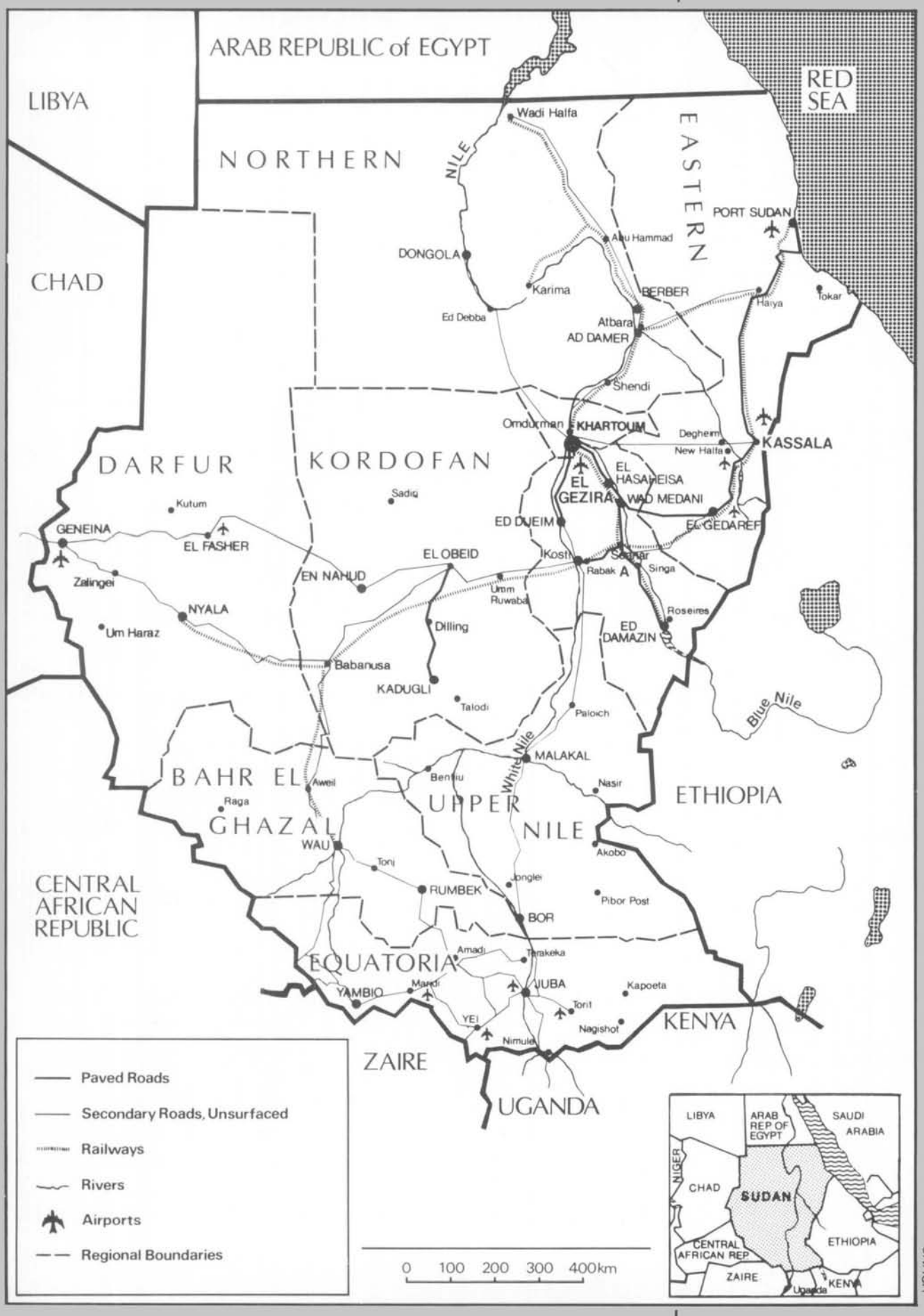
Sudan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Ed Debba
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AD DAMER
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Uganda
KENYA

UNHCR

Dates and Events

Regional Profile

Sudan is often considered as two entities: the North, which is predominantly Muslim, Arab and relatively advanced; and the South; Christian or pagan, black and virtually undeveloped. Indeed, at the time of British colonial occupation, Sudan was administered as two territories. But it is far more varied than that, with the census at independence identifying 597 tribes in 19 ethnic groups. The Arabs, at 39%, were the largest group, the Southern Dinka next with 20%, and there were also hundreds of thousands of people from other African countries. The Sudanese are about 70% Muslim, 4% Christian and the rest follow other traditional beliefs. Of the 115 languages, 26 are spoken by more than 100,000 people.

