
Livelihood Patterns of Displaced Households in Greater Khartoum

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Members of impoverished households in Greater Khartoum, who have been displaced from their homelands by famine and civil war, gain a livelihood by utilising a wide variety of subsistence activities and sources. These include moonlighting, income diversification and pooling, exchange relations, scavenging, relief supplies from aid agencies and remittances from relatives working in other areas. This finding challenges the widely held view of the displaced as dependent and parasitic on the wider urban community. Several public policies are identified which have a detrimental effect on the livelihood of the displaced.

INTRODUCTION

Population displacement within Sudan has assumed the proportions of a national crisis. The famine of 1984–85, precipitated by several consecutive years of meager rainfall and intense drought, forced some two million people to flee their homes and to seek refuge in areas of plentiful rainfall and in the riverain areas of central and northern Sudan. By early 1985 some 400,000 of them were estimated to have taken refuge in Greater Khartoum (Commission of the Displaced, 1990, p. 2). Following the good rains of 1985–86, many displaced people voluntarily returned home. There are still tens of thousands of households, however, who are reluctant to return home, either because their herds were decimated by the drought, and the fields they used to cultivate and the pastures they used to graze were reduced to desert; or because they have managed to assimilate and gain employment in Greater Khartoum. A new wave of population displacement from

northwestern Sudan to Greater Khartoum started in late 1990 due to lack of rain for two consecutive years (Hiltzik, 1991a), but the rains of 1991 were plentiful.

Another factor which has caused substantial population displacement is the civil war that has been ravaging southern Sudan and affecting the southern parts of the Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan provinces since mid-1983. Nobody knows exactly how many people have died but by 1989 the number of those killed, directly or indirectly, by the war was estimated to be about 200,000 (Alier, 1990, p. 261; Peace and Foreign Relations Commission, 1990, p. 63). About four million southern Sudanese were estimated to have been displaced (Commission of the Displaced, 1990, p. 3). Some 425,000 of them have crossed the border into Ethiopia¹ and Uganda as refugees (United States Committee for Refugees, 1990, p. 47) and the remainder have migrated to northern Sudan.

An estimated 1.8 million displaced southerners have migrated to Greater

Khartoum. Its population has consequently doubled in a span of seven years. This is a case of hyper-urbanisation, with a 10.5 per cent annual growth rate.² The arrival of the displaced in Greater Khartoum throughout the 1980s coincided with a deep economic recession in which less than 30 per cent of industrial capacity was being utilized, coupled with runaway inflation and declining real wages. Municipalities and local councils could not provide adequate services because of budget cuts. Food supplies in the national capital were inadequate: there were long queues for bread and food riots were frequent. And then came the flood.

The rainy season of 1988 was unprecedented in the history of Greater Khartoum (Taban, 1988; Bradley et al., 1990). The torrential rains of early August and the concomitant flooding destroyed an estimated 127,000 dwellings and left about 750,000 persons homeless (Centers for Disease Control, 1989, p. 785). Those hardest hit were the residents of the spontaneous settlements, including tens of thousands of displaced households. Some two million destitute people, with urgent needs for housing, water, food, medical care and employment lost, almost overnight, whatever shelter and possessions they had managed to acquire.

In this article I describe how the displaced, for whom we may use the local term, *naziheen*,³ responded to these crises. How did they gain a livelihood, despite the forces ranged against them, and at a time when even those with above average incomes had to struggle to make ends meet?

THE FIELD RESEARCH

This article is based on a pilot survey of 50 households⁴ and a handful of community leaders and relief workers, conducted in Greater Khartoum during January and February 1990. The respondents were randomly selected from nine settlements,

which in turn were selected from a pool of 96 unplanned settlements which accommodate about 60 per cent of Greater Khartoum's population (Doxiades et al., 1990). Chosen because of their high concentrations of *naziheen*, these settlements were: *Mo'askar*⁵ Wad al-Basheer, the northwestern edge of Umbadda, *Mo'askar* Zagalona, and *Mo'askar* al-Muwailih in Omdurman; *Mo'askar* al-Izbah, Tayiba al-Ahamida, Kartoan Kassala, and at-Takamol/as-Siriha in Khartoum North; and *Mo'askar* as-Suq al-Markazi in Khartoum (Figure 1).

