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Impacts Of Male Outmigration On Women:
Case Study Of Kutum/Northern Darfur/Sudan

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Contents

1.	Introduction	page 1
1.1.	Reasons and background of the case study in Kutum	1
1.2.	Method and aims of the study	3
2.	Kutum labour market	3
3.	Patterns of outmigration	8
3.1.	Outmigration as an anti-destitution strategy of households	8
3.2.	The meaning of wage rates for the decision to migrate	10
3.3.	Gender-specific labour division and migration	10
4.	Economic impacts of labour migration on women	12
5.	The social position of migrants' wives	15
6.	Summary and conclusions	20

1. Introduction

The famine of 1985 which struck severely the western provinces of the Sudan is an indication for the failure of the Sudanese development strategy. The ambitious effort to make Sudan the breadbasket for the oil-rich Arab countries had been wrecked in the beginning of the 1980s. Since then at latest many warning voices of Sudanese and expatriate researchers and members of aid agencies have tried to convince the government to invest in the development of the rainfed agricultural sector, which is the dominant food producing sector also in the westernmost province Darfur.

In 1985/86 the Sudanese government drafted the "Strategy for Development of Rainfed Agriculture"(1), which had been prepared under the sponsoring of the World Bank and aimed at an increase of production, food security, and reduction of environmental degradation(2).

This paper intends to contribute to a concept of development of the rainfed agricultural sector presenting a case study on Kutum, a Northern Darfurian district capital. The socio-economic conditions of women whose husbands have outmigrated are specially regarded in this case study.

1.1. Reasons and background of the case study in Kutum

Kutum is chosen as a research site due to the following deliberations:

The 1984/85 famine demanded an unprecedented number of losses of human and animals' lives in Darfur(3), a catastrophe which requires long-term action towards food security for the rural population(4).

It has some persuasiveness to take the knowledge and experience of the rural population, which had proved to be very valuable during the famine, as basic development resources. Future failure of development projects in the field of rainfed agriculture can be avoided by regarding the range of actions available for the Darfurians to overcome the crisis, and by supporting self-responsible community efforts for their implementation.

Further long-term case studies showing how local people cope with a changing environment and which options they have to maintain subsistence are therefore required.

Taking this development concept as a background, a follow-up study in an already studied area seems to be reasonable. Kutum, 110 km north-west of the province capital El-Fasher, is a place where research had been done in the critical pre-famine year 1984 by Umbadda/Abdul-Jalil(5). It is located in the Sahelian zone on the banks of a seasonal river (wadi), and its inhabitants (around 12,000 in 1988) used their access to irrigated agriculture as a means to overcome the famine.

Kutum is a typical wadi town insofar as it is inhabited by a mixture of ethnic groups who immigrated from poor rural areas due to drought and deterioration of soils and pasture. Thus a case study in this place may show some socio-economic aspects which are also known in other wadi towns or applicable there.

The subject of the previous study had been "the rate and magnitude of participation of women in economic activities, especially irrigated agriculture"(6) in Wadi Kutum. In the follow-up study the accent is shifted to a special group of women, namely wives of migrants. This is justified, because female-headed households are numerous in Darfur as a whole, thus forming a significant group of cases which ought to deserve special attention in a strategy for the development of rainfed agriculture. Kutum is a place with high male outmigration. Therefore, it seems to be worth looking deeper into the socio-economic relationship between women left behind and their migrating husbands.

The choice of women as a specific group to be studied is justified, because African women in general are responsible for providing food, nutrition, water, health, education, and have always been active in agriculture, trade, and other economic pursuits. Women are the guardians of their children's welfare and have the responsibility to provide for them materially.

Taking these roles of women into account, it seems to be especially interesting to find out which differences occur for wives of migrants.

A further aspect which leads to the concentration on migrants' wives is the view on male outmigration as one of households' survival strategies, or, more exactly, anti-destitution strategies. During the field study it has been tried to obtain more detailed information on the benefits of the "outmigration strategy" for the families left behind by migrants. Therefore, the household is split up into individuals, the accent being put on the women in the home areas, their economic role for the household, their location in the social network and their scope for decision-making.

The study departs from the following hypotheses:

1. Migrants' wives become household heads.
2. They have to obtain cash in order to buy complementary food items, clothes, household utensils, and to pay school fees, taxes, etc.
3. They take over the work of their absent husbands.
4. They take over the economic responsibility for elder people and children, supported by migrants' remittances.
5. They become the main food producers and, therefore, are most affected by desertification, lack of rains, famine.

6. They continue to fulfil the domestic tasks and educate their children on their own, which reduces the variety of crops grown by them due to overwork.
7. The social position of migrants' wives rises due to their growing economic independence.

1.2. Methods and aims of the study.

The field study in Kutum was done from March to September 1988. 82 women were interviewed with a guideline on visits at their working sites in gardens, fields, houses, and in the market. Detailed questionnaires were presented to members of several administrative departments, teachers, traditional leaders, heads of political parties, and midwives.

The last month was used for a survey in 206 households in Kutum town, 90 households in 6 nearby wadi villages, and 13 households of a village located on the sandy soils (qoz), representing around 8.3% of the total in Kutum and 7.6 % in the villages. The quantitative data should be taken with caution, because the officially available data on population and household numbers are not reliable. Therefore, the size of the sample in relation to the total is the first inaccuracy. Secondly, there might be a bias against the poorest households. Nevertheless, useful quantitative completion of results reached by the qualitative study before, can be drawn from the household survey, and imbalances can be corrected by the more reliable qualitative data.

