3 Peasant Livelihood: Options and Constraints

The notion of 'the peasant' has been very much debated. In order to identify the particular conditions of peasant livelihood, the characteristics of the peasant economy and society and how they are related to capitalism are investigated first. An analysis of peasant livelihood in Sudan and particularly in Kutum follows.

PEASANT ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Differences between Peasants and Commercial Farmers

Peasants are different from commercial farmers. The latter manage their farms as agricultural enterprises, keeping themselves going by the profits they gain from marketing their produce. Their production is value-creating in the neoclassical economic understanding, and it is hence counted in the GDP. Although commercial farming does not exclude the use of family labour, it is usually based on wage labour.

Peasants exchange only part of their products at the market and are partly self-sufficient in food and basic needs. They use mainly family labour, but seasonal wage labour might be employed as well. Labour relations are partly embedded in reciprocal relations comprising culturally defined exchanges, sharing, and redistribution of goods and services. This principle provides opportunities to modify market principles or avoid their impact (Scott, 1976; Hyden, 1982, p. 219). It also might protect households, for example, if they suffer from a crop failure. Thus in contrast to commercial farming, the peasant economy has been integrated into the capitalist market economy only to some extent (Berry, 1993). On the other hand, part of peasant input is produced in the capitalist mode and imported from industrial centres and part of their output flows into the capitalist production process, either within the country or through exportation to other countries. Due to the fact that peasants have little or no influence on the determinants of the market prices, their involvement in markets is
ambivalent. They might benefit by obtaining a higher standard of living and by diversifying their consumption. On the other hand, adverse prices or unequal market power might ruin them. Unlike commercial farmers, peasants do not have market information and are therefore frequently taken for a ride by merchants and officials. Credit is usually not available to peasants at competitive market rates of interest (Ellis, 1988, p. 6). Production inputs are not permanently available, of varying quality, or rationed. Land is rarely for sale in peasant societies and has thus no market value (Berry, 1993, p. 101). Despite the key assumption of economists that markets are transparent, peasants not only suffer from a lack of information, but are also partly excluded from access to markets.

In spite of these different conditions, peasant economic activities are usually measured in the same way as those of commercial farmers. Neoclassical economists thus regard reciprocity as a barrier to the efficiency of markets and as not value-creating. If peasant behaviour does not correspond to the expected ‘rationalism’, it is easily interpreted as showing irrationality or fatalism. This in turn is readily explained as backwardness instead of putting it in its due frame. Ignoring the particular livelihood conditions of peasants suggests that mainstream rural development policy implicitly aims at transforming peasants into commercial farmers. The policy of the World Bank has been a case in point (Weltbank, 1991, p. 97).

**Peasant Households**

The household is the unit of neoclassical economic analysis. Welfare maximization is assumed to be the goal household members strive for. This implies that they share resources. Peasant households in particular are regarded as units of production and consumption. Hence development experts have been taking the peasant household as an economic enterprise, within which the members are working together. The husband or father has been regarded to manage the resources on behalf of the other members, expecting that his dependents provide labour under his direction. This approach presumes a unity of interests of household members.

Critics maintain that taking the household as a unity of interests is misleading. In fact, in the peasant economy resource streams are separated within the domestic group, and exchange, not necessarily sharing, may take place within the household, especially between husband and wife (Guyer, 1981). Furthermore, the assumption impli-
citly requires altruism as the basis of the relationship among all household members, at least on the part of the head of household, who would then be a 'benevolent dictator' (Ellis, 1988, p. 175). This ignores the selfishness of individuals in the market which neoclassical economists presume, basing their doctrine on the utility optimizing individual (Folbre, 1986) and is thus inconsistent within the neoclassical economic theory (Whitehead, 1990, p. 18). Sen (1987), although agreeing that the peasant household should be regarded as a basic economic unit, characterizes it as being determined by 'cooperative conflict'. This means that economic outcomes which serve the interests of all household members coexist with conflicts over the choice between several possible cooperative arrangements according to the differing interests of the household members. The decisions of a household thus depend on the power relations among the household members and are likely to reflect the interests of the most powerful one. Accordingly, the economic outcome is most probably distributed among the household members according to their respective social status and influence (Wilson, 1991, p. 31).

Fleming (1991) holds that spheres of action outside the household can be equally or more important for decisions and economic behaviour of peasants. Kinship relations outside the domestic group may entail sharing, altruism and reciprocity. Additional labour force is often taken from outside the household, either in the form of reciprocal transactions like work parties and shared cooking for feasts or as seasonal or daily paid wage labour. In this case the limits of the 'household unit' are transcended with regard to production. Sharing and non-sharing behaviour is not separable along household boundaries. This means that the bases of neoclassical and household economics analyses are not valid to African communities (Whitehead, 1990, p. 18).

False assumptions on the household as the basic economic unit have consequences on development planning and project targeting. A lot of damage has been done to the welfare of household members, because the networks of social relations within the peasantry have not been considered. Development projects have even driven large numbers of peasants into poverty (Erler, 1985). The World Bank in its recent studies on social dimensions of structural adjustment has largely adopted this critique. In its poverty surveys and measurements of the effects of policy change on households of the early 1990s, it proposes to include surveys of the specific situation of individuals within households (The World Bank, 1991, p. 39). The outcome of this change is not yet clear.
The Position of Peasants in Society

Peasants are characterized by low social and cultural status. They lack access to political power and are frequently subject to coercion by other social groups. Peasants also suffer from wars waged in the interests of others. Furthermore, they are economically exploited, for example by merchants who practice usury or by the state bureaucracy which devours a large proportion of the surplus that the peasants produce (Ellis, 1983; 1988, p. 6; Wolf, 1966, p. 3). In order to distinguish ‘peasants’ from ‘traditional’ or ‘subsistence cultivators’, their subjugation under ruling social groups has to be emphasized.

Peasants are in a continuous process of adaptation to the changing society and environment they live in. They act towards external forces on the community as well as on kin, family, and individual levels. They may split up on all these levels into different classes, ranging from merchants and capitalist farmers to petty traders, petty commodity producers, providers of services, labourers, small-scale farmers, tenants, landless, and marginalized classes. Even if they are employed by the state, they do not necessarily leave the peasant class once and for all. For an analysis of peasant societies, the process of internal differentiation requires careful inspection, because it gives a hint on the way society changes. Recently the flowing differentiation among peasants has been intensified by the combined pressure of economic crisis, ecological destruction, and reinforced social and cultural change. In addition, political coercion has forced peasants off their means of production. The tendency for peasants to be flung into the class of the marginalized is growing. A minority of them succeed in evading these pressures partially or completely, merging with classes which provide a more secure status in society.

Uncertainties Affecting Peasants

Peasants are characterized by being exposed to a wide range of uncertainties concerning production, prices, social security and political decisions.

- Yield uncertainty is increasingly occurring due to droughts, floods, unfavourable amounts of or inappropriate intervals between rains. Pests and diseases are further causes of crop failures.
• Price uncertainty prevails, because the long period of agricultural production reduces flexibility to react to price advantages, especially when market information and storage facilities are lacking.

• Social uncertainty is mainly caused by restricted access to land for part of the peasants and by the dependence of peasants on people who usurp control over resources, mostly through usury or sharecropping.

• Political uncertainty is inflicted upon peasants through unpredictable state actions like coups, wars, resettlement campaigns, or other economic and political turnabouts. Large and ever-growing numbers of peasants are uprooted by these specific uncertainties and eke out a miserable existence in refugee camps (Ellis, 1988, chapter 5).