There were three main reasons for choosing the household as the unit of analysis for this study. First, the household plays an important role in mediating a large set of behaviors and decisions such as participation in the labor market, consumption patterns, and migration (Schmink, 1984, p. 87). In contrast to studies that focus on the individual (e.g., the household head), the household approach is more likely to capture the essence of the social context under study. Second, since most migrants settle into some form of household arrangement, the household is more appropriate as a unit of analysis in migration studies. Third, focusing on the household constitutes an intermediate level of analysis between microeconomic approaches, which focus on atomistic behavior, and historical-structural approaches, which focus on the macro political economy of development (Wood, 1982).

The sample included 18 households (36 per cent) who had been displaced from western Sudan by the drought-induced famine, 22 households (44 per cent) who had been displaced from southern and southwestern Sudan by the civil war, and 10 households (20 per cent) who had migrated voluntarily in search of better jobs and services. The displaced households had typically lost a substantial portion of their assets and some of their relatives or neigh-

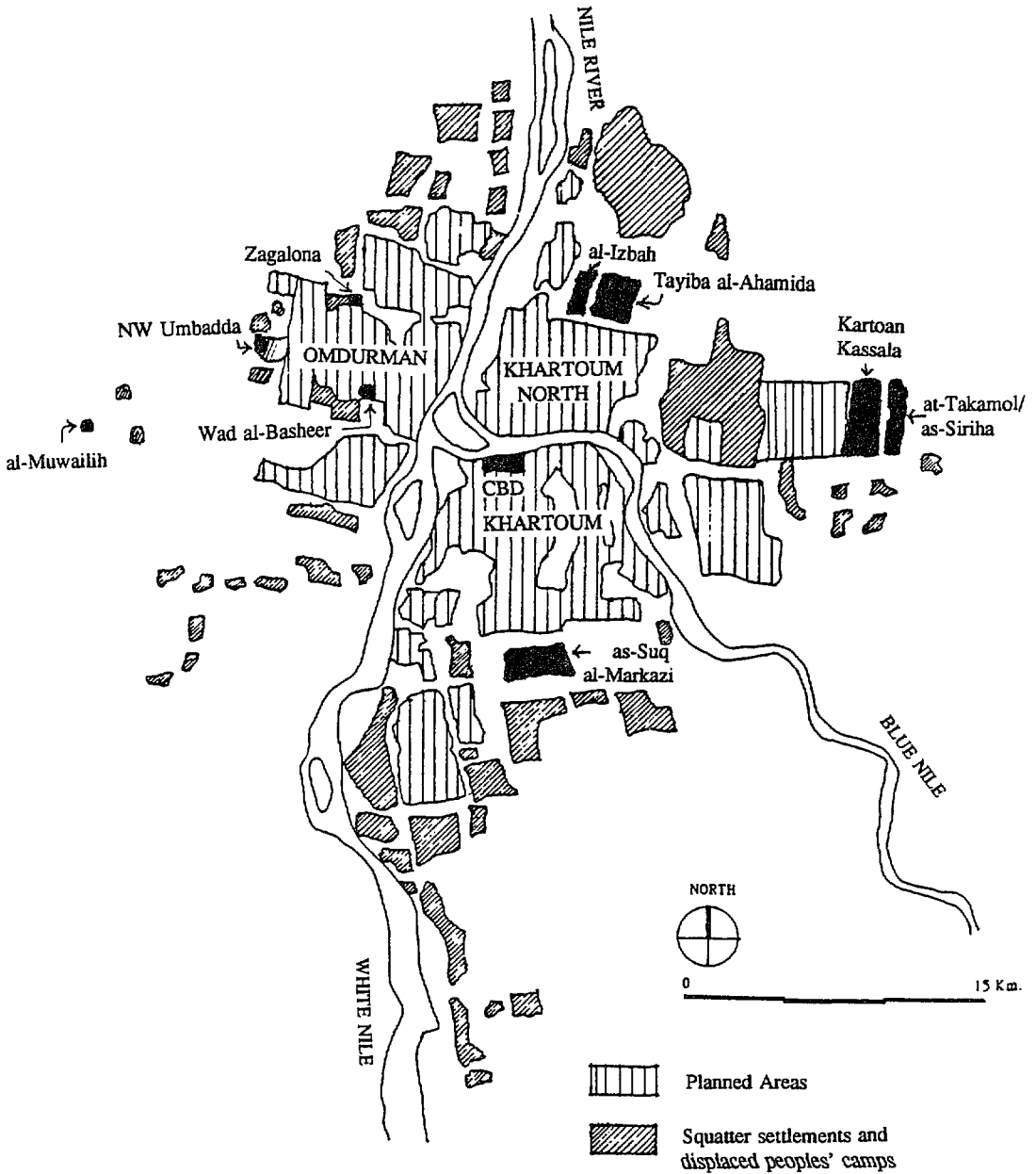


FIGURE 1 Location of the surveyed settlements within Greater Khartoum (adapted from Ahmad, 1985)

bors, and considered themselves to be endangered by the war and the drought-induced famine. In contrast, the voluntary migrants had rarely lost assets or experienced loss of life amongst relatives and friends and did not consider themselves to be in danger. About 80 per cent of the displaced had migrated to Greater Khartoum since 1984, a year when population displacement within Sudan began to intensify significantly. Only 25 per cent of the voluntary migrants had come since 1984.

MAKING A LIVELIHOOD

The majority of the respondents (54 per cent) earned their living as unskilled day-laborers in the construction industry and in marketplaces. The working day for this group usually started shortly after dawn since it often involved a long walk or bus ride to the job site. Job availability was highly dependent on an erratic building materials market, on the number of job seekers on a given day and on the health of the laborer himself. Job security therefore was virtually nonexistent and it was not uncommon for many people to go without work for many days.

