

# THE GEZIRA SCHEME

## An Illusion of Development

TONY BARNETT

*Overseas Development Group,  
University of East Anglia.*



FRANK CASS




 The Gezira Plain

FIGURE 1

The Gezira in relation to the rest of the Sudan

First published 1977 in Great Britain by  
FRANK CASS AND COMPANY LIMITED  
Gainsborough House, Gainsborough Road,  
London, E11 1RS, England

and in the United States of America by  
FRANK CASS AND COMPANY LIMITED  
c/o Biblio Distribution Center  
81 Adams Drive, Totowa, New Jersey 07512

Copyright © 1977 Tony Barnett

ISBN 0 7146 3060 8

HN 787  
G49B37

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Frank Cass and Company Limited in writing.

Typeset by Preface Ltd., Salisbury, Wilts.  
Printed in Great Britain by  
Billing & Sons Ltd, Guildford, London and Worcester

## Acknowledgements

The financial support for this research was provided by a generous grant from the Social Science Research Council during 1970 and 1971. A smaller grant from the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies of the University of Durham enabled me to make a brief return visit to the Gezira in 1972.

I am indebted to many individuals for help with this book, not least to the people of Nueila village and the officials of the Sudan Gezira Board. A number of people helped me to clarify my ideas on parts of the book, notably Talal Asad, Herbert Farbrother, Gavin Williams and 'Shahida Al Baz. The maps and diagrams were drawn by Barbara Satchell.

My greatest debt is to my wife, Marilyn, who worked with me in the field, and collected much of the data upon which this book is based.

Nueila is a real village, but I have changed the names of many of the people in order to preserve a degree of anonymity.

With regard to the transliteration of Arabic words, I have not followed any standard system. I have, however, tried to be consistent.

Needless to say, any errors of fact, analysis or interpretation are my own.

T. Barnett  
Norwich  
1977

6015 K96114

## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Chapter 1:</i> Background to the Gezira Scheme	1
<i>Chapter 2:</i> The village, the people and their work	28
<i>Chapter 3:</i> Social resources and labour strategy (i)	45
<i>Chapter 4:</i> Social resources and labour strategy (ii)	59
<i>Chapter 5:</i> The causes of debt and the sources of credit	73
<i>Chapter 6:</i> The contract between the tenant and the Sudan Gezira Board	89
<i>Chapter 7:</i> The manipulation of water and the manipulation of men	101
<i>Chapter 8:</i> Policy and external constraints	116
<i>Chapter 9:</i> The field staff: their origins and their work	135
<i>Chapter 10:</i> The means of production	158
<b>Bibliography</b>	182
<b>Index</b>	187



## LIST OF FIGURES

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Figure 1:</i> The Gezira in relation to the rest of the Sudan	Frontis
<i>Figure 2:</i> The Gezira in detail	2
<i>Figure 3:</i> Detail of the Gezira irrigation system	12
<i>Figure 4:</i> Graph showing the relationship between age of tenants, cost of weeding, and the number of sons available for work	35
<i>Figure 5:</i> Genealogy showing relationships within the Khawalda tribal core, and the social resources possessed by that group	63
<i>Figure 6:</i> Histogram showing the relationship between the number of small and large debts and the ages of tenants	84
<i>Figure 7:</i> Watering channels and earth bunds associated with watering a tenancy	104
<i>Figure 8:</i> The water shortage	108