The aim of this study is to clarify how male outmigration affects households and - more specific - household members with special regard to the "female lead managers"(7) in the case of Kutum.

To give an insight into Kutum economy, part 2 provides some information and poses questions concerning the local labour market. A short survey of the recent patterns of migration is given in part 3. In part 4 the economic impacts of labour migration on women are described guided by an analysis of the above hypotheses. In part 5 the social position of women with special regard to migrants' wives is discussed. In part 6 conclusions and open questions, which need further research, are presented.

2. Kutum labour market

The labour market is characterized by labour shortages, a high number of men sitting idly in the market complaining about unemployment(8), and women working hard for 16 hours a day on average. The author found it difficult to explain these contradictions.

Two major principles of the Darfurian economy seem to be helpful to shed some light on the observed inconsistencies: The "subsistence ideology" and the gender-specific division of labour.

According to De Waal,

"The subsistence ideology is the system of values which maintains that a household should produce primarily to satisfy its own needs, and should be as economically independent as possible. ... The norm of a subsistent household involves participating in a community of producers on an equal basis, not being subordinate to any other household in terms of making production decisions, and fulfilling all the reciprocal obligations to kin and neighbours. It is opposed to servile status... It is opposed to being merely a labourer..."(9).

This concept of the "subsistence ideology" is applied here to explain the background of the decisions and economic behaviour of the rural population(10). It should be pointed out that this ideology is rooted in an economy of smallholders and pastoralists which is threatened more by ecological deterioration of its preconditions for production than by land seizing of rich farmers and landlessness of the poor.

De Waal gives the hint

"that economic independence and social integration are highly valued and tied together, and may be preferred to a higher cash income."(11)

A household's priority is, therefore, to manage its resources so as to try to guarantee subsistence production. This means, first of all, to secure millet production, because millet is the staple food of the rural people of Northern Darfur. It is grown on the sandy soils, and its yield depends largely on sufficient and evenly distributed rainfall, which tends to become an exception in Sahelian areas of Northern Darfur.

That is why in Kutum (like in other wadi towns and villages) increasingly the alluvial soils are also planted with grain). Soil preparation and weeding is much harder work than on sandy soils, but the yields are higher and even with poor rainfall more secure.

Another means for farmers to gain access to millet is animal husbandry to an extent, which allows sales of animals in order to buy grain in the market, if households suffer from shortage of stored grain(12). 6 goats, 5 sheep, 1.4 camels, or 1.5 cows are a sufficient number of animals to be held as a reserve for an average 5-persons-household in an average year(13).

For the same purpose, gold or cash is kept in many households in order to spend it for grain in times of need.

In Kutum dry season irrigated horticulture is a further means to earn cash by selling the produced fruit and vegetables at the market.

The "subsistence ideology" does not exclude commercial market participation. On the contrary, farmers whose subsistence is secured, are very active in market business and trade. They engage in growing cash crops and market them at times when high prices can be demanded.

On the other hand, many people depend on the market in order to earn their living by petty trade, wage labour, or services. They are not able to react in an optimizing way to price fluctuations and often are forced to sell their produce at low prices. A majority of these people are farmers who cannot subsist on their own agricultural production. For them also to reach subsistence level is highly

valued. Over time households usually rise above and fall below subsistence according to rainfall, season, number and age of members(14), and - more recently - ecological problems.

Due to the prevailing and highly valued subsistence ideology Kutum labour market is fluctuating according to agricultural seasons(15) and - on a long-term view - according to climatic changes over years. As will be shown below, the labour market is on the other hand segmented due to gender-specific division of labour.

In Kutum in years of sufficient rainfall a labour shortage occurs during July and August, the months of weeding, because nearly every adult is busy weeding his or her own field. Some field owners still overcome this labour peak by arranging for a work party (nafir, tawiza), which is a traditional exchange of communal labour against food. Usually, one field after the other is weeded by such a party group, each member once being host for the others. But because of poverty this custom is declining, leaving poor farmers' families drudging on their own.

From September onwards seasonal labour for harvesting is available, because the time pressure to harvest the workers' own grain is low. Millet can stay on the stalks without getting mould throughout the dry season.

In Kutum soil preparation for dry season irrigated crops is started in September or October. The wells are opened or newly dug and fences built around plots, usually by male (day) labour. Well digging and fencing are jobs done by poor men only. In years of good rainfall there is a labour shortage for this, because work as a day labourer belongs to the low status income generating activities which are only followed in times of destitution. Daily wages amounted to 8, 9, or 10 LS in 1988.

Ditch digging for irrigation, planting of vegetables, irrigating by hand, weeding, and harvesting are considered women's work. There is little demand for wage labour, because unpaid family labour by women and girls is sufficiently available.

Growing fruit, especially date cultivation, is the only garden work mainly run by men. Orchard work is not labour intensive and still profitable.

An estimated 10% of gardens in Wadi Kutum are irrigated by diesel pumps. Profitable crops like beans and a certain fodder plant (berseem) are often grown in mechanically irrigated gardens. Owners of diesel pumps can be considered rich.

Diesel pumps enable garden owners to irrigate a large area. Therefore, their installation reduces the chance for women to lease a plot for seasonal vegetable production(16).