Wages were paid on a daily or piece work basis. Reported daily earnings ranged from twenty to forty Sudanese pounds (i.e., US\$1.6 to US\$3.2). Although these wages were two to three times the official minimum wage of 300 pounds per month (i.e., about US\$25 per month), they were barely enough for a daily supply of two liters of milk.⁶

This category of employment could be observed at Khartoum's regional market (as-Suq al-Markazi). Typically, men from the nearby *mo'askar* worked in loading and unloading the produce that arrived in the market every morning, or in cleaning and cutting fish. Work for this group of people started at dawn and ceased around ten o'clock in the morning, after which each

man carried home a piece of fish, and whatever other food he could get. The rest of the day was spent within the *mo'askar*. Unemployment was common because work in the market was sporadic and because of the high number of job seekers. Many of those who did not find employment scavenged the solid waste generated from the market for whatever food they could take home for dinner.

To guard against prolonged unemployment, most households diversified their sources of income, such that loss of income from one source was compensated for by income from another source. A notable example of income diversification is provided by a household consisting of an old man and his wife who lived in *Mo'askar* as-Suq al-Markazi. The man worked as a guard at one of the schools run in the *mo'askar* by an Islamic relief organization. In addition to free accommodation in the form of a tent, he received a monthly salary of 400 pounds, a free daily meal which was part of a feeding program offered by the organization to the students, and irregular perquisites in the form of canned food stuffs and grain. Furthermore, the household depended on erratic remittances sent by their two sons who were farm workers in eastern Sudan. The woman wove date palm leaves into prayer mats and sold them for a reasonable price. In addition, the man used their remittances to buy soap and cigarettes from middle men which he sold in the *mo'askar* at a profit.

