6 Labour Migration: An Option for Peasant Livelihood?

Migration comprises a multitude of physical movements in space and time. It is a process which is spatially subdivided into sending areas, routes of migration and receiving areas. With regard to the motivations of migrants, three types of migration can be distinguished: enforced migration, voluntary migration and distress migration. The first is decided upon by external powers. Resettlement programmes of governments for instance fall into this category. The second is the outcome of a decision-making process of migrants and their families. It refers to labour migration and to migration for the purposes of education or marriage. The third type of migration is caused by deprivation. In this case the decision to migrate is made in order to escape from an environment which is no longer felt to guarantee survival. Migration due to drought, crop failure and famine is, among other causes, covered by this category (Sharp et al., 1991, p. 2). This classification is of course a theoretical one. In practice motivations overlap and the border lines between the categories are vague.¹

This chapter concentrates on labour migration, which is defined here as a movement of human beings away from home, undertaken with the intention of finding employment. The other fields of voluntary migration (education and marriage) as well as distress migration are considered only in those cases where they are not clearly separated from labour migration. Enforced migration is excluded from this study. The focus is on the economic and social repercussions of labour migration on the families and communities staying behind. The leading question is: what role labour migration has in securing the livelihood of the peasants who stay in the rural sending areas of migrants?
MOTIVATIONS, FUNCTIONS AND THE IMPACT OF LABOUR MIGRATION: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The definition of labour migration allows a breakdown into distinct components. 'Labour migration' includes a temporal aspect of movement, which makes it possible to discern seasonal (also called circulatory), temporary and permanent migration (Sharp, 1991, p. 2a). Seasonal migration comprises a period of a few weeks or months and implies regular return of the migrants. Temporary migration may last for one or more years. The migrants might come back for holidays from time to time and return to their places of work, but they intend finally to settle at home again. Permanent migration refers to people who leave their homes in search of work and never come back, either because they settle down near their places of work or because they fail to find regular employment and struggle along among the poorest of the society in the receiving area.

The component 'of human beings' refers to the persons who migrate. They can be classified according to their sex, age, level of education and social class. Furthermore, it is possible to differentiate between individual migrants and migrating groups.

Labour migrants are also characterized by the component 'away from home'. This could refer to the distance or direction of movement. The former differentiates between migrants who move to a neighbouring region or town, those who leave for a region which is located in a remote part of the country and those who go abroad. The latter are labelled 'international migrants'. The direction of migration classifies migrants according to origin and destination, that is 'rural–rural', 'rural–urban', 'urban–urban' or 'urban–rural' migration. The categories 'distance' and 'direction' inevitably overlap.

The component 'undertaken with the intention of finding a job' shifts the analysis to the conditions of the labour market and to the requirements and constraints for job seekers. It also includes the question of the motivation of labour migration.

The definition of labour migration implies a further component which also refers to the part 'away from home', but in this case the accent is put on 'home'. As a component of labour migration, this aspect has been rarely studied. It is assumed here that this part of the migration process is the one which could reveal most on the relevance of migration for the livelihood security of peasant communities.
Characteristics of Labour Migrants

People who migrate need a degree of flexibility which is higher than that of others. Flexibility could be related to spatial mobility and to skills. Mobility can be considered under the aspects of age, sex, distance and sector of the place of destination and period of migration.

Conventionally it is assumed that spatial mobility correlates with youth and to a certain degree with gender. Scholars frequently mention that the labour migrants tend to be young male adults, ranging from their late teens to their early thirties (Williamson, 1988, p. 430; Richards and Waterbury, 1990, p. 382). A few authors maintain that whereas labour migration used to be a domain of young men during colonialism, the share of women in migration has been increasing since Independence (Eades, 1987, p. 4; Brydon, 1986; Sudarkasa, 1977). These statements only consider rural–urban and international migration. Textbooks rarely deal with internal rural–rural migration.

Skills are also likely to increase flexibility, because a skilled person can be employed in more fields than an unskilled person. Skills are the result of education and training. To find out whether this connection could explain a male bias in labour migration, statistics on male and female participation in education and in the labour force are considered in the case study presented below.

Motivation of Labour Migration

During the 1960s and 1970s theorists focussed their research on rural–urban migration, stimulated by growing concern about the rapid urbanization of Third World countries. At that time, the term ‘migration’ was exclusively used for the ‘rural–urban’ type (Lewis, 1954; Fei and Ranis, 1961). Todaro presented a more differentiated analysis conceding an ‘urban traditional sector’ providing entry for new migrants (Todaro, 1977, p. 221). He constructed a model which shows the potential equilibrium between the rural wage and the expected urban wage. He assumed that migration was rational as long as the urban wages expected by risk-neutral migrants were higher than the rural wages. With this model Todaro tried to explain urban unemployment. He concluded that rural development must have priority over urban development in order to reduce rural–urban migration (Todaro, 1969). Even today economists usually divide labour migration into ‘push’ and ‘pull’ motives in order to identify the causes which make migrants leave their homes, as opposed to the
reasons which make (urban) destinations attractive for them. Their key assumption is that higher wage rates in the cities attract rural people. Migration hence would transfer rural surplus labour to the labour-deficit capitalist sector and eliminate wage differentials between the rural and urban sectors. Several theorists set up general equilibrium models in order to enable policy-makers to determine measures which would be significant in creating the balance, which is primarily long-term wage equalization (Williamson, 1988, p. 443). Thus, the spatial and the motivational dimensions of migration have been central to economic development research.

However, it is doubtful whether wages are a meaningful indicator to measure the attractiveness of the cities of today. The cost of living is much higher there than in rural areas, where the basic food supply is partly guaranteed without entering the markets. Free housing and sometimes free transport as well as reciprocal relations between labourers and rural people have to be considered in addition to rural real wages. Furthermore, the expenses for migration (mainly transport) have to be subtracted from the migrants' urban income.

Until recently migration theorists focussed on the individual migrant who was supposed to decide on the locality of his work in terms of optimizing utility. Whereas scholars largely agree that the migrants gain from migration, the question remains whether the rural kin of migrants also gain, whether they lose or whether they are affected differently. Two major steps have been made recently which are likely to lead theorists out of the narrow migration models developed so far and open up avenues towards answering the question of the losers and winners in the migration process:

One step has been to turn from the individual migrant and to explain migration as a household decision. The second step has been built on this, leading to the assumption that wage gaps are less important in deciding whether to migrate than the expectation of diminishing risks by diversifying household income sources (Stark and Levhari, 1982). Consequently, the push–pull categories have been criticized in favour of more complex models to explain the motivation of migration (Jamal and Weeks, 1988; Sharp et al., 1991).

The household economics approach regards time and money as critical for economic decision-making. Time is not only required for farm work, but also for income-earning activities, household work, child raising and several other off-farm occupations. Each activity is ascribed an opportunity cost. It is assumed that decisions on production, acceptance of new technologies and migration are guided by
comparative advantages in order to maximize household utilities. An example would be peasants who prefer migration to applying improved farming technologies, because the opportunity cost of time might be lower in wage earning occupations than in farming with the new technologies (Low, 1986, p. 75).

This view implies the household to be an income-pooling unit, which as a whole benefits from opportunities seized by individuals. As has been shown above, this is a false assumption. Instead, decision-making within a household depends on an internal process and on weighing up all of the external conditions affecting the community (Whitehead, 1990, p. 17). Hence, migration might be preferred over applying improved agricultural technologies, because:

- in the short run, cash might be more urgent for a powerful faction of the community than increased agricultural production;
- the improved technology might not directly benefit the power-holders within the community and those who would benefit might not be able to assert themselves against them; and
- the improved technology might fit in the prevailing gender pattern and therefore, might be restricted to certain gender-specific tasks which diverge from the intentions of those who provide the new technology.