Common to all these events is their unpredictability. Consequently peasants have a very limited scope to prepare for them. Facing growing dependence on markets, peasants’ knowledge might no longer suffice to reduce risks. Measures which they still apply to some degree, and not only with the aim of avoiding disasters, are mixed cultivation of crops with differing qualities, resistances, times of maturity and beneficial impact on neighbouring plants, crop rotation, sowing in a larger area than can be harvested, terrassing, dam construction, water harvesting, collecting wild crops, and hunting. The most important measure, however, is to split activities of household members along many lines, so that they are spread all over the peasant society in order to pool the benefits some of them gain. In this sense, reciprocity is appropriate to moderate the contemporary uncertainties which could threaten peasants’ livelihoods. In spite of all these preventive measures, peasants have remained largely powerless in the face of social and political uncertainties as well as towards market fluctuations and natural hazards (Alavi, 1965; Shanin, 1971; Spittler, 1978).

Definition of ‘Peasants’ and Summary of Livelihood Aspects

According to the above considerations, in this book peasants are specified as follows:

*Peasants are women and men who live in farm households, have access to land which they use as a means of livelihood, and utilize mainly family labour in farm production. Peasants are socially differentiated and cannot be categorized in one single social class. They have in common adherence to the land, even if they are active in*
diverse livelihood-securing activities. Besides its economic function, land has a social value for peasants as a security against emergencies. Peasants participate mostly in informal groups which are not congruent with households and have diverse social and economic functions. They are involved in local markets to a varying extent, according to the uncertainties of agricultural production and prices. Peasants are always located in a larger economic system, within which they are partially engaged in markets that tend to function with a high degree of imperfection. Peasants are socially subordinated under ruling classes and typically in a permanent process of transformation due to changes imposed on them by external forces.

The livelihood conditions of the peasants worked out so far are:

1. means of livelihood gained from agriculture;
2. incomes from employment;
3. means of livelihood gained from trade;
4. means of livelihood gained from communal, intra-kin, and intra-familial sharing and redistribution.

The above analysis also allows for uncertainties which shape livelihood-adverse conditions. These are:

1. economic crises;
2. ecological crises;
3. political or social disruptions.

PEASANT LIVELIHOOD IN SUDAN

Sudan is the largest African state, comprising 2 500 000 square kilometres reaching over 2050 km between the latitudes 3.5 and 23 degrees north, and over 1600 km between the longitudes 21.75 and 38.5 degrees east. The country shares frontiers with nine nations: Chad, the Central African Republic, Zaire, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt and Libya. During the course of history the neighbourhood of these countries has played a substantial role in shaping the ethnic composition of the population and their cultures in Sudan. Nineteen ethnic groups with 597 subgroups were counted in the population census of 1956 (Mattes, 1993a, p. 23).
An extreme diversity of climatic and ecological zones ranging from deserts, semideserts, thornlands, and savannahs in the north to swamps and tropical forests in the south shapes the environment in Sudan. The respective climatic zones cover arid areas with daily temperatures of more than 50°C and no rainfall in the Saharan belt of the north, semiarid areas in the Sahelian belt with 100 to 400 mm annual rainfall and areas with up to 1500 mm annual rainfall in humid south Sudan. The duration of the rainy season varies from two months in the semiarid zone to eight months in the humid zone. Moist southerly winds advance northwards in January and reach their furthest point in August, whereas northerly airstreams bring cool dry weather in winter and dry heat in summer. The highest temperatures occur in the months before the rains. In central Sudan they are accompanied by occasional heavy dust storms.

Thousands of years ago, the area of present Sudan became the home of nomadic, pastoralist, and farming communities. During the last 5000 years, Sudan continually has been troubled by the precarious coexistence of segmentary and centralized sub-societies. The Sudanese experienced empires bringing their previously autonomous sub-societies into subjection, enslavement of vast sections of the population, and invasions of foreign people. The invaders partly intermingled with the indigenous population and frequently imposed new leaderships on them, a process which was accompanied by the change of many sub-societies from matrilineal to patrilineal systems. Streams of migrants and refugees have constantly been crossing, penetrating, and leaving Sudan. The Sudanese have proved flexible in securing their livelihood by continuously adapting their modes of production and their society to the changing conditions and environments. However, an amazing persistence of habits gives a hint as to the compromises the Sudanese society has made between internal and external requirements. Such compromises are behind the structure of the society and economy of present Sudan. They are part of the social dimension of the livelihood conditions in Sudan (Streck, 1982; Hasan, 1973; Deng, 1973).

Another social factor shaping the livelihood conditions of the Sudanese is the coexistence of heterogeneous religions and cultures, always a challenge for the people throughout their history. Many conflicts arose – and still arise today – due to collisions of seemingly irreconcilable cultural and religious values. During Sudanese history many forms of adaptation, but also of rigid delimitation of certain value systems against foreign ideologies, have
occurred. This type of conflict usually has a substantial economic and political base.

British colonialism gravely changed the political, economic, and social conditions of livelihood and introduced a new quality of cultural conflicts in Sudan from 1898 onwards. The colonialists forced the country into its present geographical shape. At the fringes of Sudan, the borders drawn according to the decisions of the colonial powers cut several ethnic groups into two nationalities. However, the borders are usually permeable. Nomads move to and from the neighbouring countries, labour migrants and refugees spill over the frontiers, and smuggling of goods, animals, and weapons frequently occurs in the areas next to the borders (Doornbos, 1983). On the other hand, heterogeneous societies have been tied together within these artificial borders. The question of the borders has also become a dimension of the present armed struggle between the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese government. The conflict started in 1955, was interrupted by the peace agreement of Addis Ababa in 1972, and rose again in 1983. Division of Sudan has been on the agenda again since August 1991. The worsened economic and political conditions in response to the civil war affect the livelihood of the population all over Sudan.

Since Independence the Sudanese economy and society have become deeper and deeper entangled in the trap of structural heterogeneity which most of the African countries are caught in today. Reactions of the rural population range from apathy to armed struggle, passive resistance, and migration, thus encompassing in one country most of the strategies known from other parts of the Third World. How these reactions were related to the aim of livelihood security and, on the other hand, how the changing conditions affected the livelihood of the rural population in Sudan at the end of the 1980s is analyzed in the following sections.

THE ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

Sudanese agriculture is usually divided into the ‘traditional’, irrigated, and mechanized subsectors. The ‘traditional’ subsector includes small peasants’ subsistence and cash crop production and nomadic livestock breeding. The ‘traditional’ producers provide the major part of the national agricultural output. Except for the pure export crop of gum Arabic, their products are at the same time staple food crops. The
'traditional' sector also supplies the bulk of the labour force for all the other agricultural subsectors. Commodity and labour markets are the main links between 'traditional' and other economic sectors in Sudan.

The irrigated subsector comprises cotton, groundnut, wheat, sorghum, and sugar cane production in the Nile areas. The Gezira and Managail cotton schemes were constructed by the British colonial government; extensions of these, several cotton-growing pump schemes as well as four sugar schemes have been built under the independent Sudanese governments. The cotton schemes are run by a tripartite system. The government provides land and water, parastatal bodies supply the means of production (seeds, tractors, fertilizers, pesticides) and are responsible for the management of the schemes, and tenants cultivate cotton, groundnuts, and sorghum in prescribed rotation (Bernal, 1991). They organize the supply of labour and deliver the harvest to the cotton board. Through this system, former peasants have been drawn into a link with the world market of cotton and groundnuts.

The sugar schemes were constructed in the late 1970s. For them a plantation system under control of the government has been adopted. Whereas the output of the smaller sugar schemes is destined for the national market, Kenana, the largest sugar plantation and refinery in Sudan and probably in the world (Gumaa, 1992, p. 3), has been oriented towards export markets from the outset.