About ten per cent of the respondents were self-employed in informal, micro-enterprises such as water vending, cloth mending and petty trading. The main sources of capital invested in these enterprises were sale of assets in the homeland, particularly livestock, credit obtained from well-established relatives and acquaintances in Greater Khartoum or elsewhere, and incomes generated from seasonal employment in the agricultural belt of east-central Sudan. Savings generated from employ-

ment also provided capital for investment in micro enterprises. One man, for example, worked in a laundry shop in Khartoum. Because the shop was far from the *mo'askar* in which his wife and children lived, he spent the nights in the shop and returned to his family only for the weekend. Every Thursday evening the man returned home with some commodities in hand and about 200 pounds in cash, which he gave to his wife to spend on household needs during his absence. With his consent, she invested some of this money in making *a'ragi*, a local liquor made from dates. With 110 pounds spent on dates, ten pounds on charcoal, six pounds on spices and five pounds on water, she would distill one gallon of *a'ragi* and sell it to a middle man for 200 pounds, making a 70 pounds profit on a 130 pounds investment. The middle man would then make an extra profit of 200 pounds by selling it by the bottle outside the *mo'askar*.

Some households depended totally on women who worked as domestic servants in affluent neighborhoods. If a woman had an infant or a toddler, she would take him or her to where she worked. In this way, the woman and her child were guaranteed food, and possibly some used clothes, in addition to a monthly wage at least equivalent to a minimum wage. At dusk she would return home, possibly carrying some left over food for the rest of her children. She would then carry out her household duties, not the least of which was preparation of the evening meal.

Another income generating activity totally dominated by women is selling food and beverages, either within the settlement, in local markets or at transportation nodes. Brewing *marisa*, a popular local beer, for instance, is an economic activity undertaken by a large number of women in the *mo'askarat*. Because of its high calorific content, *marisa* is the main and often the only diet for many adults. What little money a man earns is spent first on feeding the children. If he has some money left over he

usually contributes with a group of friends to buying a bucket of *marisa*. Even if a man does not have any money, he can still find a group of friends and neighbors who are willing to share *marisa* with him in the expectation that, one day he will be able to return the favor.

In addition to being a local custom found in different parts of Sudan, the drinking of *marisa* is also dictated by economic necessity. As mentioned above, a person needs only a little money, or even no money at all, in order to satisfy a large part of his or her daily calorific needs in this way. The authorities in Khartoum, however, are hostile to drinking *marisa* because of its intoxicating side effects. Women who brew *marisa* are subjected to frequent raids by the police who confiscate their utensils and may even take them to court to receive an additional punishment. Paying fines and bribes to the police keeps the *marisa* business rolling, although it raises the cost of its production — a cost which is usually passed on to consumers thus making an extra demand on an already limited household budget.

Sharing food with other households was common in the *mo'askarat*. Of those surveyed, 76 per cent indicated that they frequently shared food with needy households. Such reciprocal arrangements develop among households related by kinship and/or by place of origin, who usually live near each other. Other households have networks which extend beyond their current settlement to relatives and fellow villagers in other settlements. Since the majority of the displaced work as wage laborers on a day-to-day basis, and are thus prone to intermittent unemployment, the contribution of these reciprocal, non-monetized transactions to their livelihood is very significant.

Income pooling and mutual assistance are integral components of the repertoire of household subsistence strategies. Some 22 per cent of the surveyed households had

more than one member who contributed to household expenditure by pooling their incomes. Six per cent of the households had no bread winner at all, however, and depended totally on assistance from relatives and friends.