The decision to migrate, ultimately made by the migrating individual, could thus be influenced by other persons within as well as outside his household, by internal as well as external factors. The question remains: for whose benefit besides their own (expected) do men migrate? This question has led to the approach of the risk-spreading household.

Jamal and Weeks (1988) point out that since the 1980s there has been a change in the dynamics of income distribution between urban and rural areas, tending to widen the gap between rich and poor regardless of their urban or rural location. However, although the income gap between town and country has narrowed considerably, migration from rural to urban areas is still increasing. Shifting the focus of analysis onto rural-urban interactions, Jamal and Weeks affirm that decisions to migrate are neither made by individuals nor stimulated by higher average incomes in urban areas. It is the family which compares marginal incomes and, since the marginal income from farm work might be nil or negligible, sends an adult son to work in the city. The migrant is expected to earn enough to make a
net addition in cash to the family income (Jamal and Weeks, 1988, p. 273). Thus, income generated by other members of the family is included in the calculation which leads to the decision to migrate.

This is not new. As early as 1970, Boserup developed a similar explanation for migration. She started her analysis, like most anthropologists of her era, by considering rural–urban migration to be induced by pull factors, mainly the attractiveness of the cities. She assumed that peasants took up rural–urban migration because the cities promised a ‘modern’ life style for men as breadwinners for their families and an easier life for women as housewives. Although Boserup observed that many migrant women were working as petty traders in the towns, she regarded the spreading of female self-employment as a transitional phase which would come to a standstill as soon as the men had established themselves as sole income-earners. Boserup drew attention to the continual access to land and other means of subsistence which remain with the rural part of the family. She interpreted this as a security net for the migrants (Boserup, 1982, p. 179). This early analysis is quite optimistic compared to those which followed. It is still relevant, because it already indicates a splitting of work for livelihood security between men and women and between rural and urban parts of one and the same family. Risk-spreading of households thus does not seem to be a recent phenomenon, as Jamal and Weeks assume.

These approaches imply a change in the perspective which has severe theoretical implications.

Firstly, the relation between ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors has to be reconsidered. Taking into account the interconnections of external forces like macro-economic processes and social change and internal pressures as for example the power relations within households, a clearcut differentiation between push and pull factors seems to be nearly impossible. Their explanatory or practical value becomes doubtful.

Secondly, assuming risk-avoidance to be the main cause of migration invites a gender- and age-differentiated analysis of risk-spreading. Migration has to be viewed then as one among several livelihood options of a social unit. An analysis of the historical and present social dynamics of the migration process would be necessary to assess its status among other livelihood options properly.

Thirdly, the new insights require a shift away from the individual migrant to a larger decision-making unit. In most of the economic literature, the individual has been replaced by the household unit (Ellis, 1988, pp. 163–83). The dubious aspects of this view lead to the plea:
to extend the analysis of decision-making beyond the household;
- to take conflicts within any ‘unit’ into account; and
- to agree on a notion of household broad enough to include absent household members. Only under these preconditions is it justified to regard migration as one means among other ‘local’ ones to spread risks.

Fourthly, the new perspective implies the possibility of including the problem of food security in the research on the decision-making process to migrate. Thus it provides a way out of the narrow wage-centred analyses of the migration process. Risk-spreading by locating family members in urban as well as rural areas and by tapping various sources of income and food in order to redistribute the surplus within the family would be the new focus of analysis. The social relations thus have to be considered as part and parcel of the decision to migrate.

Thus, studies on the motivation of migration should include:

- the sources of livelihood (incomes as well as production for family consumption) of the migrant’s family members;
- the interests and role of the family members in the decision-making process which leads to the departure of the migrant;
- the benefits the stay of the migrant at the place of destination has for the rest of the family or his community of origin, in terms of income as well as in terms of entitlements to food, goods, housing for students from his family or community, jobs for more migrants and so on;
- the question of who the migrants of today are. Are they, as Jamal and Weeks like their predecessors imply, really mostly the sons of poor peasants whose labour is abundant in their areas of origin? This should be answered by thorough empirical studies.

The success of the strategy to spread risks through labour migration depends on several factors. First of all the personal success of the migrant is decisive. Given he finds employment, social factors become crucial. Still, whether the migrant sends remittances or not, invests at home or not, keeps the contact or not, the household members at home depend on his good will and his chances to gain from migration. As long as women have less opportunities or are even restricted from migration (Broetz, 1991, p. 22), this dependence keeps them subjugated under patriarchal power.
The Impact of Labour Migration on the Sending Areas

If they investigate the impact of immigration, economists tend to consider mainly international migration. Sticking to macro-economic cost–benefit analyses, they concentrate on the repercussions on the labour market in the sending country and on migrants’ remittances. Return migration and social repercussions are rather fields of anthropological research.

Many scholars argue that international labour migration acts as a safety valve for the labour markets of poor countries, releasing the unemployed to the jobs provided in the rich countries (Appleyard, 1989, p. 30). This is beneficial to the economy for the case of unskilled labour migrants whose departure does not negatively affect industrial growth in poor countries. However, some scholars have found that most of the migrants had been employed before and that their leaving created labour shortages which hampered development (Appleyard, 1989, p. 30). On the other hand, their departure frequently benefits other people who thus get a chance on the labour market (Richards and Waterbury, 1990, p. 385). This does not only occur in the migrants’ countries of origin, but has even extended to the receiving areas of migrants, due to the increase of sponsorship and ‘chain migration’ (Eades, 1987, p. 9). That means that migrants encourage migration of their relatives or fellows and provide them with housing and food for the period until they find employment (Appleyard, 1989, p. 23).

Three main repercussions of migration of unskilled men on the rural sending areas have been identified:

- cereal production may slow down because of the departure of labour;
- local labour bottlenecks may emerge, adversely affecting mainly commercial farmers who cannot fall back upon family labour as peasants can;
- farm labour may be recruited from elder people and women who might be overworked and suffering from deteriorating health conditions (Richards and Waterbury, 1990; Heuler-Neuhaus, 1994, p. 151).

According to Richards and Waterbury (1990, p. 387), none of these issues has had a negative impact on agricultural output so far. They point to the fact that in many countries the agricultural labour force
has increased in absolute figures. Consequently, like many other economists, they maintain a macro-economic perspective and regard temporary rural labour shortages as negligible.

Migration of professionals ('brain drain') is a special case, because they are difficult to replace in developing countries. Many African and Arab male professionals have left their countries in order to work either in western industrialized countries or in the high-salary oil-producing Arab countries. Scholars blame the educational system, which has been taken over from the former colonialists, for having produced migration, because it creates skills for which only a narrow labour market exists in poor Third World countries (Tait, 1979; Zahlan, 1981; Theodory, 1981, p. 85; Büttner and Büttner, 1993, p. 182). Moreover, it has formed consumer aspirations and value orientations which cannot be satisfied with the means provided in an underdeveloped country. Economic decline and the concomitant social ruptures of the 1980s have enforced the tendency to bridge this gap by migration.

On balance, according to the literature reviewed, the sending areas seem to benefit from labour migration, except for the case of brain drain. Besides the change in the labour market conditions, the migrants' remittances provide the main argument for valuing migration positively. They are assumed to improve the standard of living of numerous families in the Third World.

Research revealed that migrants' families tend to spend the remittances on improving housing and supplying themselves with consumer and luxury goods. The money earned abroad does not generally flow into the migrants' home countries through the banks but through private channels, thus denying the state the benefit of foreign currency (Appleyard, 1989, p. 389).

Political economists observed a much broader range of changes initiated by the flow of remittances. They realized that the traditional subsistence economies increasingly depend on the wage labour of migrants. Peasants tend to use remittances to replace self-fabricated non-agricultural products by purchased commodities. Former reciprocal community relations change into monetized and commercialized relationships (Mayer and Schmidt, 1987, p. 133; Gravert, 1994, p. 224). Hence, migrants' remittances cause a deep structural change of peasant livelihood in the sending areas.