Free lease is common in Wadi Kutum. The number of poor women from Kutum and nearby villages who apply for a plot to lease varies according to the level of subsistence reached by the previous

millet harvest. Garden owners who lease out plots profit from the free soil preparation and fertilizing by the intermediate crops grown by the leaseholders. The leaseholders benefit from the sale of the vegetables grown on the leased ground. In some cases leaseholders have to pay a small part of the harvest or the cost for fencing to the owner.

From April onwards dry season crops are harvested. In May and June the sandy soils are cleared from bushes and trees, wells are covered on the alluvial soils, usually by male family members or day labourers, in order to prepare the ground for rainfed cultivation.

A majority of Kutum residents is active in the presented field and garden work.

Out of the author's sample 65% of the households owned fields, and more than half of them had additional gardens in Kutum town, whereas in the wadi villages 94% owned fields and 74% had additional gardens. The lower number for the town is explainable by the social structure of town inhabitants. Merchants, administration officers, teachers, policemen, and soldiers who had been transferred from other areas to the district capital Kutum did not own fields in this area. On the other hand, poor immigrants might not yet have obtained a field, because there is no surplus land left near Kutum. 28.3% of the field or garden owners of Kutum town employed seasonal wage labourers (one third of them hired female workers), but none in the villages did so.

As a preliminary conclusion concerning only agricultural work there is a seasonal shortage of labour during weeding time (July, August), and this is only true in years of average or good rainfall. In dry years no labour bottleneck appears. During the rest of the year seasonal or day labour supply seems to meet the demand.

Taking the gender-specific division of labour into consideration, a more complex conclusion is to be drawn: Female labour is mostly unpaid. Thus field or garden owners get their lands cultivated mainly using unpaid female family labour. At the market these women occur as retailers in vegetables and fruit, spending the cash most time immediately for basic needs. At home they are main providers of millet and other rainfed crops needed to maintain subsistence of the households.

The free leasing system, which seems to be exclusively for women, works in the same direction: Land is cultivated by unpaid labour, the working women stay formally independent by selling their produce and earning cash that way.

Observations during the field study affirmed that throughout the year the bulk of poor and lower middle class women are busy working either for the subsistence (rainy season) or cash needs (dry season) of the household. The part of the male household members is field work, as well, for subsistence, and either professional work, crafts, trade, day labour, rarely garden work to earn cash for taxes, school fees, clothes, and - according to wealth - other goods. There are several cases, especially among the leaseholders interviewed, with husbands not working at all during the dry season.

The rigidity of the gender-specific division of labour is striking, especially if it is complied with by members of destitute households. At the same time, those few cases where male and female family members were cooperating in garden work seemed to benefit being able to split their produce for petty trade at the local market and getting the best quality crops marketed in El-Fasher and other towns.

The other sectors of Kutum labour market are mostly connected with the described agricultural sector, due to the prevailing "subsistence ideology". Many craftsmen and traders open their (work-) shops during weeding time only now and then. The market shrinks to a fraction of its dry season size. Besides this, Kutum is nearly inaccessible by lorries during July and August, therefore traders and middlemen rarely move to Kutum then.

Construction is strongly required before and after the rains, first to protect walls and roofs from water erosion, then for repair. Straw and mud houses are built and repaired by family, mostly female labour. Wage labour for construction is rare in Kutum; it is said that there are 10 builders at the market. Sometimes poor women or old men are employed on a daily basis and paid up to 10 LS.

Other day labour, mostly done by older men, is carrying loads. Water scooping by buckets, loading it on donkeys, and supplying households with it is done by men and women alike, most of them being immigrated villagers who return to their fields in the rainy season.

To conclude, wage labour in Kutum is mostly seasonal. Women play a part as wage labourers and, even more, as family labour force in Kutum economy. They earn cash by petty trade including sale of special crafts products, sale of crops, of processed food, reselling small quantities of food or fodder which early in the morning they bought from other traders, sometimes collecting and selling fuel wood. The principle of the gender-specific division of labour prevents men from taking over more of the women's work, even though this would probably lead to more wealth for the household. The system of the smallholders' economy which needs family labour as its supporting beam hinders the commoditization of labour. This is the background for male outmigration from Kutum in search of wage labour elsewhere.

3. Patterns of outmigration

This is not the place to discuss even a fraction of the huge number of existing approaches to explain migration. Only three aspects shall be inquired into more closely for the case of Kutum:

1. Outmigration as an anti-destitution strategy of households.
2. The meaning of wage rates for the decision to migrate.
3. Gender-specific division of labour and migration.

3.1. Outmigration as an anti-destitution strategy of households

The deteriorating surroundings of Northern Darfur require a broadening range of strategies for households to sustain subsistence. such strategies can be cash crop cultivation on leased land, petty trade, sale of animals or gold, seasonal wage labour, or migration.

Wage labour in the home area is a socially little accepted resort, because usually only poor people seek employment on the farms of their neighbours or relatives. De Waal even hints that wage labour still has an affinity to slavery in the minds of the subsistence-oriented rural population(17). Nevertheless, the number of people looking for employment as field workers increases in famine years. Besides the low acceptance of wage labour mainly seasonal employment is available in Kutum, as has been stated above. Therefore households that are in danger to become destitute or are already below subsistence level send one or more male members out to find employment elsewhere.

Out of the 313 households in the author's sample 69 men migrated to Arab countries, 35 to other areas inside Darfur, 23 to Khartoum, and 4 to other areas in the Sudan.