Remittances played a minor role in the livelihood of those surveyed. Only ten per cent of the households had received sporadic cash or in-kind remittances from other households outside Greater Khartoum within the past year, while about 20 per cent of the households were sending remittances to their families in other areas of Sudan. This rather modest contribution of remittances could be explained in three ways: (i) the rural economy is too weak to generate surplus money and commodities to be sent to the city; (ii) there are few people left in the villages and towns from which the respondents came; and (iii) there are few, if any, people going back and forth between the city and the countryside with whom remittances could be sent. On the other hand, the fact that some households do send remittances is a positive indicator that at least some of the displaced are doing well enough to afford to remit money and/or commodities to their families at home.

About 44 per cent of those surveyed were issued commodity rationing cards (CRCs) which enabled them to procure rationed commodities, such as sugar, cooking oil, sorghum, soap and tea, at subsidized prices through the stringent rationing system established in early 1990. Those who did not have CRCs (56 per cent) resorted to the black market and paid exorbitant prices for indispensable items such as sorghum, the main food staple for the great majority of respondents.

In general, the *mo'askarat* surveyed were better off than many spontaneous settlements in that most of them had water tanks donated and operated by relief organizations who ensured that the tanks were filled everyday by mobile tankers. Except in one quarter in *Mo'askar* as-Suq al-Markazi,

where the residents had elected to pay a nominal fee to generate a revolving fund to be used for small projects within their quarter, water is distributed freely from these tanks. Households in the *mo'askarat* that did not have water tanks (al-Izbah and Zagalona) either bought it from vendors or procured it at a lower price from stand pipes in adjacent settlements. A large number of households, however, have established connections with security guards in the adjacent industrial areas, who allow them to fill their water containers without necessarily obtaining the consent of the owners of the establishments.

Whether a household buys water at a high price from vendors, obtains it at a lower price from adjacent settlements, or gets it freely from the industrial area depends on whether it can afford to designate a female member for the tedious job of walking several miles several times a day carrying water on her head. When the woman is tending to an infant or a sick child or is busy earning a living herself, the household is obliged to resort to water vendors. The high price of water forces impoverished households to cut down their water consumption to the absolute minimum required for survival. Ordinary chores, such as regular bathing and washing clothes, thus become a luxury which the majority of households cannot afford.

Sending children to school is another household survival strategy, especially given the fact that some of the schools sponsored by charitable organizations like the African Muslim Committee and the Sudan Council of Churches distribute to the students free breakfast, free books and notebooks, and sometimes even a free school uniform. Schooling is also a long term investment decision wisely made by the household because there is hardly any work available for young children in the vicinity. Schooling thus provides a glimmer of hope that a better future may emerge from the miserable life of the *mo'askarat*.

Unfortunately, it is not available to all children of school age because the charitable organizations cannot afford to provide spaces for everyone.

Lobbying for relief and aid from government departments and charitable organizations is another subsistence strategy. There are some outspoken people in each *mo'askar* who spend most of their time and energy lobbying for aid from organizations. Prominent among these are the community leaders (the sultans and their assistants) whose primary function, for which they receive an allowance from the government, is to settle disputes and supervise the distribution of communal services and relief supplies within their respective *mo'askarat*. In reality, however, the sultan's primary job is to build connections with relief agencies, and solicit assistance from them. The correlation between a sultan's popularity (and sometimes legitimacy) and his ability to gain frequent assistance for his followers is evidently very high.

Needless to say, relief assistance is not value free. Charitable organizations use it to gain and maintain more adherents to the religious beliefs they espouse. There is a noticeable correspondence between the religion of the majority of residents in a *mo'askar* and that of the 'sponsoring' relief organization. Muslim-based organizations, for example, provide most of their assistance to settlements where the majority are Muslims, as do Christian-based organizations in Christian-dominated settlements. A familiar, though not very common, sight in the *mo'askarat* is that of young children queueing for supplementary food aid. Each child carries an identification tag distributed to him or her by a specific charitable organization in a pre-registration session in which his or her religion and hence eligibility to receive assistance from the organization has been determined.

Despite the large amount of energy exerted in lobbying for it, the contribution of institutional aid to the livelihood of the

displaced households has dwindled over the years. The great majority of respondents reported that they had received no aid in the past year from either the State or relief organizations. Of those who received assistance, 46 per cent reported that they could depend on it for a few days only.