The largest country in Africa is divided into six administrative regions. In the Southern Region, the population is composed of distinctive tribes of Nilo-Hamitic and Negro origins. With the exception of explorers and slavers, the South had little contact with the rest of the country until the 20th century, and remains undeveloped. While there is some Christian and Muslim influence, most people still follow tribal traditions. They are largely dependent on subsistence farming and stock-rearing.

The Central Region and the Khartoum-Khartoum North-Omdurman conurbation dominate Sudanese economic, social, political and cultural life. The Gezira area, between the Blue and White Niles, is the site of extensive irrigation schemes, particularly for cotton and wheat production. Seasonal labour requirements draw large numbers of migrants, particularly from the west.

In the Northern Region the Nubian people are the predominant group who are traditionally influential throughout Sudan. The Nubian and Libyan deserts lie beyond the Nile Valley, so the population is concentrated along the river.

In Eastern Region, between Khartoum and the Ethiopian border, the clay soils are the most productive in Sudan. Traditionally, the area has produced a surplus of cereals for export to the Middle East and grain-deficient parts of Sudan. Port Sudan, which is Sudan's only significant port, lies on the Red Sea. It is backed by the Red Sea Hills, whose inhabitants, the semi-nomadic Beja people, have been severely affected by drought.

The western regions of Kordofan and Darfur represent a transition between Arab and Negro influences. Although the Arabic language and culture predominate, there remain non-Arab tribes e.g. the Nuba in Kordofan, the Fur, Messalit and Meidob in Darfur. Most people are sedentary farmers dependent upon small-scale rain-fed cultivation of food crops, but about a quarter of the population are cattle or camel nomads. Due to its position, Darfur has always been isolated from the Nile Valley area and it was not formally incorporated into Sudan until early this century.

From its earliest history, the area that became Sudan has seen kingdoms come and go, a few lasting hundreds of years, some linked to or influenced by outside states like the Pharoahs of Egypt or Christian Ethiopia, others self-sustaining sultanates or organised tribal groups.

639 AD	Arab Muslims invade Egypt, leading to Sudan's gradual Islamicisation.
1504	Fall of the last Sudanese Christian kingdom's capital as Arab Muslims consolidated influence.
1821	Turko-Egyptian invasion of central and northern Sudan.
1881	Emergence of Mahdi — 'appointed one' — as religious leader opposed to Turko-Egyptian rule.
1885	Siege of Khartoum ends with death of General Charles Gordon, Mahdist state starts.
1898	Defeat of Mahdist forces by Sir Herbert Kitchener at Omdurman.
1899	Establishment of Anglo-Egyptian 'condominium' to run Sudan.
1916	Killing of last independent ruler of Darfur to incorporate region into condominium.
1920s	Closed districts established to restrict contact between north & south.
1926	Gezira cotton growing scheme opened.
1930s/40s	Increasing pressure for independence.
1955	Beginnings of conflict in south which develops into civil war.
1956	Independence.
1958	General Abboud takes over from disorganised democratic government.
1964	Abboud gives up power after failing to solve economic & political problems or ending war in south.
1965	Coalition civilian government formed.
1969	Colonel Nimeiri takes over, promises socialist path, nationalises big businesses.
1970s	Ambitious development programmes start, aiming to make Sudan food exporter as 'breadbasket of the Middle East'.
1971	Communist-inspired coup attempt, Nimeiri begins rightward shift.
1972	Addis Ababa treaty signed to end civil war, promising development and much autonomy for south.
1973/74	Arab oil price rises, to be followed by higher interest rates and recession in West, Sudan turns towards crisis.
1980s	Debts spiral, output falls, prices rise etc.
1983	Southern soldiers mutiny, new rebellion begins.
1984	Nimeiri announces further Islamicisation, including Islamic law & taxes.
1985 March	Nimeiri puts up food & fuel prices, leaves for visit to US.
April	Head of army takes over after wave of strikes.

A transitional military council, aided by a civilian cabinet representing groups that organised strikes, has promised a return to democracy in 1986.

Introduction

Why did drought become a famine?

