assessed on gum. In this case, the estimation procedure is mandated by the People's District Council at Umm Rawaba and is subject to an annual evaluation. After the assembler has loaded his truck, he takes the sesame and gum to el-Obeid and the karkadee to el-Rahad. He nearly always sells to a crop agency rather than at the Crop Market and receives the same terms as described above (i.e., the median price prevailing at el-Obeid Crop Market). As in the example given for the mizaan system, the assemblers' profit margin would be quite low were it not for the possibility to evade taxation on some of the crops he buys.

The Marketing of Sorghum and Millet

Sorghum, more than wheat, and millet to a lesser extent than either sorghum or wheat are common commodities in local markets in the el-Obeid area. A brief historical digression will explain this.

Historical Background

Early in this century the el-Obeid region was settled by subsistence cultivators living in scattered villages. Millet was the principal crop in this semi-arid zone. The other main pursuits of farmers were animal husbandry and gum arabic collection. The region had been depopulated in the previous century by the tribal upheavals that occurred during the Mahdiya (1881-1898). Resettlement came with the reimposition of Anglo-Egyptian Colonial rule, and through the media of administrative and marketing centers, such as el-Obeid, the region was gradually penetrated by the urban money economy that colonial rule fostered. But it was not until the last twenty years that agriculture experienced a strong change of direction. The new emphasis is on cash crops, particularly sesame and groundnuts, with the consequence that millet and sorghum have been partially displaced. This change can be related to a host of demographic, economic and cultural factors, but two stand out. The first point is that the population of the region has grown steadily in this century, especially in the towns like el-Obeid. Many of the townspeople are government workers. Of these, a large number have been transferred to the town from Khartoum and the eastern provinces. These immigrants prefer to eat wheat or sorghum to locally-grown millet and they have set the standards for urban consumers' tastes. Thus, the urban market for locally-produced millet is practically non-existent. Moreover, townspeople have a constant demand for sesame oil—or, less preferably, groundnut oil—which is used for daily cooking. To meet this demand eleven oil processing mills have gone into operation at el-Obeid since 1960. Most of the sesame grown in the area is consumed locally after processing into oil. Groundnuts, by contrast, have become the main export crop in the region. The second point is that the last two decades have seen the development of mechanized farming schemes across the Sudan, along the 600 mm rainfall belt. Sorghum is the principal crop on these schemes. Improvements in transportation have made it possible to distribute the harvest from this grain belt to all parts of the Sudan and even outside the country. It is no longer necessary for a semi-arid region like the one

81 To the east of el-Obeid in the vicinity of el-Rahad and Umm Rawaba karkadee has assumed a major importance as a cash crop.