The decision to send away male household members induces a twofold change: The first to be felt by a destitute family will be the release of one (or more) food consumers. This will be felt the more if the migrant had been without work before. - The second change will be the migrant's remittances. Although the data of the household survey have to be taken with care, some results can be presented here:

Out of 115 migrants (students excluded) 62.5% were married. Out of these 20.8% did not send anything home after 6 or more months of absence.

Out of the unmarried migrants 46.5% did not send anything.

Out of 77 women left behind by migrants 15.6% said that they were not satisfied with the migrants' remittances.

Out of 121 migrants 21.5% were absent for up to one year at the time of the interview, 66.1% between 2 and 5 years, and 12.4% more than 5 years. Each migrant who had been back home in the meantime had remigrated.

These data show that households cannot rely upon male outmigration as a short-term anti-destitution strategy. The families left behind by migrants have to care for their needs independently, at least for the time until the first remittances arrive. Matin, who studied Kebkabiya area in 1984, made similar observations: Migrants hardly sent home anything, they only brought goods with them on visits. The women were the ones who maintained life, production, tradition, and social obligations in the home area(18).

Remittances are sent irregularly due to many reasons. First of all, the costs of living in urban areas not being backed by subsistence production are higher than in rural areas. Therefore, migrants consume a larger share of their wages than they would at home.

Secondly, remittances in cash or kind usually are sent with relatives or close friends who travel to the home area. Thus, the arrival of remittances depends on irregular transport opportunities.

Thirdly, young male household members might not send anything home, because they often try to save money in order to found a family later on (this probably explains the higher share of unmarried men in the sample who did not send anything).

The majority of migrants did not start investments, but brought consumption and luxury goods with them. Thus they raised the standard of living of their core families and were forced to migrate again as soon as their money was consumed.

At last it should be mentioned that the migrants proved to be useful for the survival of some households during the famine of 1984/85: It is said that there had been villages which were supplied with bread from Khartoum by their migrants, who loaded lorries especially for this purpose. Whether this was true or a mere rumour could not be decided by the author. Bush - in contradiction to De Waal(19) - found a similar pattern in Saiyah (north of Um Keddada), where migrants provided "the major lifeline" for their families who stayed in Saiyah(20).

To summarize, male outmigration is to be regarded as a long-term anti-destitution strategy for households in Kutum. The release of food consumers is felt immediately in destitute households, whereas remittances take many months or even more than one year to start and are not reliable afterwards. The high incidence of remigration after visits at home points to the rather quick consumption of the resources brought to the households.

Therefore, migration can be considered a consolidating structure rather than a strategy applied just to overcome a household's bottleneck. The notion "survival strategy" for outmigration used by Cornia

is misleading here(21). "Survival" is not threatened in the long run, but destitution can be a long-term state which is tried to be changed by outmigration of male household members.

3.2. The meaning of wage rates for the decision to migrate

Wage rates for seasonal labour in Kutum were high in 1988, amounting to 8 to 10 LS per day. In agricultural schemes of Central Sudan wages of not more than 7 LS were paid in the same year. Daily wages for unskilled labour in Khartoum were not above 10 LS per day.

Still, usually rural outmigration to Central or Eastern Sudan (dar sabah) is said to start from the assumption of obtaining higher wages there than at home(22).

To regard outmigration as an anti-destitution strategy, chosen by rural households on the background of the "subsistence ideology" can help to solve this apparent contradiction. A household's existence seems to be more secure, if its members are divided and live in rural and urban areas and, maybe, also make use of seasonal employment opportunities on agricultural schemes. It is a risk-reducing strategy in case the connection between the household members is sustained. Those better off can support the other part of the family, and in the prevailing economic crisis this might benefit once the rural, once the urban household members.

Recently Jamal has discussed this issue and demanded to do further analyses of income distributions with respect to "intra-group differentiation" instead of starting from a given "rural-urban dichotomy"(23). He means that the key differentiation is to be made between rich and poor, not between urban-rural or workers-peasants, because due to the economic decline and decreasing real wages both might be equally vulnerable(24).

This view supports the results of the field study in Kutum and helps to explain outmigration in spite of lack of income incentives.

To conclude, higher wage rates are not a primary motivation for rural outmigration. It might be more important for those who leave for the oil-rich Arab countries. But still, the assumption that even for those members of destitute households who migrate to Arab countries wage rates range behind households' security through splitting their members cannot easily be refuted.

3.3. Gender-specific division of labour and migration

As has been stated already, women contribute the major share in production of millet and horticultural crops. Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil point out that

"in fact the historic right of women to work in fields was never a subject of dispute or challenge by men."(25)

Therefore, if a household head migrates, the basic food production for the household is not basically made dubious, even if remittances are long in coming. Drought and the need for cash in order to buy even basic food crops in bad years pushed many households to split, and the fissure is usually opened according to long-existent gender-specific economic differences. Historically, these included the following occupations:

Men were responsible for cutting wood, land clearance, building of the wooden parts of houses and of fences, building of grain stores, weeding and threshing grain, digging wells, herding the cattle or camels, selling of crops in distant markets. Craftsmen made beds from wood, roots, or leather, ropes, saddles, stools, or wove cotton cloth.

Women built the straw and mud parts of the houses, made decorative accessories, cleaned the house, cared for the children, fetched wood and water, cooked two or three times a day, milked the animals, prepared butter and bartered it for sugar, salt, tea, etc., prepared the land together with the men, sowed, weeded, harvested, grinded the grain, irrigated crops and sold them at nearby markets. Craftswomen made food covers from roots or grass, dyed straw, tanned skins, made leather bags, baskets, mats out of straw and carpets from animals' hairs.

