The Least Developed and the Oil-Rich Arab Countries

Dependence, Interdependence or Patronage?

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1 INTRODUCTION

The question of rural out-migration has received much attention in the literature. However, perceptions as to the possible effects on both sending and receiving areas or countries vary considerably. Ostensibly, two views prevail at present. On the one hand, many studies emphasise the negative impact of out-migration on the sending areas (Reichert, 1981, p. 63; Jamal, 1988, p. 808). These studies depict the inflationary effects of remittances (ILO, 1975, p. 65; Jamal, 1988, p. 808; Choucri, 1986, p. 703); self-perpetuation of the migration process (Reichert, op. cit., p. 64); an increase in interpersonal and interhousehold inequality within and between villages (Lipton, 1980, p. 1); and/or family disorganisation (Nour, 1986, p. 148). Others, however, view rural out-migration as generally positive. It is argued that the migration of ordinary working people to higher-paid jobs abroad is a major avenue of escape from poverty and oppression (Griffin, 1976, p. 353). Furthermore it is stated that emigration raises the welfare both of the migrant and their dependents who would otherwise not be able to sustain themselves (ibid., p. 354). Studies of the effect of rural out-migration on family organisation found that in most cases migration enhances extended family cohesion (Williams and Williams, 1965, p. 64; Van Velsen, 1960, p. 265). None the less, other studies, for example Gulati (1983) and Grawert in the next chapter of this volume, showed the increasing independence of women in rural migrant households.

The question of level of analysis, whether local or national, is essential in understanding the dynamics of out-migration. In this respect, rural households pursue out-migration as part and parcel of an overall resources management since migration takes place within the existing extended family structure. Thus, the decision to migrate is not based entirely on the individual's choice independent of the overall household subsistence strategy and other social obligations. However, the repercussions of such decisions on the village community as a whole or on the national economy remain debatable.

According to Choucri (1986, p. 698), the phenomenon of labour migration across state boundaries in the Middle East has evolved through five phases.

1. A phase that began during the inter-war period and ended with the events of October war in 1973. It was characterised by two traditional types of movement. Egyptians (and to some extent Jordanians) migrated to other Arab countries, principally as teachers and administrators, staffing the administrative framework of the Gulf states. Again, prior to 1973 there was some migration of unskilled workers for work in the service and construction sectors of various states. Examples include the movement of Yemenis to Saudi Arabia and of Sudanese to Egypt.
2. A second phase was set in motion by the oil price increases of 1973. Arab countries experienced large-scale adjustments in their national labour forces and a general expansion of economic activity.
3. The third phase evolved through the latter part of the 1970s. In this stage Arab workers continued to migrate, but the Gulf states began to recruit large numbers of South Asian workers.
4. A phase that was crystallised by the end of the decade of the 1970s, and characterised by a growing complexity in Asian labour. At the same time, governments in both sending and receiving countries assumed a much more active role in managing the migration process.
5. A phase of the mid-1980s, characterised by stabilisation in the total number of migrants.

Incidentally, the rural areas of Sudan witnessed many profound changes during the 1970s and the 1980s. To understand the present manifestations of rural out-migration in Sudan, it is important to treat them within a broader historical context. This is due to the fact that migration from the rural areas of Sudan started much earlier than the last two decades and it was normally perceived as a means to satisfy basic household needs. Although those needs were not very much different from today, they were pursued in different circumstances and within different socioeconomic structures.

2 THE HERITAGE OF MIGRATION IN RURAL SUDAN

Rural Sudan had experienced internal and external migration for

centuries (Galaleddin, 1979, p. 1). In fact migration is part of the prevailing culture in a country composed essentially of arable cultivators and pastoral tribes. It comprises one option in a set of strategies pursued by the households to satisfy their immediate needs. Climatic vagaries and an increasing population pressure on limited resources were a recurrent incentive to migrate. Migrants left their villages either in groups or as individuals. The group size and its composition are highly responsive to demands by their local social networks and ecological factors – for example a good or bad rainy season.