Labour migration is rarely intended to last for more than a few years. Return migration is assumed to be closely connected with incentives which attract migrants to come back, like for example an
improved economic situation in the home country (Richards and Waterbury, 1990, p. 394; Appleyard, 1989, p. 21). Still, little is known yet about the impact of return migration on the home areas. Field research at different localities has provided contradictory results. In some cases, migrants have brought new ideas and technologies with them (Vlassoff and Rao, 1994; Ernegger, 1994; David and Ruthven, 1994). Elsewhere, they have introduced new patterns of consumption and values which encouraged further migration instead of bringing innovation to the rural economy and society (Mayer and Schmidt, 1987, p. 133). Both categories have in common that the migrants have initiated social change.

Meillassoux (1983) was one of the first to include socio-economic repercussions in his analysis of migration. He warned that if the period of migration exceeds one year, the deficit of men will increasingly exhaust the labour force and the soils in the home areas. This sets in motion an irreversible cycle: social groups who were spared before, like children, young mothers and elder people, participate in food production. Fallow periods are reduced in order to use the labour time available more intensively on the land close to the villages. Food production decreases. This is compensated by food bought at the market. The reduced family labour force is partly replaced by hired seasonal agricultural labour. Subsequently, monetization of the economy expands and raises the need for cash, because the goods bartered before become commodities during this process. Poverty and the destruction of the subsistence sector increase. Towns grow rapidly but cannot absorb the masses of emigrating peasants flowing in. Unemployment, poverty and diseases become the features of city life. Food aid from the industrialized countries is a resort a growing number of countries, especially in Africa, depend on (Meillassoux, 1983, p. 147).

After this far-reaching analysis, the social repercussions on the micro-level have become the least studied aspect of the migration process. However, one important approach has been to analyze the ‘links’ between migrants and their families at home. In a first step, it has to be determined for each case whether there are links with home or whether links have not been retained. If there are links, different repercussions of migration occur,

- if the respective societies have cash crops as an alternative source of income to migrant labour,
- if subsistence economy survives alongside labour migration,
• if societies are fully proletarianized and migrant labour provides the only income (Stichter, 1985, p. 21),
• if societies depend on white-collar workers living permanently in town, but investing in farms in their home areas, which are managed with the help of kin and hired labour (Eades, 1987, p. 9).

To record ‘links’ might be helpful in answering the question whether labour migration has a livelihood-securing function for the family members staying at home or not. Remittances and final or temporary returning of migrants should not be considered separately from the impact of migration on those staying at home, as the economists mentioned above do. Instead, the category of the links should be extended to these two issues. Furthermore, Meillasoux’s ‘irreversible cycle’ could be split up into an analysis of the redistribution of labour in migrants’ home areas, ecological repercussions, the impact on food security and the transformation of the local economy. The last issue should consider particularly the extent to which subsistence production and purchased goods are used for family supply.

MIGRATION IN SUDAN

Four phases which shaped the Sudanese labour market can be distinguished:

• The precolonial period, during which migration was connected with trade, nomadism and slavery and when Sudan was a net receiving country of migrants from the Arab peninsula (Hasan, 1973; Deng, 1973; Streck, 1982).
• The colonial period when wage labour was set free in the form of circulatory internal migration.
• The period between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s when the wage labour market stabilized and attracted temporary rural–urban migrants besides the seasonal rural–rural ones.
• The period since the mid-1970s when the economy slumped, unemployment rose and an ever-growing wave of migration of all types determined the situation at the labour market.

The attraction of economic centres, of fertile soils and water, but also political transformations have always been strong motives for
migration. The first phase contributed to patterns of migration which are relevant still today:

- Distance trade closely connected Sudan with the Arab trade centres and by that with the Asian and European world. Since the 1970s the medieval trade routes turned into routes of labour migration.
- The long-distance traders were men, whereas the local traders were women in many areas of present Sudan. Today this labour division is still valid and a large share of migrant men are involved in trade. Since that early time traders have been ascribed a high social status. The manual workers of today are more or less despised compared with trading migrants.
- The nomads of the Middle Ages were 'forerunners' of the labour migrants of today, because they were used to spatial and temporal mobility. Within their system of production the extensive movements with the big animals were the task of the male adults, whereas the domestic work, care for the small animals and eventually the cultivation of small plots of land was ascribed to women, children and elder people. These characteristics predestined the male nomads to become labour migrants under changed economic circumstances.

The history of slavery in Sudan is also relevant for the analysis of present migration because of two reasons:

- labour migrants are still largely recruited from areas and population groups in west and south Sudan which were former catching grounds for slave hunters; and
- enforced resettlement connected with forced labour and even slavery has been revived in modern Sudan, affecting the same parts of the population as in former times (especially the Nuba and Dinka), among them, however, rarely men, but mainly women and children (Tetzlaff, 1993, pp. 131–8; Sudan Human Rights Voice, March 1994).

During the second phase, the British colonialists concentrated their effort on developing the Gezira cotton scheme. Recruiting Sudanese labour to run cotton production was difficult, because the livelihood of peasants and nomads was still secured without additional wage work. The British took several steps to lay off a seasonal labour force for cotton picking:
they encouraged West African Muslim immigrants to settle down in and around the Gezira area and to supply labour;
they raised taxes and collected them rigorously;
they destroyed traditional handicraft production, partly by introducing imported goods which were superior to local products, partly through a ban on local production. To keep their monopoly in cotton, they also destroyed cotton cultivation in areas other than the Gezira; and
they introduced the cash economy on a large scale and created a market for British products (O'Brien, 1983, p. 17).

On the part of the peasants, village communities tried to integrate migration into their livelihood:

• young men migrated in order to gain prestige, furnish proof of courage and self-reliance and escape the narrow circle of the patriarchal village;
• they filled occasional gaps in maintaining the livelihood of their families and provided money for special socio-cultural occasions, thus gaining prestige by displaying generosity;
• the local society demanded benefits for the community from the migrants. Parents, for example, expected for their daughters bold and skilful bridegrooms who stood the test far away and brought with them consumer goods and prestigious dowries.

The decision to migrate was thus not primarily made by an individual, but whole communities pursued their interests according to the internal relations of dependence.

In the 1950s, the tenants of the Gezira started to systematically recruit families from Kordofan for cotton picking. The Gezira management benefitted most from this system, because the tenants kept the wages down, did part of the work themselves and solidarity between the two groups against management never emerged (O'Brien, 1983, p. 23).

This second phase of labour migration in Sudan was limited mainly to parts of the Blue Nile Province and central Kordofan. The system of production and reproduction in the home areas of the migrants was destabilized to an extent that labour was set free, but not drained off on a longer term or permanent scale. The impact of male emigration on the sending communities has been double-edged from the outset: the drain of young the strong labour force undermined the
productivity of the subsistence sector, but the commodities and remit-
tances the migrants transferred to the villages were also desired. Both
factors caused a growing dependence of rural communities on the
input provided by labour migrants.

THE LABOUR MARKETS FOR MIGRANTS

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, the Sudanese governments
promoted further development of the ‘modern’ enclaves in the coun-
try. Mechanized schemes, ranches, industries, trade and transport
were built up in Khartoum, Blue Nile and Kassala provinces. While
the rural producers increasingly depended on commodity and labour
markets, the wages and producer prices for agricultural products at
the local markets remained low. This caused the continuous decline of
the ‘traditional’ sector.

Circular Rural–Rural Migration

Until the end of the 1970s, peasants took up seasonal labour migra-
tion mainly as a resort in times of insufficient local production. The
number of labourers in the Gezira had quadrupled since Independ-
ence and reached 1 million (Galal Al-Din, 1988). Until today the
agricultural schemes have been continuously extended, but no estima-
tions on the present number of labourers are available.