THE POOR OF SUDAN, like those in many African countries, starved in 1984, continued to starve in 1985, and will need a lot of help if they are not to starve in 1986. An enormous relief effort tried, often against great difficulties, to save lives, but thousands died when the relief was late or not enough got through.

The people who died did not do so because the rains failed in 1984. Despite hard work and careful calculation, they died because they could not grow enough food and were too poor to buy what they needed. Their hunger and poverty were due to a complex combination of political, economic and environmental factors that for decades have been destroying the land they depend on.

In other countries across the drought belt from Somalia to Senegal, the factors of famine are often more stark. In Ethiopia, for example, the provinces worst affected by environmental decline and drought are also locked in civil war. In Mali or Niger, many problems have been blamed on the legacy of exploitative French colonialism and the takeover of good land for exported cash crops. Sudan has its own civil war, cash crops and colonial legacy — but the causes of the famine go far wider.

Sudan's crisis has been linked, amongst other things, to the introduction of new agricultural methods, political systems and economic frameworks which damage the old ways of life and erode the networks of support that existed within families, villages and tribes. As sustainable food production is abandoned, the intricate mechanisms of survival break down and the common climatic variation of drought ceases to be an endurable calamity and becomes an engulfing disaster.

The crisis does not stop when Western food aid arrives — and if short term handouts are all we will give, we are merely postponing famine's inevitable return. For the poor of Sudan, it is clear that every pound given, every song performed, and every tear wept for the dead will have been in vain unless two things begin to happen. First, that we try to understand why this famine occurred, and second, that steps are taken to stop it occurring again.

What happened?

Although news coverage focused on the plight of refugees in Sudan, by August 1985 an estimated half of Sudan's own population — more than ten million people — was affected by famine.

Signs of impending disaster were seen after the poor rains of 1983. The failure of the rains in 1984 brought things to a head. Darfur, Kordofan and the Red Sea Hills were particularly affected, but the traditionally more productive areas of Central Region and around Kassala also suffered.

Large scale migration from northern Darfur, northern Kordofan, and the Red Sea Hills started even before the 1984 harvest as people saw no hope in remaining in their villages. In each area, hundreds of thousands moved in desperation: in Darfur they went south to local towns; in Kordofan, to El Obeid and Omdurman; and in the Red Sea Hills to makeshift camps on the Kassala–Port Sudan road and the shanties of Port Sudan.

Oxfam nutrition surveys which covered Darfur and Kordofan in early 1985 indicated regionwide malnutrition levels four times the normal in Africa, with a deterioration anticipated as food stocks became further depleted and the rainy season brought increased disease levels. Livestock losses of 50-70% were usual. The condition of the displaced was especially poor, with little food and shelter available and much disease. Children died as surveys were being carried out. Aid officials concluded that nearly all the six million people in these regions needed food assistance. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) made generous donations of sorghum, but logistical problems were such that little got to the people in the villages in good time. The arrival of 120,000 refugees from Chad in mid-1984 added to the problems in Darfur.

Facts and Figures

Population:	20.8 million (mid 1983)
Population growth:	2.8% per year
Capital:	Khartoum
Area:	2,506,000 sq. km. (10 times the size of the UK)
Gross National Product:	$400 per person UK $9,200 per person
Life expectancy:	48 years UK 74 years
Infant mortality (0–1yr):	117 per 1,000 UK 10 per 1,000
Child death rate (1–5yrs):	19 per 1,000 UK less than 1
Population per physician:	8,930 UK 650
Literacy:	38% male: 14% female
Percentage enrolled in Primary Schools:	59% male: 42% female
External debts:	1970: $306 million 1985: approx $9,000 million
Main exports 1983	
Total:	$687.3 million
of which:	$344.3 million cotton $ 70.2 million livestock $ 67.6 million sesame $ 64.5 million gum arabic
Main imports 1983	
Total:	$1345 million
of which:	$344.6 petroleum and petroleum products $264.8 manufactured goods $205.2 machinery and equipment $164.5 medicines and chemicals $133.5 transport equipment $95.3 tea, wheat and sugar $98.8 other foodstuffs

Source: World Bank / IPPF

Refugees

Even before the much publicised influx of refugees in late 1984/1985, Sudan hosted 750,000 refugees: 500,000 Ethiopians in north Sudan and 250,000 Ugandans in the south. Most were self-settled: the Ethiopians in the large towns, and in rural communities in central and eastern Sudan; the Ugandans as farmers in Equatoria Region. However, the Ethiopians were badly affected, in common with the local Sudanese population, by the poor harvests and collapse of the rural labour market in 1984.