During the times when the men travelled to distant markets or herded animals in remote areas women sometimes took over men's tasks, as well(26).

This labour division remained principally unchanged under changed economic preconditions. Three outstanding reactions of households to decreasing millet yields caused by drought can be made out:

1. The development of gardening as an additional means of food production as well as cash crop production demanded additional female labour. This is because according to the traditional system of division of labour all the monotonous and time consuming tasks like irrigating, weeding, harvesting, and petty trade in nearby markets is women's work.
2. The loss of animals due to the drought left the men without their traditional tasks of herding and selling of animals.
3. Travelling to distant areas, historically accepted for males, has gained in importance because of the chance to obtain cash abroad, in urban or mechanized agricultural areas. The absence of men principally leads to the same consequence as it had done in former times in case of male absence due to herding or trade: Women take over men's work during their absence. If they are lucky, they are assisted by male relatives, otherwise they have to do the additional work on their own. The work of migrants' wives will be scrutinized in part 4.

To summarize, male outmigration is compatible with the historical gender-specific division of labour. Male absence due to migration has become a long-term condition, which burdens women in the home areas with additional work as had been the case in former times during herding or trading travels. At the same time horticulture, especially necessary for migrants' wives in order to overcome cash shortages, also increased women's work burden one-sidedly according to the prevailing gender-specific division of labour.

4. Economic impacts of labour migration on women(27)

6 out of 7 hypotheses presented in part 1.1. are related to economic impacts of labour migration on women. They will be discussed in this part.

1. "Migrants' wives become household heads."

If a married man is going to leave to search for work in a distant area, he decides first who will be responsible for his wife and children during the time of his absence. Most time he chooses his brother or father (62.8% of the author's sample), less often he gives the responsibility to his wife (37.2%). Out of the sample taken in Kutum town 55 household heads, i. e. roughly one quarter of all household heads were migrants.

Consequently, hypothesis 1 has to be differentiated. The appointment of a male guardian for around two thirds of migrants' wives might contribute to more economic security for a destitute household by integrating wife and children into the extended family. Thus, for some women life continues as it was, their work, decision making, and responsibility do not change due to the absence of their husbands. This is more frequently the case in rich and upper middle class families. Whether this system works, and whether the relatives of the husband are willing to support a woman, depends largely on her generosity and politeness towards them in case her husband sends money.

If it is a poor family, wife and children are expected to work, because the guardian cannot afford to have several persons live off him, especially under the condition of poor and unreliable remittances. Therefore, poor women, although having a guardian, are in a situation comparable to that of a woman who is de jure household head during the period of her husband's migration.

2. "Migrants' wives have to earn cash in order to buy complementary food items, clothes, household utensils, and to pay school fees, taxes, etc."

In Kutum it is not common to ask for help, and no woman likes to get into her husband's relatives' bad books. Therefore she usually keeps silent if she gets into trouble and tries to solve the problem on her own by selling some jewelry, animals, or other items. Frequently the support of the relatives fades out after some months or if any member of the household finds a job. Then the woman, besides providing the family with food, has to earn enough money to pay for all expenses of the household. - Because she needs any help available, in many cases her daughters will break off school early in order to help her and save the fees(28).

These observations verify hypothesis 2 for poor households.

3. "Migrants' wives take over the work of their absent husbands."

Horticultural crop production on leased land and petty trade are the common means for Kutum women to obtain cash. During the field study it has been observed that there are - besides men - women who dig wells, maintain and cover them after the harvest of the garden crops. Clearing of the sandy soils from bushes and trees also was seen to be sometimes done by women(29). This shows that women who do not live with male adults in their households take over these male activities.

Hypothesis 3 is therefore true for female household heads.

4. "Migrants' wives take over the economic responsibility for elder people and children, supported by migrants' remittances."

Hypothesis 4 must be differentiated. There are cases of female household heads who do not obtain remittances, others obtain poor and irregular remittances, but the hypothesis can be verified completely only for the women with regular or sufficient remittances of their migrating husbands. It has to be falsified for the cases of women under male guardians, because in these cases the women are not regarded economically responsible for others.

On the other hand - and this is also important for hypothesis 5 - women are the main food producers in Darfur, whether their husbands are present or not. Thus, concerning hypothesis 4, they have the responsibility to produce food for elders and children, anyhow.

5. "Migrants' wives become the main food producers and, therefore, are most affected by desertification, lack of rains, and famine."

Hypothesis 5 has to be changed into "migrants' wives are the main food producers", and it becomes evident that all female farmers, whether migrants' wives or not, are affected by desertification and lack of rains.

As has been shown by De Waal(30), it is not true that female-headed households were more affected by the famine of 1984/85 than others. The part of hypothesis 5 which concerns famine is therefore untrue.

De Waal's statement that remittances are irregular in Darfur is confirmed by the field study in Kutum. That means, female-headed households are not more affected by famine than others even without migrants' remittances. - The field study in Kutum showed that there was no recognizable difference in standard of living in female-headed households which obtained no remittances and male-headed poor households.

This strengthens the point of view that male outmigration can be an anti-destitution strategy in the sense that it releases households from eaters.

6. "Migrants' wives continue to fulfil the domestic tasks and educate their children on their own, which reduces the variety of crops grown by them due to overwork."