The spread of lorries, buses and railways eased travelling and
enhanced migration. The previous system of labour recruitment was
dissolved and the cost of transport and finding work was included in
the wage bill. Because the season of cotton and sugar cane harvesting
is complementary to rainfed crop cultivation, most of the peasants
return to their own fields at the beginning of the rainy season. Many
migrant families have broken up according to the different demands
of the labour market. Whereas cotton picking has become mainly the
domain of women, children and the elderly, the male family members
and some women with bigger children migrate to the sorghum, sesame
and sugar schemes. According to a survey of the mid-1980s, 29 per
cent of the Sudanese labour migrants moved to the cotton schemes
and towns of Blue Nile province, followed by 16 per cent moving to
Kassala, the main sorghum producing province. 18 per cent of the
migrants were children under 14, 58 per cent were 15 to 44 years old
and 24 per cent were above 44 (Eltahir and Ali, 1987, p. 5). Sixty-four
per cent of the migrants were men and 46 per cent women. Thus, internal labour migration in Sudan is neither a male phenomenon nor limited to young people.

The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s and accelerated desertification hit the rural population. Their subsistence base eroded and the economic crisis squeezed their household budgets. As a consequence, the combination of subsistence production of some household members with migration of others consolidated and assumed an even more pronounced gender-specific dimension during the 1980s. Migrants from areas with few job opportunities like Darfur, Kordofan, Northern, Eastern, Upper Nile and Equatoria provinces increasingly settled in central Sudan. They extended their period of migration over several seasons and changed their jobs according to opportunities (Grawert, 1984). In areas where agro-industries or agricultural schemes exist, food supply is more secure and more regular than in the migrants' home areas. The migrants buy food at the market and are partly paid directly in grain. Hence, the food situation of seasonal migrants in Sudan tends to be better than that in their home areas (Kevane, 1991; Sharp et al., 1991; Myers, 1994). Although seasonal labour migrants are rarely able to save money to be sent home (Grawert, 1984; Myers, 1994), they still contribute to food security in their home areas, because they provide labour at home during the agricultural season and use the slack season for other livelihood-securing options.

**Rural–Urban Migration**

Since the 1980s, migrants frequently have been leaving home for several years. They mostly shift between several short-term employments and between rural and urban areas (El-Mangouri, 1983). Between 1970 and 1980, the number of urban inhabitants doubled. The population census of 1983 counted 54.5 per cent males and 45.5 per cent females in the province of Khartoum (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1990a, p. 20). Only 39 per cent of the men, but 59 per cent of the women aged 15–54 had been born there (Mattes, 1993a, p. 23). These figures point to male-dominated immigration.

According to a study of the situation of labour migrants in Khartoum in 1987, the majority of the labour migrants in the sample of 500 households had come from the Northern (36.6 per cent) and Blue Nile provinces (34 per cent) and from Kordofan and Darfur (23 per cent). The level of education was sharply split between men and women. Whereas only 15.8 per cent of the migrant women had visited
intermediate or higher schools, 35.5 per cent of the men had done so. 42.5 per cent of the male and 67.6 per cent of the female migrants had not even visited primary school. Forty per cent of the migrants were petty traders and workers, 6.6 per cent soldiers, 14 per cent professionals, another 14 per cent businessmen, 9 per cent clerical workers and the remaining 15 per cent nurses, technicians and teachers (Eltahir and Ali, 1987, p. 15). Still, compared with the resident population of the home area, the labour migrants had a relatively high educational standard (Sharif, 1978, p. 282).

All migrants surveyed in 1987 named several motives for migration, primarily better job opportunities (39 per cent) and better access to social services (22.5 per cent). The wage differential was important for only 11 per cent of the migrants (Eltahir and Ali, 1987, p. 13). These empirical findings question the assumptions of those economic theorists who built their research on wage equilibrium models.

The main expectations of the migrants have a background in their sending areas. Both job opportunities and social services are generally in short supply there. The real conditions in Khartoum, however, are not likely to fulfil these expectations. The cost of living is high. Many migrants cannot pay the rent for housing and therefore share rooms. Only a very small proportion of the migrants has found work in the productive sector and benefits from health, educational and other services. Even many consumer goods are affordable only for a minority.

The tremendous influx of refugees which has taken place since 1983 has severely aggravated the conditions (Ibrahim, 1991b, p. 79). According to estimations, the population of Khartoum again more than doubled between 1983 and 1993 (Mottes, 1993a, p. 19). Between 500 000 and 2 million migrants and displaced persons, mostly women and children from the southern civil war areas as well as drought refugees from western Sudan, have been arriving in Khartoum area (Peter, 1993, p. 548). Competition among the growing number of groups seeking food has pushed food prices up and worsened access to food for all lower classes, including most of the temporary labour migrants.

Asked about the impact of their absence on their families at home, the migrants mentioned difficulties in obtaining basic needs (37 per cent), shortage of labour (25.6 per cent) and difficulties in child-rearing (17.4 per cent) (Eltahir and Ali, 1987, p. 18). This contradicts the theoretical assumption that the remittances of the labour migrants have the most relevant impact on the sending areas, promoting
commercialization, modernization and a rising standard of living there. It also questions the theory that migration serves as a means of spreading risks of rural households.

Migrants coming from the Gezira expressed a different view. They said that their own as well as their migrant sons’ financial support were indispensable for their families’ livelihood (Bernal, 1991, p. 70; Alnagarabi, 1992, pp. 172, 175). Obviously the impact of migration differs within Sudanese sending areas. Probably the migrants from the Gezira are generally better qualified, find better-paid jobs and maintain closer contacts with their families due to the smaller distance between sending areas and the places of destination. The migrants coming from north Sudan, the Blue Nile and west Sudan might be disadvantaged in this respect. Further comparative research is needed to solve this question.

**International Migration**

Sudanese development in general has been influenced more by its connection with the Middle East and North Africa than with sub-Saharan Africa. The number of Sudanese migrants to the oil-rich Arab countries has been estimated at about half a million, that is about 3.1 per cent of the total labour force of Sudan (UNDP, 1992, p. 159; Raffer and Mohamed Salih, 1992, p. 2). The majority of the Sudanese migrants do the same work which their enslaved ancestors had done, but now as paid labourers. Today they even happen to be called ‘*abd*’ (slave) in Arabia.

An ILO study of 1984 found that 90 per cent of the Sudanese international migrants were males, 60 per cent of them being between 18 and 30 years old (Berar-Awad, 1984). Statistics of Saudi Arabia reveal that between 1970 and 1990 the number of men in the age group 35 to 50 increased by 11.2 per cent, whereas the share of young men increased only by 3.1 per cent in the same period (*Statistisches Bundesamt*, 1993, p. 28). This refutes the assumption that the migrants are still mainly young people. Saudi Arabia was the main destination for Sudanese international migrants until 1991. Because the Sudanese government politically supported Iraq in the Gulf war, about 200 000 labour migrants had to leave this country. No study is available yet which provides information on how this labour has been absorbed (Shah, 1994).