After several years of distributing relief supplies in the *mo'askarat*, many relief organizations have shifted their focus to special programs such as the supplemental feeding of malnourished children, pregnant and lactating women. Others have shifted most of their operations to the war zone in southern Sudan where several thousand starving people are caught in the cross fire. This shift in focus has come as a result of pressure from the government, which is intent on the redevelopment of 'peace villages' in the South in order to absorb the *naziheen*. Most relief organizations, however, have seen their funds decline as a result of what Hiltzik (1991b) calls 'donor fatigue'. As a result, many of those who had been fully dependent on relief supplies have been forced to eke out a meager living in the nooks and crannies of the urban economy.

CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

New consumption patterns are acquired by most of the *naziheen* in urban areas. Those who work outside the *mo'askarat* find it necessary to replenish their energy at mid morning with the standard urban breakfast: a dish of *fool masri* (fava beans), a loaf of bread and, possibly, a glass of hot tea. Because it is relatively cheap, many displaced people have become 'addicted' to this meal, which they hardly knew in their home villages. This same meal (with the exception of tea) is distributed to school children by the charitable organizations who run the schools. Gradually, *fool masri*, bread, and even sugar have become daily necessities for most households.

Whereas in the home villages each

household would brew its own *marisa*, in the city, where the ingredients are too costly to buy on a daily basis, it is made by some women who sell it to others. The same is true of other food items which were available in abundance in the countryside, but which have to be bought at exorbitant prices in the city. Bread is another commodity which many displaced people had not known before but which becomes a household necessity in the city because of its reasonable price and its readiness for final consumption. The household economy thus becomes increasingly monetized as people are forced to seek refuge in large cities.

These new consumption habits in turn swell the overall urban demand for bread, sugar, and *fool masri*. The first two items are rationed by the government and can be bought only in officially recognized stores and cooperative societies. To date, only a few *mo'askarat* receive these items through the official channels. The rest get them through the black market at much higher prices. At the same time the quantities that find their way to the black market in the *mo'askarat* are illicitly siphoned off from the rationed quantities of other neighborhoods, creating a black market in those neighborhoods as well. The end result is higher prices inside and outside the *mo'askarat*, and a feeling of discontent among the host population who feel that their own livelihood is deeply affected by the influx of displaced persons into the already congested market for labor and commodities. This resentment is expressed repeatedly in newspaper articles which call for the forced resettlement of *naziheen* somewhere else.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The employment opportunities available to the *naziheen* in Greater Khartoum are affected by conditions prevailing at the national level. Although population displacement from the South to the North

also took place during the first phase of civil war between 1955 and 1972, its related unemployment problem seemed less acute then because there was more economic activity — such as the construction of highways, railway lines and residential extensions. On the other hand, the negative ramifications of the population displacement that started in 1984 are widely felt today because of the prevailing economic stagflation. The contraction of economic activity also restricts the employment choices open to the *naziheen*: the division of labor which was common in the past, with the Abei Dinka, for example, working as domestic labor and the Nuer working primarily in the construction industry, is virtually nonexistent today. Everybody now competes for whatever jobs there are.

Displaced people gain a livelihood within this general climate of economic despair by utilizing a plethora of subsistence activities which include moonlighting between formal and informal employment, income diversification, pooling resources, reciprocity, scavenging, soliciting relief supplies from aid agencies, and receiving remittances from relatives who work in other areas of Sudan or overseas. By engaging in these activities, the displaced people of Greater Khartoum have come a long way from their earlier state of total dependence on relief supplies and now make up self-supporting communities, hardly differentiated in this respect from other migrant communities. It is to be hoped that this finding will help to correct the widely held view of the *naziheen* as dependent and parasitic (cf. El-Seed, 1988, p. 9; Omer, 1990, p. 68).