Since the beginning of 1984, an additional 300,000 people have come to Sudan from Ethiopia, primarily from Eritrea and Tigray. The influx reached a peak in early 1985, when an estimated 3,500 people per day arrived, to flee drought and fighting. Most entered formal camps, where conditions were initially poor, with shortages of food and drinking water, and with widespread disease. However, the situation was controlled by mid-1985. In April and May 1985, around 55,000 Tigrayans spontaneously returned home to prepare for the farming season. Few Eritreans returned home, and an intensification of fighting in Eritrea in past months has led to more arrivals. Thus, it is currently estimated that there are 780,000 Ethiopian refugees in Sudan, of whom 400,000 remain in camps in Eastern Region.

An influx of refugees from Chad into western Sudan began in mid-1984 due to drought and poor security. Over 120,000 people are estimated to have entered. Many have moved south and east in search of food and work, but about 70,000 are in reception centres close to the border. Provision of supplies has been difficult due to much-publicised logistical problems, which were worsened by heavy rains in mid-1985. Severe shortages of food resulted in high levels of malnutrition and mortality.

In the Red Sea Province, the drought has lasted even longer than in other areas — as much as six years. The Beja nomads have lost more than 90% of their livestock and the pastures are so badly damaged that some environmentalists fear that they may never recover.

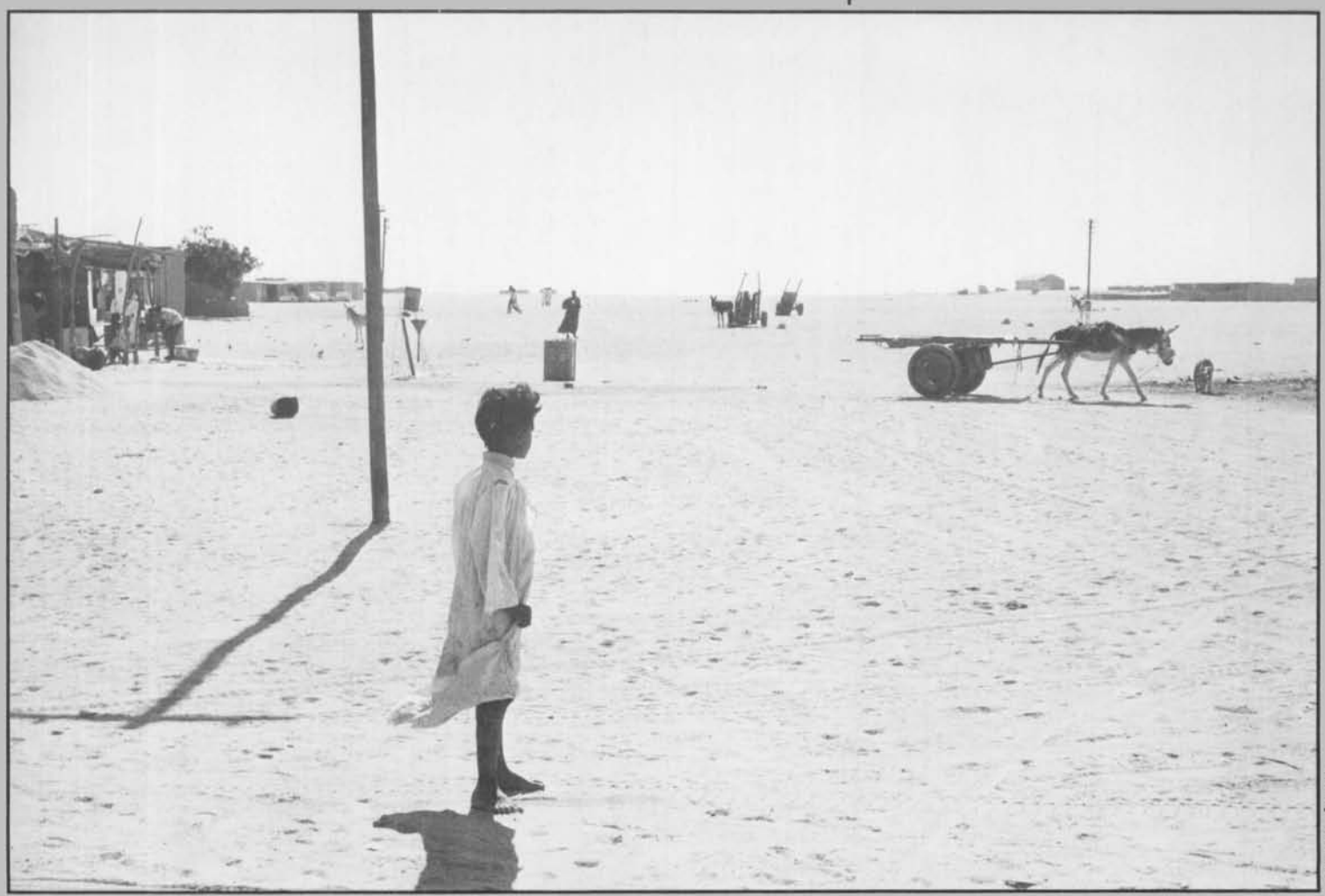
Even in Central Region and around Kassala harvests were poor in 1984: rainfall was low and the River Nile at its lowest level in 80 years was seriously affecting irrigation schemes. Problems were worsened by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian refugees and migrant workers from the west at a time when labour demands were reduced.

