials and constraints; their impact on the local and global environment; their demographic and cultural background; and their susceptibility and resilience to changes in the economic and institutional environment.

The understanding of the development problems in the Sudano-Sahelian region is often blurred by rather simplistic notions of causes and effects of ecological degradation and desertification. The overall objective of SEREIN was, therefore, to contribute to a better and more realistic understanding of the Sudano-Sahelian situation, through research of issues of key importance to an increased or stable agricultural production, on an ecologically sound basis.

On behalf of the entire group of SEREIN researchers I would like to use this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to Danida for funding the activities and to the anonymous international peer referees of this journal for their serious work and many good suggestions for improvements.

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