The ability of local authorities and public agencies to extend infrastructural services to people in the *mo'askarat* is substantially affected by economic stagflation and by the official perception of displacement as a temporary phenomenon. Except for the services donated by charitable organizations, most of the *mo'askarat* and

spontaneous settlements are deficient in health, education, drainage and sanitation services. Because human and solid wastes are disposed of in open areas within the settlements, environmental health conditions in the settlements are dire. An urgent and massive mobilization of fiscal and human resources is needed to improve the living conditions of people in the *mo'askarat*.

Public policy plays a significant role in the livelihood of migrants in general and the displaced in particular. The relocation of people from the settlements they had spontaneously built near places of employment to remote areas has had a detrimental impact on household survival, access to employment and daily expenditure (especially transportation costs). Comparing the two *mo'askarat* of as-Suq al-Markazi near Khartoum's regional market, where many displaced people find intermittent employment, and al-Izbah, a desolate place on the periphery of Khartoum North, shows that location is a key factor affecting household survival. The *mo'askarat* which are near major streets and densely populated neighborhoods have a better chance of receiving services than those in isolated parts of the city.

The detrimental impact of the lack of CRCs on the household economy of those surveyed cannot be overemphasized. Since the rationing system includes most of the essential household reproduction needs, the lack of CRCs leaves the impoverished migrants at the mercy of a relentless black market. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a high incidence of malnutrition and disease among young children. In their study of the health conditions of the displaced, Dodge et al. (1987, p. 249) concluded that the undernutrition rate for displaced children under 36 months of age was twice the average for Northern Sudan. It is these disadvantaged people who should be given priority in the distribution of rationed commodities.

It is important to recognize that the 'repatriation' of the *naziheen* cannot be achieved while the conditions which compelled them to migrate — namely, drought, famine, and civil war — still exist. Hasty (and often forced) 'repatriation', without resolving these problems and without rebuilding the destroyed rural infrastructure and local economies, will only aggravate the suffering of the displaced and lead to further starvation and displacement. This is particularly true for those households who have managed, through their diligence and resourcefulness, to establish an economic foothold in Greater Khartoum, and whose chances of maintaining a decent life would be seriously jeopardized by forced 'repatriation' and resettlement.

Postscript

Since mid-1991, the Greater Khartoum authorities have started to re-locate some of the squatters and displaced people to the outskirts of the city. In early 1992, a new master plan was approved by the Council of Ministers. The re-location of displaced peoples' camps is a feature of the plan. The new destinations are located a few kilometres west of Umbadda and near Jebel al-Awlia, about 30 km south of Khartoum's Central Business District (CBD). The forced re-location of displaced people to these desolate sites may be expected to have a detrimental effect on their livelihoods.

Notes

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1. Since the change of government in Ethiopia in June 1991, most of the Sudanese refugees have fled from Ethiopia to southeastern Sudan.
2. The population of Khartoum Province was 1.8 million at the time of the 1983 population census (Department of Statistics, 1987, Table 1). The preliminary findings of an enumeration conducted in January 1990 indicated that it had reached 3.6 million (Doxiades et al., 1990).
3. The term *nazih* (pl. *naziheen*) refers literally to a person who relocates from one place to another. It has gained wider currency in the last seven years to refer to a Sudanese citizen displaced *within* Sudan, in contrast to a *laji*, an international refugee.
4. A household is defined here as a co-resident group of people who may or may not be of the same kinship group and who make collective decisions about the consumption and allocation of resources.
5. *Mo'askar* (pl. *mo'askarat*) literally means 'camp'. The term was hardly used to refer to civilian settlements within Greater Khartoum before 1984. The term was popularised by the State and the relief agencies, both of whom were active in delivering services and relief supplies to the displaced and wanted to differentiate their target groups from the rest of the population.
6. Established in late 1988, this minimum wage is very outdated. A more realistic one would be in the region of 1500 to 2000 pounds.

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