What next?

Prospects for Sudan in 1986 now cause serious concern. Although the traditionally productive areas should have a good harvest, providing work and surplus grain for internal distribution, the worst affected areas of Darfur, Kordofan and the Red Sea Hills have yet to recover. In Darfur and Kordofan, early optimism over the harvest has faded. Agency surveys indicate that overall it will be around 30-40% of a good year, with complete failure in some areas. For some people the rains were poor again, most had been unable to make the most of the season because of the lack of seed and their own weak condition at planting time. Following the livestock deaths and debts incurred in the past year, many people are in worse condition to cope than a year ago. In the Red Sea Hills, there has been little restoration of pasture or herds, and the Beja nomads will be dependent on relief for another year.

The war in southern Sudan has disrupted planting and harvesting for hundreds of thousands of people, and brought acute problems of rustling for cattle herders. In some areas, work has begun to supply food where people have run out and are in an extremely poor condition, but many places remain beyond reach and Oxfam estimates that around one million people are at risk. Efforts are being made to secure 'food truces' to allow supplies in.

Altogether, the Government and agencies are seeking assistance for around four million people until the harvest in late 1986. The priority is to purchase surplus grain available in parts of Sudan and transport it to the needy areas. The Sudanese Government has little cash for this, so an appeal for over $100 million has been launched. If the money is not available soon, and the mechanisms for buying grain are not sorted out, it will not be in place by April 1986. Then, for a second year, farmers will be in a poor position to plant and the logistical difficulties of transport in the rainy season will be encountered. Will the lessons painfully learnt in 1985 be forgotten in 1986?



Wendy Wallace

Wadi Halfa — the northernmost town in Sudan

Climate:

A pattern of drought

THE DROUGHT IN 1984 was the worst this century, with rainfall levels markedly down over almost all the country. This followed several years of fairly poor rainfall, part of a twenty year period of rains below this century's average. Twenty years is a longer period than most, but for centuries this part of Africa has experienced alternating phases of wet and dry years — and there have often been droughts in Sudan.

Those in the last 100 years are recalled with special names. In 1886, the Islamic calendar's year 1306, as the new State of the fundamentalist Mahdi was starting, a drought began called *Senat Setta* "the year six". In some places the drought between 1910 and 1917 was called *Senat Ab Tokolaya,* referring to a half gourd as a very small measure of grain. Again in 1940–1945 there was a drought called *Malwa* — the smallest unit of millet — and some refer to the most recent severe drought years, in 1970–1973, as *Ifza 'una,* or "rescue us".

The fact that the current drought has been longer fuelled the debate between climatologists about whether Africa's weather is getting drier. Even if this were true — and those in support are talking about very gradual changes — it would not explain what has happened in Sudan in this century, when more than half the years have had good rains. 'Desertification' is taking place hundreds of kilometres from the desert itself, and the southward progress of desert at about five kilometres a year is far faster than could be caused by climate alone.

More immediately important is the extreme variability of Sudan's weather. Annual rainfall ranges from well over 1,200mm in the south to almost zero in the north. The further north one goes, the more erratic the rainfall, which can vary considerably over very short distances, so even within one village two farmers may have very different harvests. A bad year in one spot can easily be followed by a very good year with three times as much rain.

