

Part I. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

Introduction

This section of the report presents a review of the data collected thus far in the ethnographic study of agricultural production and the household economy of the El Obeid region of North Kordofan. In Report No. 1, the primary focus of this study has been on three villages in our village sample. These villages are El Kharta (north of El Obeid), El Geifil (east of El Obeid) and Umm Ramad (southwest of El Obeid). These three villages were selected for intensive study of the farming system in this area of North Kordofan in order to design a survey instrument of farming operations. This survey instrument was used with a sample of farmers in 15 villages in the El Obeid area beginning in late May, 1982.

Between July 1981 and January 1982, an extensive amount of data was collected from the three villages in our study area. First, we attempted to collect data on all aspects of the farming system found in this Sahelian environment. Such data include farmers' access to land, labor, and capital, how they manage these resources, as well as how these resources are channeled into cropping patterns, animal husbandry and off-farm economic activities. Second, detailed descriptions of farming practices have been obtained as well as the local names of the operations and tools involved. Some of this information is presented in Appendix D of this report. Third, information regarding the growth cycles of crops and the various stages of growth which farmers recognize as being important is being collected. The stages of millet growth as identified by farmers in this area and their distinguishing attributes are presented in Appendix C.

General Overview of the Farming System Found in the El Obeid Region of North Kordofan

To fully understand farming in this area of the Sudan, one has to take into account the constraints imposed by the environment. First, this area averages 347 mm of rainfall annually, most within the period between July and October. This rainfall is highly variable from one year to the next, making consistently successful farming almost impossible to achieve. Second, the agricultural area surrounding El Obeid is a transitional zone as far as soils are concerned, with clayey sandy soils lying to the south and qoz soils (stabilized sand dunes) lying to the north. These soils in conjunction with the limited rainfall limits the types of crops that can be grown. The character of agriculture also is heavily influenced by the socio-economic environment which is characterized by extreme poverty, a high inflation rate, unstable government policies, the lack of infrastructure, labor intensive agriculture, a low level of education, and the survival of many traditional beliefs and values.

A detailed description of the farming system characterizing the El Obeid region was presented in our first field report, so no attempt will be made here to deal with it in depth. The five major components of this system are the cropping patterns, animal husbandry, off-farm economic activities, marketing and consumption. Cropping patterns in this system consist of a mixture