With the establishment of Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1898, however, the rural areas of the country came to exhibit a new form of relationship to the new state. The local populations were no longer autonomous and had to cater for externally induced ecological, economic and political constraints, while the hand of the state had been extended to reach previously autonomous people's and remote areas. Furthermore, the rural areas were expected to contribute taxes to a central organ, that is the state. A succession of capital-intensive schemes, owned and dominated by the state, drove the rural areas into the centripetal force of the state and incorporated them into the world economic system, which was controlled by the colonial powers. The consequences of these changes were far reaching. Although the rural areas invariably exhibited a predominantly subsistence household economy, they became increasingly dependent on production for the market. Hence the local populations were continuously striving to adjust themselves to the changing socio-economic environment. Therefore the intricate changes in economy, education and transport were utilised by the rural households in their pursuit to diversify their income sources while maintaining and solidifying their subsistence base.

Large-scale migration to the neighbouring countries was adopted by many individuals as early as the beginning of this century. This was particularly evident in the northern province where land scarcity along the Nile is evident and the technology was rudimentary. For example, in 1935, the hazard of out-migration was raised in *Alfagar* (*Dawn*) magazine, showing concern about migration from Dongola to Egypt and other parts of the country (Shorbagi, 1935, p. 151). Although many educated migrants settle in urban centres, they continue to send remittances, which are vital for the maintenance of those remaining behind in the rural areas. Those who work in government jobs that necessitate their regular transfer throughout the

country return after retirement and reunite with their extended families, using their savings to establish a small business such as a garden (Ibrahim, 1979). In fact, findings from northern Sudan revealed that rural–urban linkages are always maintained between the migrants and the rural communities. These include economic linkages in the form of remittances and social linkages in the form of visiting or participating in important occasions such as weddings, funerals and so on (ibid., p. 227).

3 THE HOUSEHOLD UNIT IN RURAL SUDAN

Not long ago, Sudanese rural households maintained self-sufficiency despite the many changes that impinged upon rural Sudan. Their incorporation into the national and international economy through the production of cash crops, however, has created a new reality and altered this classic picture of a self-sufficient society to one of dependence. The prevalence of a vast community of simple commodity producers in modern social formations has been the subject of many studies (Friedmann, 1978, p. 585). Hence it can be argued that the position of the household as a basic subsistence unit is still crucial in rural Sudan. What has actually changed is peoples' expectations and inability to maintain their previous standards of living. In many cases, the insufficiency of any single subsistence activity such as cultivation or animal husbandry makes subsistence strategies a matter of finding the best combination of various potential income-generating activities (Hill, 1968, p. 60). The provision of education in the rural areas has, however, increased the tendency towards out-migration. Although educated migrants join the urban labour market, they are not totally lost to town and most of them enthusiastically send remittances to their families. Remittances help to maintain subsistence, reproduction and therefore constitute an important part of the household budget. Moreover people with intermediate or secondary school education prefer to work in the rural areas than the more expensive urban centres where salaries are too low to support them. Government employees in the rural areas use their salaries as an additional source of income while participating in agricultural production to obtain basic food needs. It can be argued, therefore, that such jobs as school teachers, nurses,

labourers, watchmen and so on should not be conceived solely in terms of differentiation within the local community. This constitutes an essential element in the multiple income-generating activities integrating new patterns into an old structure. This argument, however, can be expanded to include the educated migrants who leave rural Sudan for work in the oil-rich Arab countries.

4 CHANGES IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

Large-scale migration of Sudanese to the oil-rich Arab countries can be attributed to the accelerated economic changes that took place during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the 1970s witnessed what can be called an artificial 'economic boom'. The government committed itself to a grand plan of development. The planners emphasised the execution of large-scale irrigated schemes, which were intended to increase the production of cash crops such as cotton, groundnuts and sugar-cane. Although the scale of agricultural expansion was exceptionally large in the 1970s – due to the government's commitment to development – it was a continuation of previous efforts started early in the 1960s. Large-scale expansion of capital-intensive enterprises, however, affected mainly the traditional cultivators and herdsmen. First, it deprived pastoralists and small-scale cultivators of large areas that were formerly used for pasture or grain cultivation. Consequently great pressure was placed on households, their subsistence pursuit and ecology. Secondly, the expansion of large-scale schemes means that areas that were formerly perceived as remote are now close to the rapidly expanding towns and transport networks. Hence many villages can now be considered an extension to the schemes as economic and road linkages are forming between the two. The schemes, however, provide job opportunities that can be incorporated into the household subsistence strategy to compensate for labour and land losses encountered elsewhere. In retrospect, the household strategy has been reshaped to readapt to a changing socioeconomic environment. Therefore, we argue that though the large-scale schemes have distorted the old pattern of subsistence, they offer labour, which is useful source of income. The difference, however, lies in the fact that peripheral villages are pulled into the orbits of larger systems mediated by

dependence, which makes them highly responsive to changes that take place outside the villages themselves (see also the chapters by Jamal and Grawert in this volume).