In the mechanized subsector, sorghum, groundnuts, and sesame are produced. The colonial government introduced mechanization and initiated the first uprooting of nomads and small-scale subsistence cultivators who used to till the central clay plains of Sudan. Mechanized production requires clearance of vast areas from all vegetation in order to sow the crops in a monocultural system, measures which expose the soil to wind and water erosion and quick exhaustion ('agricultural mining') (Hasaballa, 1986, p. 114; Adam et al., 1983, p. 70). This type of agricultural production was started in Kassala province in the 1940s, continued in the Blue Nile province, reached the White Nile province, Kordofan, Darfur and Bahr el Ghazal in the 1970s, and Upper Nile in the 1980s. It is still in a process of rapid extension.

Agricultural output stagnated between 1965 and 1985, in the period between 1986 and 1991 it declined (Oesterdiekhoff, 1988, pp. 27, 42). In 1992 agricultural production contributed 34 per cent to the Sudanese GDP. Whereas the industrial growth rate was more than 4 per cent between 1974 and 1985, the industrial sector slumped in 1990. Its
total contribution to the GDP was 17 per cent in 1992, that of the processing industries alone only 8.6 per cent (Mattes, 1993b, p. 166). The share of services in the GDP was 50 per cent (Weltbank, 1994, p. 204). This points to a severe overbureaucratization of the little-industrialized, agriculture-oriented Sudanese economy.

The share of raw materials in exports was 96 per cent in 1992 (Weltbank, 1994, p. 228). They included mainly cotton, livestock, food crops, gum Arabic, oilseeds, hides, and skins (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1990a, p. 70). Both exports and imports have been declining since the 1980s (Wohlmuth, 1993, pp. 412, 414). For a majority of the Sudanese, basic goods are frequently not available.

The deficit of the governmental household budget increased from 4.8 per cent of the GDP in 1977–78 to 8.1 per cent in 1988–89 (Hansohm, 1991, p. 19). In 1991 foreign debt was more than US$ 600 per head, that is about US$ 16 bn. Consumer price inflation has been accelerating since 1965, between 1986 and 1989 the official rate of inflation was 45.6 per cent, for 1991 figures between 78.3 per cent and 200 per cent were reported (Wohlmuth, 1993, p. 412; EIU, 1993). Due to this economic performance, essential services are lacking, real incomes have been declining since the 1980s, rapid deterioration of the ecology is not stopped, and among the people malnutrition is spreading.

The development problem has structural causes:

- the dependence on exports of primary agricultural goods initiated by the colonial power has never been reduced;
- capital goods and mass consumption goods have to be imported or, in case of financial shortages, they are just lacking; and
- the structural heterogeneity of the economic subsectors has never been overcome (Oesterdiekhoff, 1980, p. 147).

THE POSITION OF PEASANTS IN SUDANESE SOCIETY

Subjugation under foreign rule together with a component of intermingling between the original society and foreign people is a pattern of experience which most of the rural cultivators all over Sudan underwent during their respective histories. Because the relations between Darfurian peasants and the centres resemble those of all peasants in Sudan, they are given as an example here.

As early as in ancient Darfur, the ancestors of the Masalit, Erenga, Tama, Gimr, Fur, Tunjur, Berti, Birgid, Beigo, and Daju, who live in
Darfur today, cultivated the fertile Jebel Marra area. The Meidob and the Zaghawa traditionally combined animal husbandry with cultivating millet and collecting wild herbs and fruit. As recently as 1988, the Zaghawa included a despised caste of blacksmiths (men) and potters (their wives) (Streck, 1982, p. 132). The other livestock-raising groups presently living in Darfur trace themselves back to the Juhayna, Arabs originating in south Arabia who had moved into Sudan. The Juhayna include the northern Darfurian subgroups of the Mahriya, ‘Ereigat and Umm Jalul. Ethnic grouping had remained amorphous during the centuries following Arab penetration into Sudan. The composition of the ‘tribes’ always fluctuated and was constantly affected by forming new alliances, arrival of new members of other subsocieties, adopting different names, and changing habitat (Hasan, 1973, p. 135).

In spite of the hierarchy the rulers had established since the Darfurian empires of the 15th century, on the local level the peasants preserved a system of reciprocal obligations and of equality and mutuality. The nafir for example is a customary exchange of communal labour for a nutritious meal which includes meat of a goat or sheep and frequently millet beer. Feasts are organized with the help of several families and permit redistribution of food within the society. Marriage rules also contain exchange of goods, food, money, labour and services. In most parts of Sudan the precondition for marriage is the payment of a dowry by the family of the bridegroom to the family of the bride in order to give the bridegroom the right to the future children of the bride. The family of the bride is thus compensated for transferring the fertility of the daughter to a foreign lineage (Streck, 1982, p. 264). In order to lay the foundation for good relations between the two kin groups concerned, the family of the bride might redistribute up to one third of the dowry to the family of the bridegroom. On the other hand, the value given to the resources of livelihood tends to make them subjects of covetousness within and between subsocieties. Disputes and crimes occur when the commonly agreed rules of satisfying desires are neglected. A violation of rules might cause between two groups a process of mutual avengement which could last for many generations. As soon as inequality starts to threaten the balance, measures are taken to create equality again. Hence, the principles of equality and mutuality refer to friendly relations as well as to hostilities. They are with varying degrees still valid throughout the Sudan of today. They are also part and parcel of the Islam practiced in Sudan.
Islam reached Darfur in the 17th century. Especially under the Mahdist rule between 1883 and 1898, Islam became the bond which connected heterogeneous groups of peasants and nomads and stabilized their symbiotic economic relations. The gap between Islamized and non-Islamic sub-societies increased up to a point where non-Islamic people were no longer regarded as human beings but as slaves who could be caught, sold, and treated in any way whatever.

In 1916 the British colonialists killed the Darfurian sultan Ali Dinar in a battle and ‘acquired’ the province of Darfur. Violent expeditions against insurgent groups continued until 1930. Throughout Sudan the policy of indirect rule made use of the existing administrative structure and of tribal differences in the Sudanese society and transformed it in a way that served them in maintaining power. The British introduced a hierarchy of administrators, starting with the sheikhs, village or kin group leaders, whom they employed as tax collectors. The sheikhs were responsible to an omda, the omdas in turn had a nazir or malik above. In Kutum district the magdoun remained ruler, councillor, judge, and lord of the manor. He had only the British governor above him. The British selectively curtailed the responsibilities of the indigenous leaders. But they deliberately left control over the armament of their followers with them, a right which bound them to the colonial rulers but, in the eyes of the followers, left the power of the leaders undiminished (see, for example, Streck, 1982, p. 125). The system of indirect rule caused a clearcut delimitation between tribes and transformed them into political units which still play a part in the Sudanese politics of today.

After Independence in 1956, the influence of the traditional leaders was removed step by step, culminating in the blow President Nimeiri inflicted on the old administrative system in 1971 by deposing the magdoun and the majority of the maliks. In Kutum and some other native kingdoms bordering Chad, however, Nimeiri took over power half-heartedly. He kept the maliks of these areas formally in office side by side with the new administration, but took a major share of their former influence from them. The reason might have been that the new administrators, who frequently were of urban origin, faced a lot of difficulties to win through against the population who remained loyal to the native administrators. Committees of the Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) were established on village, area, and district levels and took over the responsibility for tax collection, distribution of sugar, of grain, and of other essential goods. Nimeiri banned all political parties except the SSU, which was very active in building up a power base
among the people. The party’s sub-organizations spread centrally elaborated political guidelines to the masses during huge assemblies. Public presence and political participation of women were promoted. However, permitting the coexistence of the modern and traditional system without a clear division of functions created confusion. The people liable to pay taxes used the chaos to evade the payments and played the officials off against each other. Due to the failure of this policy, in the early 1980s Nimeiri reinstalled the maliks all over Sudan.

