

At the Desert's Edge: Oral Histories from the Sahel



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Abstract

The book is a collection of interviews conducted in 1989-90 with older members of Sahelian communities. Its purpose is to discover the perception of change in the Sahel through the oral histories given; it is asking questions about how life used to be, what factors have contributed to constructing present Sahelian life, and how and why communities continue. The accounts of history show common themes: the decreased in tree cover, the increased population pressure which has resulted in the shortening or disappearance of the fallow season. Many interviewees talk about the changing role of children, the increase in formal education and the decline of the family and community in child rearing. Drought features repeatedly, sometimes as a new phenomenon, unknown in the time of the interviewees childhood. Hunting, farming and fishing are all deemed to have been easier and more productive in the past, and the resulting poverty is considered to be more severe and

widespread. The major contribution of the book is to the understanding of oral history and the appreciation of the importance of the view from the ground. The book focuses on the experience of the individual, making the account both subjective and personal, and thus showing in human terms the impact of a changing environment.

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