Those farmers who do invest in camels use them in income generating activities such as hauling crops, oil presses, and hauling wood, charcoal and millet stalks for sale.

Horses are rarely found in most of the villages around El Obeid. Only three farmers in our sample owned a horse. All three of them were from Umm Ramad. One of these farmers had three horses, but this was quite unusual. Horses are most frequently used to pull the carts (kaaroo) on which crops, water, building materials or other supplies are transported. Several of these carts are in use in Umm Ramad. The other two villages do not have such carts nor the horses to pull them. They rely on camels and donkeys for such services.

The extent to which farmers are investing in animals is worth noting. Such investments are considered a form of savings. For instance, when a farmer's crops do poorly, he can rely on his animals to help him get through a bad year. In addition to being a source of meat or milk, income obtained from animal sales can be used to purchase foodstuffs and other household commodities. Thus, animal investment is another strategy followed by farmers to help deal with the uncertainty imposed on them by their environment. Unfortunately, the long term effects of this short term strategy are detrimental to the environment, and are increasing the danger of desert encroachment. Overgrazing has become such a severe problem that it can no longer be overlooked. Steps should be taken as soon as possible to impress on farmers the need for better range management practices. This should be done in conjunction with the introduction of proper crop rotation practices. Otherwise, environmental degradation will continue on its present course.

Although many farmers are investing in animals, such a strategy is not a viable option for poor farmers with limited resources. These farmers must rely on other means to supplement their meager farm incomes. The following discussion will focus on some of these alternatives.

Migration

One alternative farmers pursue to supplement their incomes is to migrate to other areas for seasonal work. In 40 percent of the forty farm families someone had migrated for seasonal employment, and this included nine of the farmers. Half of these migrants left their villages for employment in El Obeid (8), while the rest migrated to places like Khartoum (2), Habila (2), Gezira (2), Rahad (1) and Wad Medani (1). El Geifil had the greatest number of migrants (5 of 10 or 50%) followed by Umm Ramad (6 of 15 or 40%) and El Kharta (5 of 15 or 33%).

The usual pattern for those who migrate is to wait till the harvest is through for all crops then to leave beginning in late December or early January. They usually return at the end of May or early June in time to

49a Several informants mentioned buying camels from nomads passing near their village as a way of acquiring an animal cheaply, but in such cases the camel sometimes was weak or sick so that it died in the first year that the farmer owned it.

50 Some farmers left as early as November or as late as March; however, the usual time for migration was around January.