In April 1985 Nimeiri was toppled by a popular uprising the centre of which was in Khartoum. After one year of rule by a transitory military regime, elections took place in April 1986. The Umma and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) won.

This survey demonstrates that there has never been a final decision as to how peasants could be administered. Not even the SSU dared to uproot the traditional leadership completely and to replace it by a modern superstructure.

PEASANT LIVELIHOOD IN KUTUM

Kutum is located about 100 km northwest of El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, in the Sahelian zone. The landscape around Kutum belongs to the basement complex of western Darfur and is characterized by old sand dunes, ridges of mountains, solitary fells and rocky hills. The annual rainfall in the area amounts to 200–400mm. In the rainy season between June and September precipitation concentrates on the two months of July and August. Annual and local variations in quantity, intensity and intervals are great. The dry season includes a winter season between November and January with temperatures falling to 5°C at night and a summer season between February and May with continuous dry hot weather.

Kutum is situated in the acacia mellifera savannah. Vegetation consists of several acacia varieties and some other tree and bush species like balanites aegyptiaca (hjiljil/labob), ziziphus spina christi (sidir/nabag), capparis decidua (tundub), and boscia senegalensis (mukheir). The ground vegetation includes varieties of aristida grasses (gao) and herbs like cassia tora (kawall/harisha) and cassia occidentalis (kawall/sureb/sene) (Ibrahim, 1984, p. 80).

The sandy soils (goz) around Kutum are cultivated during the rainy season. All-the-year-round pastures are situated about 10 km north
and south of Kutum. Unlike the qoz, the fertile banks of the seasonal river (wadi), which near Kutum runs almost east-west, are cultivated throughout the year. During the dry season, the gardens are irrigated by numerous wells at depths of between four and twelve metres.

Kutum town is a small regional centre which has been rapidly growing during the last decade. At the same time, it has been a source of and transit place for migrants. According to information from the Council, Kutum town was inhabited by 12 093, Kutum rural by 61 000 persons in 1986–87. A survey of 206 households, that is 8.4 per cent of all households of Kutum, showed that many ethnic groups live in the town. The Tunjur (35 per cent of the heads of household) and Fur (10.7 per cent) are mostly peasants and gardeners. Many of the Zagawa (25.4 per cent), who had been pastoralists, cultivators, and gatherers of wild fruit before (Tubiana and Tubiana, 1977), settled in Kutum as merchants, officers, teachers, craftsmen, petty traders, peasants, and gardeners during the 1980s. The 'Arabs' (13.6 per cent) in Kutum mainly comprise the nomadic groups of the Awlad Jallul, Ereigat, Iteifat, and Mahriya. Part of them settled in town, whereas the others are on the move with their animals during most of the year. The ‘Fellata’ (3.4 per cent) are former migrants from West Africa who have settled in Sudan. Small groups of Bergo, Berti, Birgid, Danagla, Katinga, Kinia, Masalit, Meidob, Mimi, Nuba, Sukain and Tama also live in Kutum.

The bed of Wadi Kutum divides the town into the southern and northern quarters. In the south, the British colonialists had established the councils, the police, the court, the hospital, and the prison. The northern part comprises the market and the living quarters. The houses in Kutum are mostly constructed out of clay, arranged within a yard (hosh) which is surrounded by a clay wall. Inside the hosh there usually are three buildings, one for men, one for women, and one kitchen. Some houses and the public buildings are built out of bricks. Other houses, mostly in the outskirts but also some inside Kutum, are made out of straw and surrounded by a straw fence. The building material of the houses can serve as an indicator of the wealth of the inhabitants, with the reservation that recent immigrants, even if wealthy, might have constructed provisional straw or mud houses.

In 1988 only a few street lamps and houses received electricity by a diesel generator operated by the Council, but most of the time, because of diesel shortage, only the houses the owners of which had installed private generators were lit. The majority of the population depended on oil lamps and fire for light and on charcoal and wood for
Peasant Livelihood

cooking. Water was pulled out of the wells and carried home privately or deliverymen and women brought it on donkeys’ backs to their customers’ houses. Transport facilities existed in two directions: three to four times a week, buses and lorries went to the north (Dar Zaghawa) and to El-Fasher. Local public transport was not available, people usually rode on donkeys or walked.

At the time of the field study, Kutum provided five primary schools for boys and three for girls, three secondary schools for boys and one for girls, and one high school for boys with evening classes for girls.

The main productive activities in Kutum region are agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture and food processing. Moreover, there are several trades and services. Before introducing them in detail, I would like to deal with the basic factor of agricultural production, access to land.

Land Tenure Systems in Kutum

Until the beginning of the Nimeiri era (1969–85), the cultivators had the right to use land allocated by the sheikhs as long as they paid a tithe (ushur) and a religious duty (zakat). It was not allowed to sell the land (officers of the Council; Bliss, 1990, p. 41). In 1971 Nimeiri announced the Unregistered Land Act (ULA), by which all rights to unregistered land were formally transferred to the government (Rünger, 1987, p. 28). Nevertheless, the sheikhs continued to act as land-allocating authorities in Kutum region. Since the 1970s, peasants have increasingly refused to return their plots to them and frequently have been successful in the legal courts. In the present practice, any person who clears a plot and cultivates it for three subsequent years is regarded as its legal owner. If land is left fallow, any person can clear and use it. The shari‘a judge reported cases of disputes between sheikhs, traditional estate owners, and the cultivators on the one hand, and among peasants on the other. Quarrels among peasants mostly occurred, because a family who used to cultivate a certain plot left the area during the drought of 1983–85, came back, and found their plot occupied by another family. Such cases are often pending for five years and more, because documents of ownership do not exist. In order to avoid this kind of trouble, family members of absent customary land owners frequently protect the land by making a few symbolic holes, thus pretending to work on it. Ushur seems to be abandoned in Kutum region, but zakat is paid in the case of a good harvest. Qoz land is usually handed out by the parents or
grandparents of the bride or of the bridegroom to a newly married couple. The sheikhs no longer have power to interfere in this, although they still seem to be regarded as custodians of the government-owned land who have to be approached in certain cases. Thus, on the qoz soils a creeping privatization of land is gradually eroding the traditional system.

Alluvial land has turned de facto into private land. It is inherited according to Islamic law. If the owner dies, his parents receive 1/6 each, his wife 1/8, the rest is divided among his children, boys getting twice as big a share as girls. During the 1980s, alluvial land developed into such an important means of production that there is now no more land left. Production on wadi land has developed into a substitute for the centuries-old cultivation on qoz lands. The advantage of the alluvial soil is its high fertility which renews itself without a fallow period.

For those who do not own a garden, the most common way to gain access to irrigated land is leasing. Leaseholders have to stick to certain conditions which slightly differ from owner to owner. Generally they obtain a plot of about 1 feddan on which they have to dig a well. They are confined to growing seasonal crops, that means vegetables. Rarely does the garden owner take a small amount of the harvest, mostly the producers are allowed to keep the income from vegetable sales for themselves. Thus, leaseholding is mostly free of charge. In June the leaseholders have to cover the wells with earth and to clear the land of all vegetables so that it is ready for millet production. The land owner benefits from leasing out plots, because the leaseholders improve the soil through fertilization with manure and prepare the plots for the owner’s millet production. Peasant families in and around Kutum increasingly depend on incomes from vegetable sales during the dry season, because for many years the millet harvest on the qoz has been very poor or failed completely. The number of leaseholders in one garden varies according to its size between 1 and 25. The number of villagers who find a plot to be leased is also the availability of diesel pumps. Those garden owners who irrigate their gardens by diesel pumps do not lease out plots, because they are able to irrigate all their land with little labour.