One researcher compared Dilling in south Kordofan with the Scottish town of Leuchars, which have both had average rainfalls this century of 650mm. But the rainfall since 1900 in Leuchars has varied between 400 and 800mm a year, while Dilling's has been from 300 to 1,000mm. Even if the rainfall in Dilling and Leuchars were the same, Sudan's far higher average temperatures ensure that much of it immediately evaporates. Where land has been cleared of cover — trees, shrubs or grass — or overgrazed and compacted by animals, far more of the rainfall is lost by evaporation instead of soaking into the soil.

There is less time to get enough rain for a good crop as one goes north, since 60–80% of the rain falls in July, August and September, and when rainfall declines, it also becomes more patchy and inconsistent. In 1985, for example, total rainfall was good, but in many areas it began well and then simply stopped when the millet and sorghum were about to produce seedheads.

The erratic climate is part of an unforgiving ecosystem, where even fairly minor changes in land use can encourage desertification, and sudden droughts trigger disaster when other factors have brought people closer to the edge of survival.

But since an erratic climate is normal in Sudan, the people have adapted to the likelihood of drought with systems of agriculture and livestock use which minimised risks rather than maximised returns. Those survival systems have been disturbed by many factors — from world trade prices to railway lines — which have nothing to do with the rainfall.

. . . but can't people dig more wells?

Famine Forecasting

Even without knowing food output figures, an imminent famine can be seen by watching for key signals. All the following were present in Sudan.

People moved, as had been happening in Sudan for several years, with nomads going further south in the wet season for grazing, joined by normally settled farmers forced out of the north by lowered rainfall and crop yields. After the 1984 rains failed, many far northern villages were completely abandoned.

Food prices rose, reaching up to ten times normal levels, the equivalent of roughly £50 for a sack of sorghum that would feed a family for a month, a price about three times the monthly wage for a skilled worker, and thus totally beyond the pockets of most rural Sudanese.

Animal prices fell, and went on falling, ruining many nomads. As fodder costs rose and grazing disappeared, weakened animals became almost liabilities. Prices often fell to about one-tenth of previous levels for cattle, sheep and camels, but not so badly for goats, a tribute to their omnivorous and destructive ability to survive.

People sold possessions, and the types of goods sold told a lot about the state of family finances. Generally families start with jewellery and household items, and the situation is close to its peak when the cooking pots go, or nomads sell their weapons.

Wage rates fell, and when the work ran out people began begging. Part of Sudan's mass movement of people were thousands desperately searching for work on the Nile's irrigated schemes at very low rates.

Famine foods were eaten, as people went back to their hunter-gatherer origins by eating roots, berries, nuts and grasses. Every society prone to drought has a store of these foods, some seasonal delicacies, such as an early wet season grass, known in Sudan as *tamaleka*, others far less palatable, like the berries of a bush called *mukheit*, which must be soaked for days to remove poisons. The kernels of fruits like mangos are crushed for flour and oil, while termite mounds are broken into for the grains stored by the insects.

Wendy Wallace

Five or six thousand people depend on this village standpipe for their water supply.

Ahmed's Year

Nomads are not disorganised wanderers, but extremely careful livestock managers making the best use of a hostile environment. As drought deepened in recent years and the 'terms of trade' between the cash return from selling animals and the cost of buying food worsened, many nomads found the economic battle too much and were forced to settle as farmers. The worst of the drought has yet to come for a group in western Sudan led by a man called Ahmed.

Ahmed is 58 and comes from the *Baggara*, a cattle-owning nomadic group of south Darfur. His herd was built up from animals given to him as a boy and others inherited from his father. While his father's generation needed only animals to survive, the herds of Ahmed and his brothers have suffered from drought and disease, so for ten years Ahmed's family have also grown millet and sometimes groundnuts to eat and sell.

Related families migrate and camp together in a *ferig*. The size of the *ferig* varies with the season. Ahmed's *ferig* often splits into two parts: a main group that travels between one camp used in the rainy season and another for the dry season, and a smaller, more mobile group which herds the cattle. The herd's seasonal migrations follow similar patterns from year to year along broad north–south corridors between water points. The chances of good pasture or better water are continually assessed and the nomadic grapevine tapped for day-to-day decisions on the route.