Growing millet and horticultural cash crops are a priority for Kutum women. Thus, a woman would rather reduce her domestic work and do part of it (like cooking and washing clothes) in the field or garden than reduce the variety of crops grown. This means, hypothesis 6 is falsified.

Special regard must be given to the living conditions of children in many female-headed households: A woman who has to feed her children nearly or completely on her own cannot care much about their education. As long as they are small she takes them with her to the field, garden, and market. If they are bigger they either help her with the agricultural work and in the market (mostly daughters), work in the market as petty traders on their own, or - in many cases - are left to themselves (mainly boys). Therefore, young boys often spend their days in the streets and grow up among boys who are in the same situation. Some of them run away from school.

There are no official data available on boys running away from home, but according to a lorry driver every week two or three young boys from kutum district get on a lorry and travel to Khartoum without informing their parents. They hope to earn money there by petty trade. Many of them face big problems soon, depend on begging, live in the streets, suffer from uncured diseases

(31).

These points are confirmed by the findings of El-Tahir who approached the problem from Khartoum as a migrants' receiving area. The migrants responded that the impacts of their absence on their families in rural areas were

- difficulties in obtaining their basic needs (37.0%),
- shortage of family labour (25.6%),
- difficulties in child rearing (17.4%),
- others (20.0%)(32).

To summarize, for a significant number of women economic activities are increased by male migration. This is true for female household heads, women who are guarded by a male relative from a poor family, and women who got into trouble with their husbands' relatives. They have to take over men's work additionally and to earn cash by any means in order to pay for those expenses which are regarded as men's responsibility.

Food production does not decrease due to the absence of men, but the higher work burden for women often impairs their own and their children's well-being.

For those women who are protected by a financially well-off male guardian, economic activities do not change significantly, because the guardian takes over the responsibilities of the absent husband including financial support, as long as no sufficient remittances arrive.

5. The social position of migrants' wives

At the end of their study Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil regret that they could not judge whether women's active participation in production has reduced the social constraints on women and enhanced their decision-making power in the households, and they propose further research in this field(33).

Part 5 is an attempt to shed some light on the social position of women in Kutum with special regard to migrants' wives.

It is not an easy venture to find out and characterize the social position of migrants' wives in Kutum society. For an outsider structure, power relations, and decision-making of the society are non-transparent. A sociological approach is required in order to study Kutum society as a whole and how migrants' wives are integrated into it.

This is not the place to draw a comprehensive picture of Kutum society, nor to present the results of the field study concerning Kutum society as a whole. Instead, levels of social influence are made out, and the share of women in each level of influence is inquired into. Specifications of the group of migrants' wives are made subsequently(34).

In Table 1 women's influence on all levels presented is summarized.

Table 1: Levels of social influence of women

Levels of social influence	Women
Household	high influence in basic food provision, free decision of market participation and land leasing
Extended family	middle to high influence and high degree of social integration. If separated, low social acceptance
Tribal group	little influence, but free decision to consult tribal leaders for conflict settlement
Circles and informal groups	high influence, embryonal interest groups, but little and indirect influence outside the circles
Religious circles	little influence, but free decision to consult persons of these circles
Professions	influence towards women, suppressed (no influence) in the public
Formal organization	no social influence, but a share in membership
Jurisdiction	no influence, but freedom to bring an action against any adversary
Administration	no influence, but formal membership

1. Household

Decisions concerning basic food provision for the household members are made by the wife of the household head or household head and wife together.

Cash crop production of fruit and vegetables, sale of the produce or of processed food at the market are solely in the responsibility of the women who produced the crops. Purchase of basic food and household utensils are also decided upon by the women on their own.

Women decide whether they lease plots for cash crop production, engage in petty trade or wage labour. These are decisions made under conditions of economic pressure and belong to the female part in a household's anti-destitution strategy.

Decisions concerning social affairs (from enrolling the children at school up to the convocation of assemblies), animals, trade, travelling, investment, large-scale cash crop production, and migration are made by men.

The decision-making roles in the household remain unchanged, if a migrating husband appoints a guardian. If not, a woman takes over social decision-making, e. g. enrolling of children at school, circumcision of her children, calling the sheikh (local leader) or complaining at the court in case of disputes, etc. These activities are only accepted if the husband did not send her any message nor gave any instructions. If one of her children wants to marry she is not authorized to settle the marriage herself. The family has to wait until the migrant comes back, or another close male relative has to be consulted. A son can rather decide on the marriage of his brothers or sisters than the mother herself.

2. Extended family

In the extended family women exchange visits and informal help, share child-minding and cooking, prepare food and drinks for invitations, festivities, and feasts, discuss social and political events, and participate in the formation of families' views on public issues.

Migrants' wives are socially backed by being integrated in the extended family. Those whose husbands sent already some goods or brought things with them during visits are expected to be generous and let their relatives and neighbours participate in their wealth.

This is different for poor women, women who live in conflict with their husbands' families, or women who recently immigrated. All those who are separated from the extended family and are forced to take over men's responsibilities have a hard time with regard to social acceptance. This is most significant in the cases of divorced women, whose social status is very low, because there are no husbands responsible for them.

The shariya judge of Kutum(35) reports that there are more than 10 cases of divorce from absent migrants per month in Kutum district, and in Kutum town 3 per year.

3. Tribal group

The tribe plays a greater role in villages than in Kutum town, where a tribal melting pot has come into existence. Nevertheless, for minor disputes and complaints women consult (male) tribal leaders, who are in close contact with their followers and make their judgements according to their background knowledge of a family's situation. No differences for migrants' wives occur.