Statistics on education have been assumed to be an indicator by which gender differences in skills could be identified. In Sudan the
literacy rates of adult men and women were 39 and 10 per cent respectively, in 1988–89. Women’s share in the labour force was only 29 per cent then (UNDP, 1991, pp. 129, 151). Consequently, women’s share in labour migration tends to be low. The question remains whether skills are decisive for the international migration of men. The ILO study of 1984 revealed that among the Sudanese international migrants, only 11 per cent were illiterate, whereas the national illiteracy rate exceeded 75 per cent in that year. About 64 per cent of the migrants in the sample had some skills, at least some years of schooling, which made them ‘semi-skilled’ (Raffer and Mohamed Salih, 1992, p. 2) compared with the illiterate persons staying behind. The international migration of skilled people has sharply reduced the personnel of important institutions in Sudan. As early as the end of the 1970s, 24 per cent of the staff of the University of Khartoum, 50 per cent of the engineers of the most important ministries and over 60 per cent of medical doctors had emigrated (El-Tom, 1981, p. 23). This tendency has continued until today. Recent figures are not available, but some repercussions of the brain drain have been reported: the level of education has rapidly declined during the 1980s, the emigration of teachers hinders the fight against illiteracy, merely four medical doctors have remained in Darfur to care for more than three million inhabitants (Sudan Update, 15 March 1994).

Unskilled Sudanese are rare in the Gulf countries, but frequent in Libya. Living at the border, transport costs are low and affordable for western Sudanese migrants. They mainly work in constructing the ambitious artificial river project in the Libyan desert (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1990b).

The financial transfers of the international labour migrants are highly relevant for the Sudanese economy. However, only a small portion comes in through national banks. In 1984, this was only 13 per cent of the remittances from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Richards and Waterbury, 1990, p. 389). A substantial portion of the money is used up for direct consumption, thus improving the welfare of migrants’ families in the short run. In the beginning of the 1980s, about 20 per cent of the remittances were spent on housing in Khartoum (Berar-Awad, 1984). A village study in north Sudan points to the importance of food purchases and expenditure for marriage. Part of the migrants’ savings were spent on investments, predominantly irrigation equipment, workshops and vehicles (Klein-Hessling and El-Sammani, 1994, p. 30). In the Gezira significant investments were
made in reinforcing communal solidarity and solidifying the extended family relations (Alnagarabi, 1992, p. 181). The share of remittances used for productive investment has been estimated at 30 per cent (Galal Al-Din, 1988, p. 300).

To sum up:

- most of the Sudanese labour migrants are internal seasonal or temporary migrants of both sexes and all age groups;
- internal rural–urban labour migrants are better qualified than the average population in their areas of origin. They are motivated to migrate by a lack of employment opportunities in their home areas and driven by the need to overcome severe financial gaps; and
- rural urban and international labour migrants in Sudan are mostly male semi-skilled persons and professionals.

The question of the impact of migration on the livelihood of the families at home has resulted in contradictory findings. The analysis of the case study in Kutum has to clarify:

- whether the remittances of the migrants increase the standard of living of their core families and strengthen the bonds with the extended families;
- whether they enhance individualism; and
- whether they have the effect of commoditizing the social relations.

KUTUM, AN AREA AFFECTED BY MIGRATION

Demand for long-term wage labour is very rare in Kutum. The field and garden owners in the first place depend on family labour and occasionally hire day labourers for short-term work. The wage labourers in Kutum are people who have been forced by urgent necessity to work in low status occupations. They are ‘drop-outs’, living at the margin of society. Frequently they are descendants of former slaves and unskilled wage work has an affinity to slavery in the mind of the rural population (De Waal, 1989, p. 56).

According to the household survey of 1988, just over one third of the field and garden owners in Kutum town (45 out of a sample of 141 households) sometimes employed day labourers, altogether 142 men and 40 women. Whereas men did heavy work, women were hired mainly for weeding, complying with the pattern of gender-specific
division of labour. In the villages around Kutum no case of hired labour was reported.

The labour market situation in the face of the 1984 famine must have been quite different from the situation in 1988. Many families and single women had immigrated to Kutum from the villages of the region. They were looking for work, because they had abandoned their barren fields and urgently needed grain and cash. Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil report that there were ‘scores of women roaming the streets of the small town of Kutum looking for domestic jobs or around lorries unloading sacks of millet, trying to collect (and sieve) spillage from faulty sacks’ (Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil, 1985, p. 343). Thus, during droughts, labour supply is abundant, because agricultural work is void and wages are low. More people than usual offer their labour, because they strongly rely on wages to secure their livelihood under the adverse conditions (Kevane, 1991, p. 5).

The ‘scores of women’ had completely disappeared in 1988. On the contrary, farmers had difficulty in finding workers for weeding, because everybody was busy on his or her own field. Wages were high, amounting to 8 to 10 LS per day for plastering walls, digging or covering wells and similar activities. This was even higher than in the agricultural schemes of Central Sudan (7 LS) and not lower than daily wages in Khartoum. The majority of the day labourers who were employed for such jobs were more than 40 years old. Wages for weeding were 50 LS per mukhamas for adolescents and 60 LS for adults. These figures confirm the thesis that the previously prevailing rural–urban dichotomy of incomes was ‘vanishing’ in Africa during the 1980s and is being replaced by a growing gap between rich and poor (Jamal and Weeks, 1988, p. 274). However, narrowing wage rates have been confirmed only for unskilled labour.

The difference between a good and a bad season calls for some caution in generalizing on labour market situations which have been recorded only during bad years. The comparison between a dry and a wet rainy season in Kutum has demonstrated that high fluctuations are characteristic for local agricultural labour markets in semi-arid north Sudan.

Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil stated the same low participation of men in garden work as was observed in 1988. A majority of men in Kutum explained: ‘Work in the garden (specially vegetable growing) is a woman’s work’ (Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil, 1985, p. 343). This attitude has frequently been repeated during my presence in Kutum, too.
Two recent developments have been responsible for pushing a bigger share of work to the women, leaving men with less work nowadays:

1. The development of horticulture as an additional source for food crop as well as of cash crop production demands additional female labour, because according to the traditional system of labour division, the monotonous and time-consuming jobs like irrigating, weeding, harvesting and petty trade at nearby markets are regarded as women’s work.

2. The loss of animals due to the drought left men without their traditional work of herding and selling animals.

The bulk of work required to maintain Kutum economy is thus already done without creating a demand for wage labour. The existence of long-term unpaid women’s labour is responsible for the lack of demand for long-term wage labour in the fields and gardens.

It can be concluded that people migrate due to reasons which are specific for their working conditions. Before analyzing the motivations, I would like to present the places of destination, family status and occupations of Kutum migrants.

**Patterns of Migration in Kutum**

Labour migration from Kutum region began as early as the 1920s, when mostly unmarried men went east to the Gezira scheme for cotton picking. The migrants usually stayed in ‘dar sabah’ for some years, changed their jobs several times between rural and urban employment and came back for marriage. After their return to Kutum, they continued to cultivate their lands. Some of them opened small shops and there was no need to migrate again. They were internal temporary rural–rural or rural–urban young male migrants, using migration as a long-term livelihood strategy. This pattern corresponds to the overall Sudanese development of migration during colonialism.

This paradigm changed fundamentally at the beginning of the 1970s, when the impact of ecological destruction severely struck the inhabitants of Kutum region for the first time. Kutum changed from a rather stable place with little temporary migration to a place of destination for rural labour and distress migrants. On the other hand, Kutum has turned into an area of origin of many labour migrants.
Characteristics of Kutum Migrants

According to information of the Agricultural Department of Kutum, the total number of male migrants from Kutum region was around 50,000 between 1974 and 1988, that is an average of 3500 migrants per year. Judges and teachers reported that 30 to 40 per cent of the men aged 15 to 45 had left Kutum town and 80 per cent the villages of the region. According to the survey of September 1988, labour migration affected 38 per cent of Kutum households and 20 per cent of the households of villages around Kutum. The number of the migrants varied between one and five, 75 per cent of these households had one, 16 per cent two and 9 per cent more than two migrants. More than one-quarter of the household heads in the sample of 206 Kutum households were labour migrants.