From June to September — the rainy season — there are six households in the main camp, including Ahmed, his wife and seven of their children. Co-operation between families over cattle and cultivation is vital for nomad survival, since no one family could tackle both the migratory herding and settled cropping. Usually young unmarried men and couples with few children take charge of the cattle, while older people with larger families, the elderly and those with few animals remain in one place to cultivate. Ali, Ahmed's 17-year-old son, travels with the herding group, while the rest of his family grows millet. Most milking cows stay at the main camp; clarified butter and yoghurt made by the women is an important source of income during the rains.

Scarcity of forage because of drought means herds do not go as far north as in the past, while in central areas of the migration cattle compete for pasture with expanding cultivation, so milk production and calving rates have declined.

In late November, the cattle begin to move slowly south towards the Bahr el Arab river as the people in Ahmed's main camp finish their harvesting. The grain is stored for the next wet season at the homes of permanently settled relatives and animals are sold to buy the extra food needed for the dry season. As drought deepened, and harvests declined, Ahmed's family has had to sell more animals to have enough food.

After the harvest is over, the two groups of Ahmed's *ferig* are reunited at the Bahr el Arab, where the cattle are watered from wells dug in the dry river bed — hard work that everyone has to help with. At one time Ahmed's *ferig* would have continued travelling to find much needed grazing south of the river which marks the border between north and south Sudan, but these days the civil war and bandits often make that too risky. The number of animals around the Bahr el Arab mean more disease and little forage, leaving animals in a poor state by the end of the dry season.

Water:

Blessing and curse

With the first rains in May, Ali and the other herders take the cattle a short way across the Bahr el Arab to graze on the new grass while Ahmed returns north with the main group to prepare land for planting. As the rainy season continues, southern areas become very muddy and infested with tsetse flies, so the herders head north, passing close to the main group's cultivation camp.

There is no clear division between nomadic and settled communities, and families follow different strategies in different years and at various stages in their lives. Those with fewer cattle have shorter migrations south, stopping where they can make money from selling charcoal, fishing or by collecting honey. Some families, like that of one of Ahmed's nephews, specialise in sheep, looking after all of a *ferig's* animals during the dry season and camping north of the Bahr el Arab away from the cattle groups, to avoid disease.

Impoverished families, who sold all their animals to buy grain, make money by working on the land for nomadic relatives or local merchants. They may become herders for livestock traders or join those looking for work in towns, and many are forced by poverty to give up nomadism for a completely sedentary life.

Ahmed's wealth — and his family's survival — depend on their animals, and the rising price of grain and the lower price of cattle, as both harvests and grazing become sparser, are making him poorer every year. Many nomad groups in 1985 lost or sold 90 per cent of their animals and still went hungry. Ahmed and his people will not have escaped — they will be in desperate need in 1986, though unless they are forced to settle they will not want seeds and hoes, but the livestock equivalents: calves and money.

WATER IS OBVIOUSLY VITAL for people's survival in an arid land like Sudan, but it is a cruel irony that more water, particularly from deep boreholes with diesel pumps, has been an important cause of the country's slow disaster.

Nomads usually travel hundreds of kilometres to find grazing for their herds and flocks, trekking between seasonal water sources and wells. Settled farmers also rely on the seasonal rivers — *wadis* — and shallow hand-dug wells or deep year-round wells, some of which may have been professionally dug.

The large water output of boreholes upset a balance in Sudan, for it was the very shortage of water supplies from other sources that had acted as an automatic limit on the damage that could be done to the enviroment by farming and grazing.

In the British colonial era, for example, the administration encouraged the digging of small reservoirs, often in grazing areas, but care was usually taken to ensure that the water would be exhausted before the grass ran out, so the nomads would have to move on before doing permanent damage.

Putting a borehole into an area will bring in more people and animals to stay for longer periods, overgrazing to the point where all cover is lost, allowing erosion by water and wind of irreplaceable topsoil and the compacting of whatever remains, so it is less able to absorb rain.