During the 1980s, rare cases of land purchase occurred, either due to the owner needing money urgently or a quarrel between heirs who divided the money they got from the land among them. The occurrence of land sale has to be regarded as a first step to land commercialization.
These changes in tenure systems indicate how peasants are being integrated into the market.

Rainfed Agriculture

On the qoz of Kutum region peasants produce rainfed crops mainly for consumption. Millet is the staple food crop, other rainfed crops are okra (bamia), red pepper (shata), water melons (tabich), sesame (simsim), hibiscus (karkadé), cow peas (lubia), and groundnuts (ful). In the event of a surplus the peasants sell it at the market.

Qoz clearance is finished by May. Villagers who have been spending the dry season in Kutum move back home to cultivate. Sowing starts on 1 July. It is mostly done by women, each working alone or with her children on her and her husband’s joint field. One hectare requires about 10 kg of seeds. The peasants have different opinions about the most effective cultivation method. Some cling to sowing only millet, others adhere to intercropping millet with red millet (mareg), sesame, hibiscus, cow peas, water melon, okra, red pepper, or tomatoes. Some fields are sown prior to proper clearance if there is hope of good rains, mostly due to labour constraints. The peasants clear these fields later, if the expectation of a good harvest grows and if labour is available. If the rains are meagre, these parts of the fields are not cleared, and weeding is reduced according to the diminishing expectations of a successful harvest. The same crops are also sown on the clay soils west of Kutum and at the banks of the wadi. Here the peasants distribute the seeds more densely than on sandy soils.

Some peasants have more than one field. The fields are scattered over different areas so that the chance of at least one field getting enough rain is greater. The distance between homes and fields might be up to four hours by donkey.

If the rains are favourable, the peasants start weeding the qoz fields three or four weeks after sowing. They furrow the sandy soil with long-handled hoes. According to the availability of labour, weeding is organized in different ways. Some of the wealthier people arrange a work party (tawiza or nafir) with neighbours, friends, and relatives. In former times, one field after another was weeded by such a party group, each member in turn being host for the others. Today the tawiza is no longer always reciprocal (Kevane, 1991). Others hire wage labourers to overcome the seasonal peaks. Due to growing poverty, the majority of Kutum peasants can no longer afford to provide the food required for a tawiza nor to employ labourers. The
custom of communal work has declined, and poor peasants’ families are left drudging on their own.

On clay soil, weeding is very exhausting because the peasants work bent down, with the short-handled hoe and pull the densely growing grass out by hoe and hand. Therefore, in case of promising rains, many peasants do not start weeding their alluvial plots before they have finished weeding as much as possible on the less strenuous goz.

During years of a locust plague as in 1988, all the male peasants are busy for several weeks killing the pest while the women continue weeding on their own. From September to November the ripening millet is threatened by birds which eat the grains. Mostly children shoo the birds away with rattles throughout these days.

In case of favourable rains, the harvest starts by the end of October. During December and January men and women thresh and winnow the millet ears. Finally they fill sacks and underground stores (mat-mura) with the grain and keep it if possible until the next rainy season. On the alluvial land, twelve sacks of millet per feddan are harvested in a good year, whereas the sandy soils yield only three sacks per feddan (Martin, 1985).

The peasants cut the stalks which remain on the fields, to build huts and fences. Animals eat the stubble on the field and fertilize the soil with dung. Because of land scarcity, the soil is no longer left fallow and its fertility is only renewed by dung, burning bushes and grass, and sometimes by intercropping the legume lubia.

The annual cycle of rainfed production shows that the peasants’ decisions with regard to millet production depend on the following factors:

- the development of the rainy season determines the extent to which the peasants clear land and weed;
- the minimum effort required to reap a maximum harvest is decisive for the choice of the type of soil worked;
- unfavourable climatic conditions increase the effort peasants expend on subsistence production;
- the availability of family labour or sufficient wealth to hold a tawiza or pay for labour is a prerequisite for gaining a maximum harvest;
- if this is not available, peasants try to maximize their harvest by means of ‘self-exploitation’;\(^5\)
- integration in the community (participation in anti-locust campaigns and tawizas) and thus use of relationships exceeding household boundaries is a means of maximizing the harvest.
These factors are relevant to peasant economic actions irrespective of the development of market prices. The peasants aim at securing their livelihood for as long a period as possible by producing a stock of millet which could satisfy the present needs and also suffice for the time to come. Constraints the peasants face are:

- unfavourable spread or disadvantageous temporal and quantitative distribution of rains;
- labour shortages, possibly in connection with a lack of wealth;
- pests or diseases;
- limited physical strength or, from an external point of view, lack of appropriate equipment to work the clay soil.

Because of the insecurity of the yields, peasants take advantage of further means of livelihood.

**Animal Husbandry**

Out of a sample of 313 families, 44 per cent used livestock as a source of livelihood, most of them, however, to a small extent. The nomads in Kutum area raise camels, sheep, and goats, which they occasionally sell or barter for millet. Usually the nomadic families set off for the south in June and, together with the rain, move north up to wadi Howar where the animals can feed on gizzu, a type of grass which only grows there during the rainy season. Sometimes the nomads cross the Chadian border and drive their livestock onto the pastures available there. During the period of migration the families live in mobile camps (Holter, 1991). By February the families are back in Kutum area and camp near permanent wells, whereas the animals are driven to the nearby summer pastures. If the rainy season fails, there are no gizzu pastures in the north, and the male nomads, instead of moving north, migrate with the herds farther south into densely cultivated areas, leaving their families in the stationary camps. In south Darfur numerous bloody clashes between nomads and peasants have been occurring due to the pressure on the land caused by the influx of the herds. Meanwhile an increasing number of nomads has settled down in 16 villages around Kutum and in Kutum town. The heads of household hire herdsmen to move with the herds. They have built permanent huts, sent their children to school, and even taken up rainfed cultivation to a certain extent (Holter, 1993, p. 510).
Most of the Zaghawa, who used to live northwest of Kutum, were forced to give up animal husbandry during the drought. A great number of them have left their home areas and settled down in other parts of Darfur or in dar sabah (literally ‘the home of the morning’ which means eastern and central Sudan). Only the Bideyat, a nomadic subgroup of the Zaghawa, who live on the Sudanese as well as on the Chadian side of the national boundary, did not face substantial losses of animals. Traditionally they have always depended on camels which are best adapted to the Sahelian conditions.

Nomadic mobility has been constrained by ecological, economic, and political developments, leading to commercialization of herding and settlement of nomads (Mohamed Salih, 1990). Other means of livelihood have become crucial for many nomads.

**Horticulture**

Since the mid-1970s vegetable and fruit cultivation in irrigated gardens on the wadi banks has been expanding. Cash crop production on alluvial land has become the main productive activity during the dry season. According to information from the Agricultural Department, there are about 4000 gardens between Kutum and Fatta Borno (about 16 km west of Kutum), of which about 90 per cent are irrigated by dalu (leather or plastic buckets pulled out by hand) and the rest by diesel-pumps. The average size of the gardens is little more than 1 feddan, it varies between 1/4 and 5 feddan (Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil, 1985, p. 340).

The season of irrigated horticulture usually starts after the millet harvest in December or January. Only if the millet harvest has failed, do the peasant women plant onions and red pepper as early as September. Land preparation includes digging a well or re-opening a well which has been dug earlier. The gardeners clear the land, furrow the clay soil, and dig irrigation channels. If necessary a fence out of thornshrubs is put around the plot. These heavy jobs are usually done by men, but if no male family member is present, women do the work. Sometimes a tawiza is organized for plot preparation.