Concerning family status, the majority of the migrants were sons (40 per cent) and household heads (36 per cent), 10 per cent were brothers, 9 per cent daughters and the rest other relatives. More than a quarter of them (54 out of 196) lived in other places of Darfur, another quarter (50) in the capital and 8 persons in other areas in Sudan. More than one-third (64) had left for the Gulf countries (34 of these worked in Saudi Arabia, 15 in Iraq, 3 in the United Arab Emirates and 12, among them 11 household heads, were teachers in Yemen participating in a governmental education programme). 11 migrants (only household members) worked in Libya and 9 in other neighbouring countries.

Except for Khartoum, the results deviate from official data from Ministry of Labour, according to which Saudi Arabia received 90 per cent of all registered migrants in 1987–88. For Iraq no-one was registered, although from Kutum alone a considerable number went there. The number of unregistered migrants probably exceeds the number of the registered many times over. Table 6.1 shows the occupations of the migrants.

According to Table 6.1, most of the heads of household, but only one-quarter of the household members, were professionals or merchants. 27 per cent of the heads of household, but more than half of the household members were workers, manual workers, technicians or petty traders. Hence, the migrant sons of Kutum families worked more frequently as wage labourers than the migrant heads of household. Most of them had been pupils, peasants or without work before. Thus they started as unskilled workers, although frequently with a primary school education. On the other hand, three quarters of the
heads of household were at least semi-skilled, many even highly skilled. At their new places of work they were largely active in the same occupation as they had been in Kutum before.

Table 6.1 Occupations of migrant heads of household and household members, according to sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of household heads</th>
<th>Number of household members male/female</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Percentage of all migrants</th>
<th>Percentage of working migrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Manual) worker, driver, technician</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27/1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6/0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12/0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6/0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant, herder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman/soldier</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical doctor, Judge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5/0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/pupil</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>17/6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0/7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>87/18</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Household survey and qualitative interviews.

Migration of heads of household is thus an option for families sufficiently well-off to finance transport of the migrant to his place of destination. Only 5.3 per cent of the working migrants were peasants who had obtained a qoz plot elsewhere in Darfur or were employed as agricultural labourers on the plots of other people. The low number confirms the assumption that peasants only migrate in dry years and return to their fields at the beginning of a promising rainy season. The findings also assure that migrants need a certain degree of mobility including at least some skills, which distinguish them from those remaining at home. These results contradict the assumption of the theorists cited above that the majority of the
migrants from rural areas are unskilled peasants. The cases of villages in Kordofan, from which a much higher rate of migrating peasant heads of household has been reported (Kevane, 1991; Myers and Hamid, 1994), do not contradict this. These villages are closer to agricultural schemes where peasant migrants can work as seasonal labourers without abandoning their fields.

Women migrants were either pupils, students (25 per cent of all students) or teachers (20 per cent of all teachers). A significant number were housewives. In general, migration of women was low (11 per cent of all migrants), female labour migrants amounting to only 3.7 per cent of all labour migrants in the sample.

One-quarter of the migrants were pupils or students. Of these 50 per cent of them studied in Khartoum, more than 25 per cent were at school in El-Fasher and other places in Darfur and a minority abroad in Arab countries. Due to the high share of students among the migrants, nearly 70 per cent of all migrants were 35 or under. The mean age of the migrant heads of household was 41, that of the migrant household members 27.5 years. All heads of household but only 18 per cent of the household members were married. At first sight, this confirms the statements of Richards and Waterbury (1990) and Williamson (1988) who said that the majority of the migrants were young male adults. However, it has to be kept in mind that the figures include migrants who left for marriage or education, whereas Richards and Waterbury as well as Williams relate their statements exclusively to labour migrants.

Reports of returned migrants disclose that during their periods of migration they shifted between several occupations, similar to the pattern taking place at home. This contradicts what the wives, sisters or mothers of migrants had said, suggesting that the migrants were employed in one specific job. This could be explained in two ways. On the one hand, there might be a difference in what the women interviewed assumed about their husbands’ or male relatives’ occupations and what the migrants were actually doing. On the other hand, the relatively high number (15 per cent) of women who admitted that they did not know the work of their husbands, sons or brothers might indicate that even more women did not know exactly what kind of work the migrants were doing. For this reason too the data presented here (as well as similar statistics presented elsewhere!) should be treated with caution and taken as showing a rough tendency.

The length of the migrants’ absence from Kutum ranged up to 10 years. Six years were said to be necessary to secure a family’s
existence. More than one-quarter of the migrant heads of household and more than half of the migrant household members did not visit their families one or more years after having left the area.

According to information given by returned migrants, the most important objectives of migration were to invest in women, in setting up a business (shop, workshop, bus, lorry), in livestock (camels) or in a diesel-pump. Raising the standard of living of the migrants' families through consumption and luxury goods was also relevant. Migration was regarded as successful, if the livelihood of a family on a level subjectively considered as being appropriate was secured. If not, remigration was a solution frequently chosen. Setting up a business seemed to be a problematic kind of investment in Kutum, for several migrants tried, failed and remigrated. Several migrants failed to find sufficient employment to provide the income needed or did not get employment at all. It was said that migrants who did not succeed rarely came back again. One reason was the cost of return, the other the shame of returning home empty-handed.

In 1988 more married men and more middle-aged or older men than in the years before 1970 migrated. Young men maintained the old type of migration, aiming at founding a family, but the former pattern of circular rural–rural or rural–urban migration has expanded to temporary international labour migration.

**Motivation for Deciding to Migrate**

The motivation of Kutum migrants differs according to occupational group and status.

**Pupils and Students**

The supply of schools and higher institutions of education is scarce in Kutum. Therefore, middle-class families frequently send their pupils to El-Fasher, the capital of northern Darfur, where there are more schools and training centres. Students mostly enrol at the universities in Khartoum. If they have relatives living abroad in other Arab countries, they use the chance to study there.

**Government Employees**

Migrant teachers or other government employees leave Kutum largely for limited working contracts abroad or in other towns in Sudan.
Young and mostly unmarried teachers are trained or continue studies there, because there is no teachers’ seminar in Kutum. Many of them settle near their places of training, because they become acquainted with city life, receive higher and more regular salaries and have access to better social services there. For young male teachers who want to marry, a main motivation to stay far from home is the requirement of paying a dowry. They save part of their income and buy the wedding presents at the big markets of Khartoum or abroad. Young teachers more frequently than others marry colleagues or other women they get to know in the city. Thus, among the teachers, permanent rural–urban migration, which is rare in other occupational groups, occurs. Most of them, however, belong to the category of temporary rural–urban migration. Many government employees interrupt their ordinary occupation for some years in order to engage fully in trade abroad.

Merchants and Traders

Trade is regarded as an easy entry to higher income. Livestock trade within Sudan as well as livestock exports are major factors of the Sudanese economy, coming into the sphere of responsibility of the nomadic merchants. Wholesale trade and import–export business induce migration of professional merchants and of those who try to engage in large-scale trade. The bulk of the traders, however, are intermediaries. Some of them remain petty traders and never become able to open a shop themselves. Others invest in a shop, fail and remigrate. Only a few succeed and become wealthy through trade. The latter are the examples the traders strive for.

Skilled Workers

Wage labour frequently takes place abroad, where wages are higher than in Sudan, markets are better supplied with high quality goods, infrastructure is more developed and a broader range of leisure time activities is offered. For unmarried migrants, wanting to earn enough to pay the dowry goes hand in hand with looking forward to enjoying city life.

To a lesser extent this is true for skilled workers who migrate to Khartoum or other urban areas in Sudan. Permanent skilled workers and staff of enterprises are mostly entitled to a considerable set of allowances and awards, free medical treatment and free transport also for their families, free schools and other privileges (Grawert, 1984,
p. 87). However, this does not suffice to prevent them from taking the first chance to leave for the Gulf countries (Hasaballa, 1986). Thus the brain drain does not only include Sudanese professionals, but also skilled workers.