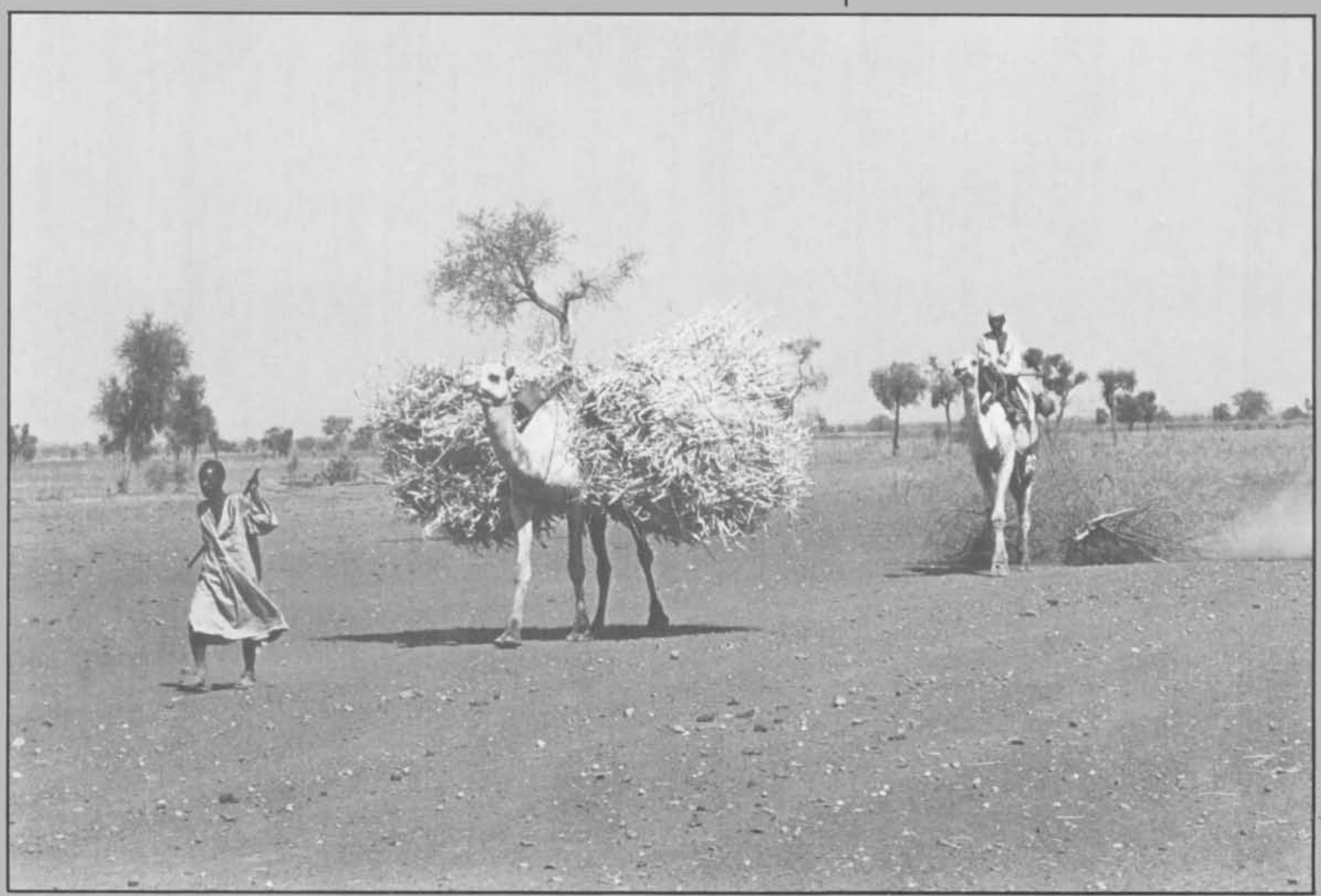
Nomadic or semi-nomadic groups have often settled permanently around a new borehole, which became a catalyst for wider cultivation, clearance of land and tree-cutting for fuel, while the herds — no longer limited by scarce water — expanded enormously.

In the middle 1960s, the civilian government began a "freedom from thirst" campaign, drilling hundreds of boreholes to improve water supplies, particularly in western Sudan, because of the west's links with powerful political parties. At a local level geology was often far less important than politics — such as a tribe's influence — in the siting of the boreholes.

From the air such centres and the tracks between them can easily be spotted, the land stripped bare and worthless, a spider's web of environmental destruction created by herds limited in size only by the grazing they could find.

Boreholes had two other immediate consequences: they were very costly in fuel, spares and servicing; and by concentrating herds, they provided perfect conditions for spreading disease.

. . . but surely the extra water must help farmers grow more food?



Wendy Wallace

Traditional agriculture — **dura** ***straw provides animal fodder and thorn bushes are used as ploughs for planting sesame.***