

Selling Charcoal and/or Wood

Another activity of some farmers to gain additional income is the selling of charcoal and/or wood. Twenty-two percent (8 of 37) of the farmers in our sample were involved with such activities. Almost all of them (7 of 8) produced charcoal for sale, while half also sold wood for building material. Only one farmer sold firewood.⁵² Most of these farmers (6 of 8) had either a donkey or a camel to haul their wood or charcoal, however, two farmers relied on borrowed or rented animals to do the hauling.

Although the selling of charcoal and/or wood is a way of supplementing the family income, many farmers view this strategy as a last resort. This is especially true of charcoal manufacture. Many of the charcoal producers we interviewed considered this activity hard, nasty work and if they had a choice, they wouldn't do it. Exceptions to this were some camel owners who found it profitable to sell charcoal in urban areas like El Obeid. They willingly pursued such activities. Thus, the farmers who are doing this are either poor and/or camel owners.

Other Types of Income Generating Activities

A number of other activities help supplement farm incomes. These include regular off-farm occupations as well as income generating capital investments. For instance, farmers may be employed by the government as guards, clerks, school teachers or other school employees, policemen, medical assistants, mill operators, etc. Or they may work in the private sector for merchants, truck owners, mill owners, and bakery owners. The number of these employment opportunities which are available to farmers is highly dependent upon the size and institutional development of their village.

In addition to off-farm occupations, some farmers are investing in capital intensive enterprises to gain additional income. The particular investments heavily depend on how much cash they have at their disposal. Some of the enterprises in which they commonly invest include shops, trucks, bakeries, flour mills, oil presses, cisterns, wells, camels for transport, and hauling carts (kaaroo). Due to the resource requirements of such investments, it is only the wealthier farmers who can do this.

From a farming systems perspective, all of the alternative strategies farmers use to supplement their farm income are very important. Given the uncertainty of the environment, farmers cannot always depend on the output gained from cropping activities to meet their minimal household needs. Therefore, they find it necessary to rely on additional income sources to help meet these needs, such as wage labor for other farmers, animal husbandry, migration, monetary gifts from relatives, off-farm occupations and capital intensive enterprises. Which of these strategies farmers pursue and how they combine these with their cropping activities vary from one farmer to the next.

It has been the purpose of this section of the report to discuss the preliminary findings of the initial farming systems survey conducted in the El Obeid region of North Kordofan up to March, 1982. Our aim was to present

⁵²Firewood collection is usually done by women of the household.