Unskilled Workers

Because of the good rainy season of 1988, peasants had no reason to leave the Kutum area. However, before the rainy season, some of them showed growing concern, because their stores were empty. The prevailing gender-specific division of labour prevented them from participating in the work of the women and the contempt of wage labour in the home area from looking for a job. Thus, they considered seeking temporary employment in agriculture in other parts of Darfur or in mechanized schemes. Migration of this type is thus induced by economic, social, but also cultural reasons.

Social and Cultural Motives for Migration

Young men are expected to prove that they are able to stand on their own two feet, to found their own household and to make up to their parents for all they had done for them. The expectations raised by parents are expressed in brief by a woman market vendor from Kutum: ‘My only wish is that my children grow up healthy, learn something and find work – as peasants, but also through migration, so that I can take a rest after it all. Look at my hands, how callous they are from all that dahu pulling.’

Migrant relatives often push young men to follow them. They often supply the newcomers with housing and food and sometimes even with jobs. This ‘chain migration’ explains why certain branches are occupied by many people from the same village, for example, bakeries by people from Kutum, construction by Nuer (Kameir, 1988). Possessing certain imported commodities like carpets, cloth, jewelry, radios, watches and in the middle class also tableware, cupboards, refrigerators, televisions and video equipment increases social prestige.

These motivations contradict the assumption that wage rates play a crucial part in the decision to migrate. It is rather caused by a combination of economic, social and cultural factors which change over the years. Wage rates seem to be most relevant for those who migrate to the Arab oil-exporting countries, but even for them that is not the only motivation. Migration therefore has largely to be regarded as another option of securing livelihood, not for single men
but for households, by spreading family members in rural as well as urban areas and even abroad. However, it only works if the connection between the household members is sustained.

IMPACT OF LABOUR MIGRATION ON KUTUM WOMEN

This section deals with the economic repercussions of migration for Kutum area, its role in preventing families from emergencies in the long run and social change.

Economic Impact of Migration

Replacement of the migrants' labour and links between migrants and their homes have been proposed as indicators of how women are affected by male labour migration. Differences are assumed to occur according to:

- the relation of a woman with the migrant(s);
- her status with regard to responsibility for the household; and
- her social class and, thus, the wealth of her family.

To begin with the last indicator, the households with migrants were divided into those whose members' livelihood was secured, those whose members' livelihood was not secured and 'middle-class' households. Households were identified as livelihood secure, if at least one member owned two or more of the following assets: a shop, a car, a diesel-pump, a generator, semi-luxuries or a lot of camels. Livelihood security was also ascribed if, in addition to owning one of the assets, the head of household was a teacher officer or merchant or if the woman interviewed was a teacher, nurse or midwife and satisfied with the remittances of the migrant(s). 'Middle-class' households comprised those whose livelihood was on the verge of being secured, because they possessed only one or none of the assets enlisted above or because their heads were manual workers, government employees, teachers or active on a similar professional level and did not own any of the above assets. Livelihood was regarded as not being secured if a household owned only a few or no animals and only one or none of the assets enlisted above or if two of the following conditions were fulfilled: the woman interviewed worked as a peasant and/or gardener and/or petty trader, lived
together with many dependants or was not satisfied with the remittances of the migrant(s).

Among the 102 households in the sample, there were 20 households whose livelihood was secured, 53 middle-class and 29 insecure households. Among the secure households, all except for three had received remittances. The consignments included money, clothes, food and frequently other commodities, among them consumer goods and prestige objects.

Among the middle-class households, all heads of household had sent mostly money and clothes, but the majority of the migrant sons or brothers had not sent home anything. Some of the households might have been able to afford the migration of male household members who kept their income for their own purposes, but one-fifth of them expected support which did not arrive. The livelihood of most of the middle-class household members depended to a significant extent on consignments of migrants.

Although households whose livelihood was not secured urgently needed support, only two-thirds of the migrants from this category sent remittances. A high share of 31 per cent of the heads of household did not send anything home, leaving their wives in a desperate livelihood situation. The transport cost of a migrant had already been a huge investment and the decision to send a male household member away was made with the expectation that this would substantially improve the situation of the household.

Nearly all women reported that remittances started to arrive one year after the migrant had departed and were then sent irregularly and with a time lag; 48 per cent of all migrants sent home food and clothes, indicating again that wages were not their only motivation. Whether migration could bridge an emergency is very much disputed though. During the famine of 1983–85, in some places the remittances had become a lifeline for those staying in Darfur (Bush, 1989/90), in other cases the remittances decreased due to insecure roads and the poverty of the migrants (De Waal, 1989, p. 152). This suggests that remittances could only help a few households to get through an emergency, whereas the bulk of the initiative in overcoming a crisis remains with those staying at home. Given the rigid food-providing role of women, under conditions of drought, food provision in households with migrants is probably not better secured than in those without. Thus, women’s labour and skills as well as the quality of kinship relations are crucial in solving an acute livelihood crisis, whereas labour migration must rather be regarded as a long-term
livelhood-securing strategy. This is at least true for households in which a range of other options for securing livelihood is available. Poor households, for which the remittances of a temporary migrant would be the only vital link, are in danger of losing more promising options of livelihood in case the migrant fails.

In a second step, the data are analyzed according to the relations of the migrants with the women at home. Differences in wealth are not considered here.

Twenty-seven (55.3 per cent) of the migrant sons or brothers sent remittances to their relatives at home. This means a slight majority of mothers or sisters received contributions to their livelihood from the migrants. On the other hand, 44.7 per cent of the migrants' mothers or sisters did not benefit from migration in terms of financial support or consignments of food or clothes. If the indicator of satisfaction is added, 59.6 per cent of mothers or sisters of migrants were not supported sufficiently by their migrant sons or brothers. The majority of these women lived in households where members' livelihood was insecure. The high rate of dissatisfaction indicates that long-term support of migrants was strongly expected.

Migrants' wives, on the other hand, received remittances in 83.6 per cent of the cases studied. Even if the indicator of 'satisfaction' is added, still 72.7 per cent of the wives of migrants experienced real support through migration. For the rest, 27.3 per cent of migrants' wives, the lack of male labour was strongly felt. This is illustrated with the report of Muna, who was visited in her garden in Kambod.

In the garden there were four deep wells. Three leaseholders were working there besides Muna. She grew tomatoes, okra, onions, cucumbers, red and green pepper:

I was born in Timtim [one day trip from Kutum]. Since our wedding about fifteen years ago, I have been living here in Kambod. With me are our five children, two of them go to school. My parents still live in Timtim, they are peasants and gardeners.

For twelve years my husband has kept going to Khartoum. He is working there, but he does not send anything. Only once did he send 50 and once 250 LS. Now he has not been here for one year. I do not know what he is doing there. Before he left he was in the army and with the police.

I got a field from my parents in Timtim. I have been working there for six years during the rainy seasons. My neighbours helped me sowing, weeding and harvesting. Only last year I could not go
there. Nobody grew millet there then. It was a problem, because my children go to school here in Kambod.

During the rest of the year I work here in my husband’s garden. This garden, the size of two mukhammas, yields the same amount of dukhn as ten mukhammas on the goz do. We need four sacks per year, but last time I could harvest only one here and one in Timtim. In the garden we have some dates. The white ants ate the lemon tree.

I have a donkey and take the crops to the market with it. I sell them and buy everything from the money I earn, including school fees and materials. My husband enrolled the children at school, but then he did not bother about anything. He comes and goes as he likes and talks with no-one about it. My husband’s relatives exchange greetings with me, but they do not support me. My parents do, but my father is a bit confused and often forgets to give me what he promised before.