All work connected with vegetable growing is done by women, with only a few exceptions. The main crops are onions, tomatoes and bamia. Many gardeners also plant carrots, cucumbers, green pepper, rocket, radish, red beets, two kinds of green leafy vegetables (rigla and chudra, also known as moulochiya), lettuce, eggplants, garlic, dill, pumpkins, potatoes, sweet potatoes, red pepper, water melons or honeydew melons. The plants need irrigation nearly every day, some
even twice a day. Weeding and harvesting is done by hand and hoe. Some gardeners, and of those a majority of men, specialize in production of fruit, mostly dates, mangoes, guavas, lemons, grapefruits and occasionally oranges. Fruit production does not require as much labour as vegetable production, because it needs less irrigation and weeding. Those gardeners who irrigate their plots by diesel-pumps grow mostly beans, a fodder clover (*berseem*) and onions.

Livelihood from horticulture is to a minor extent gained through direct consumption (onions, tomatoes, *chudra*) but mainly through marketing. On the other hand, the clay soils are used as a reserve for grain production destined for family consumption which gains greatly in importance in dry years.

**Market and Trade in Kutum**

Kutum market is the catchment area for the whole region. Its size varies according to market days and seasons. The biggest markets are before the two great Muslim feasts *id al fatur* and *id al adha*. During the season between April and July, vegetable supplies from the wadi gardens are abundant. If there has been a millet crop failure, the first onion harvest is sold as early as January at a high price.

During the main season, every Monday and Thursday the market centre is packed with petty vegetable traders. Some of them come from two days’ distance on donkeys or camels, the majority from Kutum and nearby villages. Most of the women petty traders sell their own produce, sitting closely beside one another under simple shadow roofs or in the open. They have their crops spread in front of them on sacks and in dishes or built up in small heaps. Nomadic women sell milk, fat, and yoghurt. In 1988 the petty traders’ net profit was 10 to 20 LS per market day. Women who do not own a garden or those who have not yet harvested vegetables from their plots buy little amounts of fruit, vegetables, peanuts, fodder, grain, or oil from wholesalers and resell them at the market. Others put manufactured products or processed food on the market. In 1988 they made a net profit between 7 LS and 20 LS per market day.

Women from Dar Zaghawa visit the market only once or twice a month. They offer wild fruit (in 1988 mainly *lalob* and processed *kawal*) which they gather in their home areas. They barter the fruit for onions, pounded dried tomatoes, and dried ladyfingers (*weika*). Generally the women traders spend the money earned or barter their goods immediately for basic food and household needs.
The owners of diesel-pump-irrigated gardens are much better off than the vendors of dali-irrigated gardens. Whereas in 1988, one sack of onions was sold in Kutum according to season for 80 to 160 LS, one sack of beans brought in 500 LS.

Male traders offer clothes, pots, and tableware, saddles, stools, beds, mats and other manufactured goods as well as potatoes, garlic and hens in temporary market stalls or in the open. At the livestock market camels, goats, donkeys, and sheep are on offer. The butchers work in a shop in the centre of the market. Several small bread stalls are supplied by three bakeries. Men, women and children bring firewood and charcoal from at least two hours’ distance on donkeys or camels. Boys walk around selling spices, matches or batteries. Round the market there are the workshops of the carpenters, metal workers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, mattress makers, and tailors, as well as laundries and repair shops for bicycles, watches, radios, and so on. The owners of permanent tin shops sell cloth, petrol, clothes, cooking pots, tableware and household utensils, canned food, sweets, cosmetics, tea, spices, legumes, dried crops, lamps, batteries, flour and sugar. Boiled tea and fresh juice are prepared in small stalls. Boys are busy cleaning shoes, selling cigarettes or water for washing and for the animals.

During the rainy season, the market shrinks to about a quarter of the size of the summer season, because the bulk of the harvest from the wadi gardens has been sold, and customers as well as petty traders are busy cultivating their qoz fields. If transport is not hampered by muddy roads, the market is supplied with crops from Jebel Marra and Central Sudan. Due to transport problems, the arrival of lorries which bring commodities, fruit, and vegetables is unpredictable, and some market days pass without any supply from outside. At the end of a successful rainy season, the peasants empty their stores and sell the grain of the previous harvest. Its quality is low because of the storage in the matmura.

The prices for vegetables on offer at Kutum market fluctuate according to supply and demand throughout the year. During December the supply is scarce. Those few traders who can afford to store onions for such a long time make high profits then, and even more, if they sell them in El-Fasher. July is the month with the least profit, because most of the producers need the cash immediately after harvest and do not have suitable storage facilities. Some petty traders have special contracts with middlemen or wholesalers, selling them their best-quality produce for slightly higher prices than those their collea-
gues demand. The wholesalers resell these crops at the markets of El-Fasher, Umm Keddada, Daein, Nyala, Kattal, Wadaa, Alleit or Shangil-Toobai, making much higher profits than the Kutum market vendors (Umbadda and Abdul-Jalil, 1984, p. 24).

The price differences between Kutum and El-Fasher or other outside markets do not depend on healthy competition. They are determined by arrangements between the wholesalers who have an oligopsonic position in vegetable trade (Umbadda and Abdul Jalil, 1984, p. 24). Thus the Kutum vegetable producers are deprived of the gain they could reap if there was free competition. Instead, the profit margin is distributed between the middlemen, the traders who resell the crops at the other markets, and the Tax Department, which demands 14.3 percent of the retail price. Only a few gardeners take advantage of the high profits from vegetable sales at urban markets, sharing the sale of their vegetables between husband and wife. Whereas the man takes the better quality crops to El-Fasher by camel or lorry, the woman sells the crops of poorer quality to Kutum customers.

In 1976 gardeners founded a branch of the Farmers' Union of Darfur in Kutum. This parastatal organization supplied gardeners with subsidized fuel, insecticides and seeds. The union also arranged enlightenment campaigns concerning ecology and horticulture for its members. In 1988 it had more than 8000 members, one quarter of them women. The members typically were those in whose name the gardens had been registered. The diesel-pump owners and the fruit producers dominated. The Farmers' Union represented the interests of the well-situated commercial farmers in Kutum area and only to a little extent those of the small vegetable producers.

The owners of the tin shops were organized in the Merchants' Union which controlled the supply with grain, sugar and imported goods. It had 204 members, among them only one woman. The union was organized as a joint stock company; each shareholder was paid an annual dividend. During 1988 the supply of goods under the control of the Merchants' Union fluctuated wildly, the prices increased rapidly.

This survey confirms that peasants are subject to exploitation by other classes, in this case merchants, middlemen and state authorities. The organizations introduced in this section reflect attempts to defend socio-economic interests by means of a civil society. However, the members were commercial farmers, merchants, and shop owners. Peasants were not formally organized.

To sum up, Kutum peasants react to price opportunities under certain conditions and to differing extents: they use marketing opportun-
ities seasonally; the degree to which they integrate in the market depends on the degree of food self-sufficiency they have reached during the rainy season. In case of rainfed crop failure, they heavily depend on the sale of cash crops produced during the dry season, as the observation that they start onion and shata cultivation early only when the millet crop has failed confirms. This confirms the thesis of incomplete market integration introduced above. Diesel-pump owners react to price opportunities by partly replacing the common crops by highly profitable crops. The technological advantage has thus led to more market-oriented production. If the peasants were paid according to effort and quality of their products, market integration could be a successful livelihood strategy. However, because the main profit of peasant production is drained away and not re-invested in peasant production, peasant livelihood conditions are declining and insecurity is growing.

Other Productive Activities

There are three further spheres of production in Kutum region: gathering and hunting, food processing and manual work.