The late 1970s and 1980s, however, witnessed a staggering economic decline and a slackening of many of the large-scale development schemes. According to Ali (1984, p. 18), the economic difficulties of the country assumed a crisis proportion during the second half of the 1970s following the 'spending spree' of the early 1980s, which was largely financed by massive borrowing from abroad. Therefore by 1981–2 the current account deficit was 28 times its level in 1970–1 (ibid., p. 15). Furthermore the ensuing high rates of inflation raised consumer prices to an unprecedented level. These changes affected many sectors of the population, including the rural population.

On the other hand, the oil-rich Arab countries witnessed many changes during the same period. In 1975, it was estimated that the demand for labour in Arab oil-producing countries was 3,319,900, only 1,670,800 of which was available in these countries. In 1980, the demand was 4,295,800, while the local supply was 1,901,700. The great disparity between demand and supply in the 1980s, however, was mainly due to the expansion in development projects in these countries (Birks and Sinclair, 1980, p. 20). The gap was bridged by migrant labour. Sudan, experiencing many 'push' factors during this period, was one of the countries that sent unskilled, semi-skilled and highly professional labour to the oil-rich Arab countries.

As mentioned earlier, many of the rural areas of Sudan have become structurally or partially incorporated into the wider society and hence highly susceptible to changes in the world economy. It seems illuminating to look into migration from rural areas to Arab oil-rich countries against this frame of reference.

The data presented in the next section explore the effects of these changes and how they have induced migration to the oil-rich Arab countries. It is important to note that Gezira is among the first areas to experience a direct penetration of external metropolises. Furthermore, the Gezira villages – whether outside or inside the irrigated areas – show a remarkable rate of migration to the oil-rich Arab countries.

Before discussing the data at hand, however, it is worth offering some background information about the patterns of livelihood in Gezira villages closely linked to, but outside the irrigated area.

5 SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE SCHEME

Traditionally the subsistence economy of the Gezira villages outside the irrigated areas rested on four main supports: rainfed farming – the growing of sorghum by *teras* (flood) cultivation; riverain agriculture utilising riverain lands and riverside pastures; trading in crops grown by the river banks and a wide range of commodities brought from outside Gezira; and animal husbandry (Randell, 1958, p. 30).

The irrigation of the Gezira brought fundamental changes to the village-based economy, despite the fact that most of the population are not tenants in the scheme. Soon after the Gezira scheme was initiated in 1925, many individuals and families from the nearby villages were involved in irrigated agriculture, mainly as hired labourers. Encouraged by a growing market economy, people subsequently found it more rewarding to farm the riverain lands with food crops badly needed in the cash crop-producing irrigated areas Thus, today the subsistence base of each village has become a combination of multiple resources including riverain farming, rainfed farming, pastoralism, trade or work in the scheme. The importance attached to each of these activities depends on its location, whether in the vicinity of a village or a town.

As a result of the spread of schools in the area, however, many households utilised the incomes and savings of the educated migrants as a base for extended family resource endowments. Nowadays, some households have the opportunity to combine diverse resources to fulfil their growing needs and ever-changing subsistence obligations. For the households, migration for work in the oil-rich Arab countries constitutes an additional source of income.

6 SOME SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS FROM RURAL GEZIRA TO THE OIL-RICH ARAB COUNTRIES

The data presented in this section are based on a sample of 100 households with migrating members from three villages in eastern Gezira, outside the irrigated area. These villages are Banut in Rufaa area, and Tundub and Wadel Fadul in Tambul area.