To conclude, for the majority of migrants’ wives, the remittances of their husbands were an important factor in securing their livelihoods besides their own and other household members’ contributions. For one-quarter of them, the livelihood situation seemed to be more difficult than before, because the missing migrants’ labour was not compensated for by remittances. Labour migration of heads of household has thus become an important long-term investment of families which are rather well-off from the outset. The rate of failure is high in those cases where the livelihood of the family was not secured before the head of household migrated. Concerning migration of other male household members, a direct improvement in the livelihood of their mothers and sisters occurred in only half of the cases.

This result very much questions the assumption of the economists presented above that the remittances of the ‘young male adults’ who migrate substantially improve the wealth of their families. At least for the pattern of migration which has established itself since the 1980s, this is true rather for the (elder male) migrant heads of household.

Social Impact of Migration

Due to the prevailing division of labour, the basic food supply of a household is not jeopardized by death, inactivity or the absence of men but by conditions which hamper the women in providing food. However, all other necessities for securing livelihood, such as
medicines, school fees and utensils, household equipment, clothes and shoes and contributions to social affairs, are out of reach for a family which lacks the support of the men. Therefore, the society has developed regulations to protect women who temporarily or permanently have to live alone. These regulations are rooted in the Islamic religion which proposes the protection of women by their fathers and brothers as long as they are unmarried and by their husbands, husbands' fathers and brothers, if married.

Thus, if the head of household migrates, he appoints his father, a brother or son or a brother of his wife as a guardian (wakil) for his wife. During his absence the wakil is (or several wakils are) responsible for his household, sometimes together with his wife. The wakil(s) have to provide the family with money and household needs as long as the migrant does not send enough. The wakil is also the legal guardian of the woman. He is obliged to represent her interests in public affairs in accordance with the wishes of the head of household.

Two-thirds of the migrants' wives in a sample of 44 Kutum women were wards of a wakil, whereas one-third were responsible on their own. Women guarded by a wakil led nearly the same social life as those married women whose husband was present. They were allowed to make decisions in the same scope as before, primarily concerning the household and cultivation. Their sphere of social action did not transcend the borders of the extended family and female neighbourhood. The guardian represented them in public. Those women who were responsible for themselves generally delayed decisions until they obtained instructions by their husbands. But there were a few cases where migrants' wives decided to get their children circumcised and, together with the husband's family, prepared the respective feast. In some cases the women enrolled their children at school, called the sheikh or complained at the court. These activities were only accepted if the husband did not send a message or had given no instructions before departure. One exception was the marriage of a migrant's children. A woman was not authorized to decide on this. The family either had to wait until the migrant came back or another close male relative had to be consulted. Sooner could a son decide on the marriage of his brothers or sisters than the mother herself.

In 24 cases a wakil was responsible for household supply, whereas in 20 cases the wife of the migrant was. Split according to the standard of livelihood security, the responsibility was distributed as in Table 6.2.
Table 6.2 Responsibility for providing household needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible person</th>
<th>Livelihood secure household</th>
<th>Livelihood insecure households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wakil</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife of migrant</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Household survey (September 1988).

The majority of those migrants' wives whose livelihood was secured and who were responsible for the household supply, were either housewives married to wealthy migrants or employed as teachers, nurses or midwives. Their self-responsibility was due to their independent economic status. However, to be backed by the extended family and to remain integrated in it was also a primary goal for 'independent' migrants' wives. Those whose husbands had already sent some goods or brought commodities with them during visits were expected to be generous and let their relatives and neighbours participate in their wealth.

The second group includes women who were self-responsible because of want. Six of them were second wives of migrants. Either there was no male relative who would act as a wakil or they were separated from their own relatives being themselves immigrants originating from villages near Kutum. Measured on the principles of kin networks prevailing in Kutum society, the situation of these women implied a low social status, similar to that of a divorced woman.

As a result, for the majority of migrants' wives there was little immediate change, because the obligations of the husbands were taken over by guardians. However, the quality of family relations depended on the migrants' remittances. If these were low, in the long run the families' livelihood had to be more and more secured by the activities of the migrants' wives and children themselves.

MIGRATION, GENDER RELATIONS AND FOOD SECURITY: CONCLUSIONS

The multiple dependence of households on monetary income compels people to migrate to areas where wage labour is in demand. The
migrants tend to increase the welfare of their core families supplying them with consumer goods and making investments of a type which benefits close relatives exclusively. This leads to an enhanced socio-economic differentiation within village or quarter communities. A further disintegrating impact of migration occurs between genders and generations. Whereas migrating men experience a different social life and standard of living than they are used to at home, the women and elder people are confined to the established pattern of life. If the husband migrates, in many cases the women are left with their usual share of work, whereas the share (or part of it) of the husband’s work is taken over by a wakil. Women who are integrated in the highly gender-segregated labour market might achieve a more independent economic status. Women peasants and gardeners, on the other hand, are frequently burdened with their husbands’ share of work in addition to their own productive and reproductive occupations. Whereas the work burden of women had initially been increased for a limited period of time, today it has become a permanent overload. Hence, those women who have benefitted from the transformation induced by male migration stand opposite those who are losers in this process. The fissure runs between those who are able to integrate themselves in commercial production and those who lack even the basic resources to secure food. Those women who succeed in maintaining good relations with their husbands’ extended families and informal circles of neighbours, friends and colleagues are much better accepted socially than those who fail. This social gain or loss is again closely connected with the migrants’ remittances and thus a sign of high dependence of women on men.

The long absence of migrants, especially of unmarried ones, weakens the social bonds with their families. This is enhanced by the difficulties the migrants face due to the economic crisis. The amount and frequency of remittances tend to dwindle, parents are increasingly left without any old age pension. On the other hand, the dowry which Muslim bridegrooms have to pay to the bride and her mother at marriage has increased more than tenfold for international migrants during the last two decades. Being the only claim on a considerable share of a man’s wealth, the high dowry has become a means of redistributing the benefits of male migrants to the women in the sending areas.

Parents seem to calculate for long-term livelihood security deliberately by sending at least one boy to school, hoping that he will migrate and share his income with them later. The high share of pupils and
students among the Kutum migrants is a case in point. Evidence of the higher educational status of migrants compared with the average population in their home villages confirms this long-term planning. Higher salaries due to the employment of qualified migrants, if partly remitted to the family, have a more significant impact on rural food security than irregular sendings due to insecure unskilled occupation opportunities. The most important social investment of migrants in turn is in educating their children. However, if the migration process continues in the present form, besides splitting the rural societies into core families and individuals a widening gap between skilled and unskilled classes is to be expected.

If remittances are lacking, little or very irregular, the cost of labour migration is as a whole passed on to the migrants' family members in the sending area. The work burden of women, elders and children is increased without compensation. Women left behind by migrants frequently suffer from labour bottlenecks in cultivation, because they cannot afford to hire labour in order to replace the migrants. A further reason is that they are less able to mobilize wide-ranging social relations in the rural areas nor to establish political links. Food production and food supply in the sending areas might decrease due to the medium- or long-term absence of male labour force and negatively affect the nutritional status of those remaining behind. It might even accelerate environmental degradation, because energy, labour and time to be invested in ecologically sustainable measures are lacking. This cost frequently exceeds the benefit gained through migration in the home areas.

Notes

1. It could be argued that the third category should not be labelled 'migration', but rather 'flight'. However, for a clear analysis it is useful to leave this specific notion for expulsion caused by war and catastrophes.

2. This pattern of male and female migrants' work has been confirmed recently for the Nuba in Khartoum. It has not come to a standstill at all. Cf. Häusser (1992), p. 86.

3. This is relatively old under the conditions given in Sudan, where the life expectancy at birth is 50.8 years. Cf. UNDP (1992), p. 129.

4. From the point of view of the men it seems to be appropriate to speak of 'investment in women', because the economy of marriage works in a similar way to other economic spheres.