4. Circles of neighbours, friends, colleagues, working group, market group

Exchange of views, of complaints, and of ideas often take place in the above circles and groups. Informal self-help, work parties, information on prices and food qualities are shared in these circles and overlap with the extended family and members of the same tribal group.

In Kutum the participation in circles seems to be the most common way for women to form opinions and to build up demands. Social or political demands can reach higher levels through informally influencing male family members, tribal leaders, or quarter sheikhs.

Migrants' wives are part of this social network. Their degree of influence largely depends on personal effort and reputation. - Recently immigrated and very poor women often are isolated and do not participate in any informal circles.

5. Religious and quasi-religious circles

There are "holy men" with whom people arrange a meeting if they are in trouble. Besides this, there are male and female "magicians" who are sometimes consulted.

There are no differences between migrants' wives and other women.

6. Professions

Teachers, midwives, secretaries, nurses are the main professions of educated women in Kutum. They represent a modern middle-class life style and are respected by other women. They are instrumental for the parents of the professionals who can demand a high bride wealth for educated girls, especially, if the bridegrooms are migrants.

The professionals have some influence in enlightening other women and among their colleagues at work. Some of them try to speak out women's interests or to participate in meetings of administrative bodies, but they are heavily suppressed if they speak in public.

Belonging to the middle class, migrants' wives who have a profession do not face serious problems if their husbands migrate. Usually the migrants are educated and find good jobs abroad or in Khartoum. The wives have their own incomes and stay integrated in their extended families and their circles. They can afford to be generous and keep good contact with everybody.

7. Formal organization

In Kutum there have been 4 political parties in 1988 (now suppressed), a workers', an officers', and a teachers' union, a farmers' union, a merchants' union, a housewives' union, consumers' cooperatives of different professional groups, and a youth organization.

In all these organizations women participate, but their influence is restricted.

The housewives' union offered courses in hygiene, child care, nutrition, religion, and had its own consumers' cooperative. Girls participated in youth clubs. Their activities were regulated and mostly confined to their houses (e. g. sewing). From time to time they did small social studies or social work (e. g. care for old or sick women), organized by the Office for Youth and Social Affairs.

In all these organizations women's influence is negligible; no specification for migrants' wives has been found(36).

8. Jurisdiction

Women call on the judge on their own if there are disputes. Especially the shariya judge who has jurisdiction over family conflicts was often approached by women. It has been mentioned already that some wives of migrants demand divorce from the judge(37).

9. Administration

In 1988, administration had not yet been regulated properly after the overthrow of Nimeiri. It was undisputed that 6 seats out of 24 in the district council and a corresponding share in the area and village councils were to be reserved for women (as had been the rule already under Nimeiri). But women rarely attended meetings. If they spoke in public they lost their respect. The Administrative Director for the Area Council expressed it in the following way:

"If women speak in the presence of men, they are said to be pig-headed. ... This is part of the Islamic tradition. In Darfur women learn from the beginning of their lives that they are inferior to men in every respect."

(38)

No difference for migrants' wives occurs.

To conclude, women's social influence decreases

- the more a broader public is involved,
- and the higher the level of modern organizations.

To some influential groups (tribal leaders, religious circles, judges) women have only access as clients, not as members.

For migrants' wives the levels of high female influence offer chances to be socially backed and economically supported. Real poverty, abandonment, and trouble are faced by those women (including migrants' wives) who are separated from their extended families or informal circles. Reasons for separation can be conflict, divorce, poverty, starvation, migration, childlessness, sometimes old age, death of husband or family members, diseases.

Hypothesis 7 ("The social position of migrants' wives rises due to their growing economic independence") therefore cannot be verified.

Finally, the question of Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil's whether women's "active role in production has affected positively or relaxed the social constraints on women in the area and the decision-making process in their households"(39)

must be answered in the negative. As they indicate in their study, the new factors which enhanced women's economic participation "make this less of a conscious choice"(40). This statement is confirmed by the author's 1988 field research. Growing economic participation is an anti-destitution strategy within reach of women whose economic activity has a long history.

It is a conscious choice insofar as it makes women to some degree independent of shaky male income, whether they are migrants or not.

It is not a conscious choice insofar as under the prevailing conditions of economic and ecological pressure there is no real alternative for women to secure food for their families. The "new factors" (male outmigration and growing female horticultural cash crop production) did not create a qualitative change in the area.

This point alone would be sufficient to explain the lack of improvement of women's "social position".

6. Summary and conclusions

1. The "subsistence ideology", based on a smallholders' economy, is the prevailing value system in Kutum. Millet production for households' subsistence is prior to any other economic activity. Supply and demand at Kutum labour market are determined by this priority.

2. Dry season irrigated horticulture in Kutum is a means for households to gain access to cash. In times of need it is spent on millet, otherwise on other basic food.

3. Land leasing provides access to cash. Leaseholders are poor women from Kutum and nearby villages. The supply of plots to be leased is threatened by diesel pump irrigation, which should, therefore, not be supported from outside (government or aid agencies).

4. Basic food provision of households is the responsibility of the female household members. In history and today they take over men's work additionally in case of their absence. In former times men left for trading or herding, today increasingly for labour migration.

5. Male outmigration is a long-term anti-destitution strategy of households, which is decided upon independently of wage rates. It releases a household of food consumers and provides an access to cash or consumption goods (although irregularly and unreliably) through remittances.