Table 11.1 General Characteristics of Migrants from Gezira to the Oil-Rich Arab Countries (percentages)

Age	
15–24	3
25–34	48
35–44	44
45–55	5
Education	
Illiterate	28
Primary school education	28
Intermediate school education	24
Secondary school education	20
Family type	
Extended family	53
Nuclear family	47
Marital status	
Married	77
Unmarried	15
Engaged	7
Divorced	1
Date of migration	
1970–5	5
1976–80	29
1981–5	50
1986–9	16
Work before migration	
Public service	10
School teachers	18
Labourers	50
Drivers	17
Others	5

Source: author's field data

Tables 11.1–11.3 show some of the characteristics of the rural migrants from these villages and their spending and investment activities. Table 11.1 also shows that 92 per cent of the migrants are between 25 and 45 years of age, 72 per cent are educated and two-thirds migrated during the 1980s. However, 67 per cent of these migrants were working as labourers and drivers before migration. These data, however, show that the villagers who obtained educa-

Table 11.2 Migrants' Occupations in Oil-Rich Arab Countries (percentages)

Type of work	*%*
Government employee	10
School teacher	18
Worker	32
Driver	17
Farmer and herder	18
Other jobs	5

Source: author's field data.

tion and were engaged in moderate or low-paying work in the 'modern sector' were more likely to migrate.

The data by family types can be misleading if taken as they are. Although some migrants live residentially within nuclear families, functionally they form part of broader, extended families. Table 11.3 shows these functional extended relations.

Table 11.2 shows that ex-government employees and school teachers took the same jobs after migration. Migrants from the category of skilled labourers, however, took unskilled jobs such as farming and herding in the oil-rich Arab countries.

Significantly, the categories of jobs practised by these rural migrants in the receiving countries are not the high-paying jobs, but rather from the low-paid group. Despite this fact, however, the surplus they can save and remit back is quite reasonable by rural standards.

Table 11.3 shows some of the spending and investment patterns of the migrants. Twenty-eight per cent of the migrants invested their savings on the purchase of lorries and vans. These offer transport and are often operated between the villages and nearby towns. They had the effect of linking these villages still more to the nearby towns. Others invest their savings in small shops and canteens. In all cases the income generated from such investments is used to bridge the gap in the household budget.

Table 11.3 also shows that 63 per cent of the migrants used their income to support or augment previous household enterprises while others participated in self-help activities such as schools, clubs and building mosques.

Table 11.3 Remittances Spending Pattern (percentages; do not add up to 100)

Subsidiary income to household	
Purchase of vans, lorries, canteens	5
Support of previous activities	
Agricultural activities	45
Trade	13
Provision for dependents	
Provision for parents only	36
Provision for parents and other kin	38
Provision for kin only	15
Acquiring material possessions	
Refrigerators	38
TV sets	62
Video sets	12
Contribution to community activities	86

Source: author's field data.

7 CONCLUSION

Migration from these rural villages of the Gezira to the oil-rich Arab countries generated extra incomes for many households and helped maintain their livelihood. This is particularly evident from the way migrants reinvest their savings in various income-generating activities. Savings are also used to reinforce 'traditional' solidarity, diversify household income activities and solidify extended family relations. Migration, therefore, is an important factor in maintaining and reproducing household structures, rather than causing any form of radical transformation. In fact, this trend has been found to prevail in many other parts of the Middle East such as Egypt and Turkey (Glavanis and Glavanis, 1983).

The gains that rural migrants secure are thus not disposed of on an individual basis. Rather they are used to offer households an additional source of income that enables them to diversify, reshape and hence maintain their standard of living. Furthermore remittances are used to maintain a wider range of beneficiaries than the immediate household members of the migrants, such as kinsmen or the community as a whole. Thus, migration from rural areas of Sudan to the oil-rich Arab countries does not always lead to wide economic

differentiation. This does not mean, however, that it does not bring about cultural change, particularly in the form of a stronger inclination towards the use of imported goods. But this form of social differentiation, though evident, is rather relative and limited.

The positive impact of labour migration is defended by the fact that it raises the standards of living of the families with migrant members. These have led to higher expectations within the community and induced many more to migrate. Rural youths are now seeking to migrate to the oil-rich Arab countries in order to be able to use their savings in traditional, well-trodden ways or to achieve a higher social standing within the community. This is particularly evident in the prevalence of conspicuous spending on marriage and other ceremonies and social occasions.

This depiction of the pros and cons of rural out-migration has, therefore, to cater for both the micro- and macro-forces involved in migration. Although it may be perceived as a rational strategy for the individual rural households, the effects of migration on the larger economy may not be equally desirable. Nevertheless migration from rural areas cannot be fully grasped without understanding its relationship to the problems of rural poverty, underdevelopment and dependence.

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