Women and children gather wild fruit to complement the table, especially during the rainy season when the last harvest has already been nearly consumed and the new one has not yet been brought in. Seeds of herbs, grasses and wild grains like brachiaria deflexa (koreib), aristida-grasses, echinochloa colona (difra), sorghum sudanensis (adar), berries like balanites aegyptiaca (lalob), boscia senegalensis (mukheit), and ziziphus spinachristi (nabag), herbs like cassia tora and cassia occidentalis (kawal) (Martin, 1985, p. 42) are well-known in rural households. Zaghawa women are most experienced in gathering and know the fruit and places where to find them better than other people, because they originate from the driest areas of Darfur and regularly use these fruit in their diet. Specialists in hunting are the Zaghawa blacksmiths (Tubiana and Tubiana, 1977). However, the drought has decimated wildlife very much so that hunting has become a difficult job nowadays.

Most of the women in Kutum and in the villages collect wood nearly everyday from a distance of about one hour’s walk. In 1988 the supply of dead wood was high due to the long period of drought which had killed many bushes and trees.

Food processing is exclusively women’s work throughout Sudan. In Kutum region the main dish is a stiff millet pudding (asida) with a sauce
(mulah) which is made from weika, powdered tomatoes, red pepper and/or dried meat. Most of the population rarely eat fresh vegetables or meat in the sauce. Only wealthy inhabitants of Kutum can afford such a meal from time to time. Besides preparing meals for family consumption, women and girls also process food for sale: they roast groundnuts or grind them to peanut butter or oil, make round flat fermented sorghum cakes called kisra, fat, yoghurt, mixtures of spices, thea roast melon seeds or locusts, boil eggs or potatoes and sell them with shata, fry maize or sweet dough balls (ligeimat), make tea and coffee. Besides food production, the daily processing of food is the basic productive activity in order to gain food security for rural families. Its importance is widely neglected in economic presentations and statistics of production.

Trades are a further important productive sector in Kutum. The producers can be divided into three groups:

1. Those who use local and natural materials. This group includes the pastoralists, builders, bed-, stool- and mattress-makers. The areas in which particularly women do manual work include making mats (birish), food covers (tabak), baskets, bags, besoms and decorative assets from straw, leather, roots or grass, plastic and glass beads, embroidering tray or table cloths or rugs and crochet caps, and making cosmetics from sandalwood, sugar and imported perfumes. Certain Zagawha women specialize in making water containers from burnt clay and dung.

2. Those who use scrap iron or worn-out materials and recycle them for other purposes, like shoemakers who make shoes out of tyres, blacksmiths, and metal workers.

3. Those who use imported materials, such as carpenters or tailors, or those who repair imported goods like watches, bicycles, radios, and so on.

The number and output of the manual workers is limited by the demand of the population of Kutum region. Manufactured goods are not exported to other towns, but some are imported from El-Fasher or Nyala (Hansohm, 1991).

**Occupational Structure of Kutum Heads of Household**

Income and employment could be a chance to compensate losses in subsistence production. In order to gain evidence on the importance of income in this peripheral area of Sudan, the occupation of heads of
household living in villages and in Kutum town are listed below in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 respectively. The data are based on the answers filled in for the category ‘occupation of head of household’ in school enrolment forms of two primary schools and in the questionnaire of the household survey. This procedure is similar to that used in national censuses.

**Table 3.1** Occupation of heads of household (hh) in villages around Kutum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of hh</th>
<th>Percentage of hh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government employee</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant/gardener</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Dead’</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Own surveys of households and files of two primary schools; qualitative interviews.

**Table 3.2** Occupation of heads of household (hh) in Kutum town

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation of hh</th>
<th>Number of hh</th>
<th>Percentage of hh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government employee</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant/gardener</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual worker</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Dead’</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Own surveys of households and files of two primary schools; qualitative interviews.

At first sight a comparison of the two tables shows that in the villages, two-thirds of the heads of household are peasants and/or gardeners, whereas in Kutum the occupations are much more diversified and stratified. Kutum as the regional capital has a high share of
white collar jobs and trading. The differences in the occupational structure can easily be explained by urbanization.

These are the only points that can be made without any doubt. The details must be interpreted with caution. First of all, the sample is distorted in favour of middle class households, because the poorest do not send their children to school. Secondly, the tables indicate only one activity per person. This is in contrast to the results of the qualitative interviews, according to which each household member was active in different sectors, varying according to season and agricultural conditions. Including this in the analysis the following tendencies become noticeable:

- Most of the gardeners are at the same time traders. In the household survey it is arbitrary, whether the interviewees call the heads of household traders, peasants, or gardeners.
- Peasants as well as traders could also be manual workers or food processors, who sell their produce and therefore call themselves traders. Or they work as traditional manual workers only during the slack season and as peasants during the rainy season and therefore call themselves peasants.
- Some of those who call themselves peasants work as day labourers or traders during the dry season, and vice versa.

Thus, with the exception of a few merchants, the majority of traders could be counted as peasants. In this case there would be 36 per cent heads of household who were peasants in Kutum town and 75.2 per cent in the villages. These data would still be rough because (manual) workers could also frequently be peasants during the rainy season. These figures show that, contrary to the opinions of many scholars (Ellis, 1988; Hyden, 1982; Shanin, 1971; Chayanov, 1966), the rural population is engaged in a broad range of income or food generating activities other than cultivating, which have to be regarded as equally important. Furthermore it has to be considered that the head of household need not necessarily be the one who contributes most to the livelihood of his or her household group. Besides the garden production and petty trade of women and children, there could be further productive household members and migrants who send money, clothes or food.

Only the occupations indicated for employees, merchants and workshop owners are mostly valid. Their land is mainly worked by family members and partly by wage labourers. However, even these
groups frequently add further activities to their main occupation, because salaries for government employees and teachers are low and irregular due to macro-economic and political problems. Mostly they engage in trading, many of them also work in their fields during the rainy season.

All these points make clear that the relevance of this type of statistics is limited. It might even lead its users astray. However, the official data base for development planning usually includes only one activity of the head of household. The analysis just presented suggests that a picture of the means by which most people in a peasant society contribute to the livelihood of their household members would be much more instructive for development planning than a census which includes the occupations of heads of household.

**Political Structure in Kutum during the Third Democratic Period**

Extensions of national political institutions link the local communities with the broader society. In Kutum the branches of the Umma and the DUP had already been founded in 1943, the Muslim Brothers started activities in 1952. After Independence, particularly, the Umma succeeded in winning followers among the traditional leaders of the magdoumiya Kutum, claiming that their grandfathers had fought the British during the rule of the Mahdi between 1881 and 1885. After 16 years of silence due to the suppression by the Nimeiri regime, the political parties restarted activities in 1985. Because the citizens of Kutum District were not used to making individual political decisions, the traditional leaders persuaded their followers to vote for their favourite party during the election of 1986. As on the national level, a coalition of Umma and DUP was established, the NIF minority formed the opposition.

The third democratic government was in office for only three years, and because Kutum is located in a remote area, changes oozed through slowly. Officials as well as civilians seemed to adhere to a wait-and-see attitude. The parties altogether pursued general national objectives. The vague political statements of Umma and DUP reflected the fact that their basis was rooted in traditional clan affiliations which had grown into an unpoltical ideology. Neither Umma nor DUP voiced any statement concerning local politics except winning votes and more members. Membership of the Umma Party amounted to 14,000 persons, of the DUP to 2000, and of the National Islamic Front (NIF) to 1500 in Kutum District. In 1988, the party
committees were still busy analyzing the results of the election and denouncing cases of fraud and deception which seem to have occurred frequently. They got lost in a narrow-minded power struggle over the distribution of seats in the administrative committees, which paralyzed the work of the executive. The two parties only convoked meetings which concerned their own members, but never public assemblies or discussions. Money ruled the relation with their followers and took a considerable share in establishing their power base. Beyond its meagre budget from the central government, the main source of financial support of the Umma Party were the merchants.