6. One-sidedly women are burdened with the additional work occurring due to declining millet yields on sandy soils caused by drought: The anti-destitution strategies of horticultural production and male outmigration are both mainly based on the steady and reliable food securing work of women. Therefore, women are the main target group for the development of rainfed agriculture.

7. De jure only a minority of women become household heads because of male outmigration. De facto the number is higher, especially in poor families. If remittances are low, these women have to obtain cash in order to meet all the expenses of the household. The high work burden leads to the neglect of children's education, and the economic pressure increases the number of boys running away from home.

8. Agricultural wage labour is common in Kutum town, but not in the surrounding villages. A bottleneck for weeding appears only in years of good rainfall.

The rigid gender-specific division of labour in Kutum results in a hidden "labour market": Female labour is mostly unpaid family labour, which is increasingly exploited under deteriorating economic and ecological conditions. It is an outgrowth of the subsistence ideology, maintaining formally the independence of households: Women obtain cash selling their produce at the market, not by selling their labour force. No other resort is open for women as long as the commoditization of labour remains low, and as long as men do not significantly increase their participation in "women's work". - The latter should be promoted, because it has proved to be a successful means to secure a household's subsistence without male outmigration.

9. Women's social influence is strongest at the household, extended family, and informal group levels. The more a broader public is involved, and the higher the level of modern organizations, the less their social influence. Suppression of women in public is common in Kutum, backed by the upbringing of girls, which is led by the principle of females' inferiority to males.

10. Unless these oppressing structures are removed, women (as a target group for the development of rainfed agriculture) can be approached best at their informal circles or as de jure household heads. The responsible males should be integrated in discussions and measures concerning development for women. Small-scale projects, not comprising the whole community, are required to secure the food supply for the poorest.

Whether these should be based only on agriculture, or whether small-scale industries and female wage labour should be enhanced as an alternative, needs further discussion with the women concerned.

References:

- (1) see Agricultural Planning Administration 1985; The Republic of the Sudan 1986
- (2) This is not the place to review the program. It should be mentioned that the government has not yet started to realize it.
- (3) An estimated 100,000 inhabitants of Darfur, mainly children between 1 and 5 years of age, and an unknown number of animals have been killed by the famine of 1984/85.
- (4) It is the merit of De Waal, who did a 1 1/2 year empirical research in several areas of Darfur during the famine, to have pointed out indigenous strategies applied to escape from even more starvation. See de Waal 1987
- (5) see Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil 1984 and 1985
- (6) *ibid.*, p. 339
- (7) World Bank 1989, p. 86
- (8) Similar observations Matin made in Kebkabiya area, around 50 km west-north-west of El-Fasher. She states that potential employers did not find workers, and potential workers did not find employers. see Matin 1985, p. 48
- (9) De Waal 1987, p. 11
- (10) It corresponds to the notion of the "peasant mode of production" introduced by Hyden 1982, which will not be discussed in depth here.
- (11) De Waal 1987, p. 11. This is true for farmers and herders alike. In this paper the pastoralists, which would require a detailed separate discussion, are omitted.
- (12) Therefore, exchange rates of livestock and grain are useful indicators to assess the food situation in Darfur. Recently Ibrahim presented some persuading reasons to include the meat/grain price ratio in famine early warning systems. See Ibrahim 1989, p. 14
- (13) see de Waal 1987, p. 9
- (14) For the role of the life cycle for peasant households see in detail Chayanov 1966, p. 6.
- (15) This is true for all rural labour markets in the Sudan. See ILO 1984, p. 20
- (16) see also GTZ 1987, p. 13
- (17) see De Waal 1987, p. 53
- (18) see Matin 1985, p. 26
- (19) According to De Waal migration was not significant in Saiyah and remittances did not contribute to households' survival. See De Waal 1987, pp. 91 - 96
- (20) see Bush 1989, p. 15
- (21) Cornia develops his concept on the basis of Ethiopian patterns of migration. This special case should not be generalized, and it does not explain male outmigration from Kutum satisfactorily. See Cornia 1987, p. 101

- (22) This is the well-known rural-urban income gap which for many theorists had been the key to explain the motivation of migration. See e. g. Todaro 1969
- (23) Jamal 1988, p. 274
- (24) see *ibid.*, p. 275
- (25) Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil 1985, p. 341
- (26) Interviews with Kutum inhabitants and a teacher of history. There are some differences in division of labour according to tribes. These will not be discussed in the frame of this study.
- (27) Information in this part is obtained by interviews with Kutum inhabitants, midwives, and teachers.
- (28) see also Ahmed et al. 1987, p. 11
- (29) This also has been observed by Bush 1989 in Saiyah. See Bush 1990, p. 7
- (30) see De Waal 1987, pp. 95, 109, 110, 113, 116, 125
- (31) Interview with social workers in a streetboys' home in Khartoum.
- (32) see El-Tahir 1987, p. 18
- (33) see Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil 1985, p. 394
- (34) Information in this part is based on observations and informal interviews in Kutum.
- (35) Shariya means Islamic law. The jurisdiction in families' affairs is done according to the shariya in the Sudan.
- (36) It is not known whether any of the organizations mentioned still exists under the military regime.
- (37) Matin observed that in Kebkabiya area long-term economic decline contributed to high rates of divorce. See Matin 1985, p. 38
- (38) Interview with Ahmed Adam al-Rabia
- (39) Umbadda / Abdul-Jalil 1985, p. 349
- (40) *ibid.*

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