The NIF cleverly utilized the competition between Umma and DUP. It fuelled the struggle by various public accusations. The NIF was a well-organized group with clearcut and radical political aims. Its main objective was to take over power and to make Sudan a theocratic Islamic state. Contrary to the ruling parties, the NIF was active in public. Its members arranged public lectures on Islamizing the state, Islamic education, and other subjects related to their political aims. The lectures were held at the market and always attended by a group of 20 to 50 men. There were no corresponding lectures for women.

Only in May 1988, when Umma and NIF were reconciled on the national level, did the local branches of Umma and DUP stop exposing each other’s failures. In the aftermath of this compromise the Head of the Umma party claimed as political priorities unity of state and religion, spread of Islam and of the knowledge of the qur’an as well as construction of mosques and pharmacies.

The changed political environment dragging behind it problems inherited from the past demanded its tribute: increased criminality, frequent cases of armed robbery, and timid and delayed innovation of the administration had their roots in the unsolved contradictions of the past. In 1988 these culminated in a further power struggle besides that between Umma, DUP, and NIF. It was the struggle between the old and new forces, represented by the traditional leaders and the councils.

The sheikhs were elected by the inhabitants of their villages or quarters. The sheikhs elected the omdas and these two groups elected the maliks. A malik candidate had to be accepted by all tribes in his administrative unit. On the other hand, Kutum District was administered by five councils in 1988: Kutum Rural, Fatta Borno, Umm Borro, Karnoy, and the Nomads’ Council. The councils carried out administrative tasks, partly in cooperation with the sheikhs and
omdas. They collected taxes on trees, livestock, trade and assets and zakat from those with capital at their disposal. They distributed grain, when food aid arrived in July 1988. Sugar rations of 1 *rotul* per person per month were handed out at the subsidized price of 1 LS. Members of the government and merchants were privileged, obtaining a licence for 1 sack of sugar per month. Further extra rations were distributed for special occasions like circumcision, marriage, return of migrants, obsequies. Household requirements which exceeded the rations had to be bought from the shopkeepers at the market price. The councils also allotted petrol and issued licences for market stalls. Due to shortage of finance, the councils frequently resorted to borrowing money from the Merchants' Union in order to pay salaries to their staff. A further task of the councils was to transmit juridical cases, which the *sheikhs* forwarded to them, to the Local or District Courts. If requested, departments of the councils provided calculations of damages and similar services for the judges.

Control over the population had become weak since Nimeiri had abolished traditional leadership. Since 1986 the councils had returned some particular responsibilities to the *sheikhs*, *omdas* and *maliks*, hoping to regain control this way. Thus, the native administrators guarded the trees and turned illegal wood cutters over to the police. They were responsible for road maintenance. In cases of water scarcity, they fixed the days on which certain groups of people were allowed to fetch water. They also submitted petitions from civilians, for instance concerning food distribution or social services, to the councils. The *sheikhs* were given back the task of settling disputes between individuals. If they could not solve them, they presented them to the *omdas*. The *maliks* were responsible for the solution of tribal problems and the supervision of the *omdas* and *sheikhs*. The method of finding a conflict solution was based on the native administrators' knowledge about the background of the parties concerned. Conflicts due to crop damage by intruding livestock and quarrels about boundaries were the most frequent cases they had to solve. If they were not able to settle the dispute, they took the case to the Council, which in turn transmitted charges in connection with land disputes to the judge.

Re-establishing part of the native administration meant authorizing a system within which the executive and juridical functions were not separate. It was ruled by the principles of equality and mutuality and the primacy of the family or tribal community over the individual. It included participatory as well as hierarchical elements. The popula-
tion had an influence on the authorities by electing the sheikhs, the lowest level of the hierarchy. On the other hand, they could decide whether they wanted juridical cases to be dealt with by the modern or native institutions. This allowed them to play the authorities off against each other. For example, thieves and robbers preferred to be heard by an official judge, who in many cases was not able to throw light on the whole background of the crime. His sentence tended to be milder than that following the inquiries of the native judges. The democratic government obviously intended to strengthen the native administration even more. Some traditional leaders spoke already of a renewal of the magdoumiya in a democratic, modernized shape. However, during 1988 clear determinations were neither made for the administrative nor for the juridical system.

The peasants remained minor figures in the changing power relations. They dealt with the political and judicial institutions if they needed services and if they were obliged to pay taxes and dues. The sheikh was present during daily life as the person directly responsible for law and order. Elections of political parties, on the other hand, required loyalty to a tradition which was bound to certain local leaders, among them also the sheikhs. The activities of the parties took place in central Sudan, which was out of reach of the peasants. Bonds with parties were only maintained if they resulted in direct material advantages. The reality peasants lived in was a power vacuum which created at least disorientation, and at worst tendencies towards social disintegration and criminality.

CONCLUSION: COMPONENTS OF PEASANT LIVELIHOOD

The land tenure system determines the conditions of peasant production and, thus, has an impact on their livelihood. In the customary tenure law, the peasants themselves decide on seasons, crops, schedule, methods of cultivation, allocation of labour, methods to conserve soil and water and so on. If the peasants are leaseholders, sharecroppers, tenants, or otherwise dependent, some of the decisions are beyond their scope. Nevertheless, as dependent producers or free, they are burdened with the risks of agricultural production. Typically peasant production is subject to conditions which cannot be influenced by them. However, they use several means to ease these conditions:
• Animal husbandry can be a main source or an additional means to secure the livelihood, using the livestock for milk, transport, ploughing or marketing in times of want. Access to fodder and water, free routes for migration with the herd, and labour are preconditions for this option.
• Gathering or hunting, sale of processed goods, handicrafts or repair work are further means of livelihood.
• Temporary wage labour is taken up mainly by poor peasants.
• Peasants mostly produce for local markets, but some of their produce reaches the national or international market. The conditions of trade, that is infrastructure, transport, access to markets and to market information, the determinants of prices, the impact of auctions, fees, and taxes for the producers, are crucial for peasant livelihood.
• Peasant livelihood has always a social component. Each person and each household member combines a variety of means to participate in securing the livelihood of the whole group. Mostly family labour, complemented by communal or hired labour, is used to secure the peasants' physical needs. Social bonds are developed and maintained through exchange of animals, food, labour, services and money. The bonds between scattered kin groups and within the tribe provide access to remote but fertile pastures and plots of land, to meals served during feasts, and offer opportunities for further means of livelihood through business arrangements, trade profits, or smuggling.

Power relations determine the livelihood of the peasants. In former times they depended on authorities who allocated land, fixed the time of sowing, and settled disputes. Rudiments of these former structures survived among Sudanese peasant sub-societies, although other social systems overlaid and partly eclipsed them. Whereas the former leaders periodically succeeded in securing power in alliance with the subsequent rulers, the peasants remained in a subordinate position. Until recently they managed to evade the grip of the ruling classes, either in tactical alliances with their native leaders, or against them.
Notes

1. Pastoralists are defined here as people who cultivate and, at the same time, raise animals.

2. 'Structural heterogeneity' describes the relation between the technically advanced capital-intensive productive sector and the poorly developed labour-intensive agricultural sector. It is not likely to be dissolved by a trickle-down effect through modernization of one sector but, instead, seems to be maintained and re-established in the process of dependent development. Cf. Silva-Michelena (1975), Santos (1980), Sunkel (1980), Furtado (1980), and Tibi (1991).

3. The sharia is the Islamic law. In 1988 the sharia judges of Kutum dispensed justice for Muslims in matters of inheritance, marital status and family affairs.


6. The use of DDT is widespread in Sudan. In Europe it is forbidden because of the threat to human health.

7. Sugar is important, because for the Sudanese it is a major supplier of immediate energy consumed in tea. It signifies wealth to use much sugar and to offer plenty of it to guests.