

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Agelat, Libya

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INTRODUCTION

Agelat is located in Western Libya, about 15 kilometers from Sabrata 9–10 meters above sea level altitude. In 1966 the population was estimated at 28,000. An increase in population of 10,000 persons was observed over the 1954–1966 period. The population of Agelat is composed of eight tribes. Table 1. shows the distribution of population according to tribes.

Ground water resources and public services such as hospital, schools, mosques, post offices and a police station are available.

Most of the soils are sandy and, the best soils are located in the Gefara plain. The cultivated area in 1960 was 13,386 hectares, allocated to different crops (Table 2).

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Agelat. The exact percentage of farmers of each tribe is shown in Table 3. This table shows also the agricultural activities such as raising sheep and different crops such as barley, wheat, peanuts and olive.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Objectives

Libya is fast becoming a major 'oil country' and many rural people have migrated to cities during the past ten years. Relatively little information has existed in Libya concerning the socio-economic aspects of rural people. Few studies have been made to determine the situation regarding this sector of the population. The objectives of this study were to study some of the social characteristics of farm operators and to determine what resources are available for farm operators. Some knowledge of their Social Organization, including living facilities, is necessary for proper planning, both for their social and economic needs.

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Table 1 Population distribution according tribes in Agelat, 1966.

Name of tribe	Population	Absentee	% Males	% Females
Lamagezat	2,447	400	60	40
Al-Aredrat	2,747	200	55	45
Awlad El-Sheik	3,688	300	60	40
Awlad Rashd	3,805	100	51	49
Gehat El-Wadi	3,688	700	60	40
Gawada	3,142	200	60	40
Harsha	3,092	300	60	40
Zaraga	3,357	100	50	50
Total	25,956	2,300	—	—

Source: Architectural Planning Partnership Report, 1967.

Table 2 Crops cultivated in Agelat, 1960

Crop	Acreage
	Hectares
Grains	12,840
Legumes	39
Tubers	15
Industrial crops	311
Vegetable	62
Forage	119
Total	13,386

Source: Architectural Planning Partnership Report, 1967.

Table 3 Farmers distribution as to tribes and agricultural activities, Agelat, 1966

Name of tribe	% of farmers	Crops	Livestock
Lamgezat	80	Barley and wheat	—
Al-Areshat	70	Barley and wheat	Sheep
Awlad El-Sheik	50	Peanut, olive and wheat	—
Awlad Rashd	70	Peanut, olive and wheat	—
Gerat El-Wadi	90	Peanut	Sheep
Gawada	25	Peanut	Sheep
Harsha	50	Peanut and wheat	—
Zaraga	80	Barley, wheat	Sheep

Sources: Agricultural Census 1960 and Agricultural Statistics 1963.

Table 4 Total values of animals and machinery on the surveyed farms, Agelat, Libya, 1969.

Animal Values	No. of farms	Machinery values	No. of farms
Libyan Dinars		Libyan Dinars	
Less than 400	88	Less than 400	55
400 to less than 600	8	400 to less than 600	33
600 or more	4	600 or more	12
Total	100		100

Methodology

This study was largely exploratory and of the nature of a pilot type survey — not sophisticated either in technique or statistical analysis. There were many reasons which made this necessary. Since few previous studies had been made (one in this geographic area) it was necessary to roughly ascertain the general situation without having too much specificity.

Another reason why the study was very general and not completely scientific was because it was impossible to obtain a proper cross-sections of respondents.

A random sample was impossible to obtain because there was not a complete record of all residents in the area. A partial list of farmers was obtained from knowledgeable people in the area and a sample taken from this list.

The questionnaire was prepared from what knowledge was available about the people and the area. Having no previous studies to consult, it was difficult to ask the kinds of questions that were needed to fully determine the socio-economic situation in the community. Also, since this was the first time most people had been interviewed there was a certain amount of skepticism.

The questionnaire was in English and the interviewers translated each question as they interviewed the respondent. This meant that some of the meanings would probably be changed in conversation.

This report is both descriptive and analytical. The major part of the report is a determination to survey and describe the rural situation in Agelat, Libya.

THE FINDINGS

The economy of Agelat has been, and is mainly based on agriculture. Plant production includes barley, alfalfa, beans, onions, green peppers, garlic, potatoes, carrots, olives, oranges, and almonds. Animal production is mainly sheep production. One hundred farms were surveyed and each farmer was personally interviewed.

Most if not all farms in the survey include plant and animal production. The values of animals are listed in Table 4. Only 12 farms had animals with values exceeding 400 Libyan Dinars, while all other farms have animals with values less than 400 Libyan Dinars. For machinery values, about half of the farms had machinery with values less than four hundred Dinars, the other half had machinery with values exceeding 400 Libyan Dinars.

Half of the farms have sizes of less than 10 hectares (small farms), the other half

Table 5 Distribution of surveyed farms by size, Agelat, Libya, 1969.

	No. of farms
hectares	
Less than 10	50
10 to less than 20	30
20 to less than 30	11
30 to less than 40	3
40 to less than 50	1
50 to less than 60	1
60 to less than 70	1
70 to less than 80	1
80 to less than 90	1
90 or more	1
Total	100

Table 6 Land tenure of the farm survey, Agelat, Libya, 1969.

Type of land tenure	No. of farms
Full ownership	61
Part time ownership	30
Full tenant	9
Total	100

Table 7 Farm labour of the surveyed farms, Agelat, Libya, 1969.

Type of labour	No. of farms
Operator only	8
Operator and family	89
Operator and hired labour	3
Total	100

Table 8 Sources of agricultural credits to farmers, Agelat, Libya, 1969.

Source of Credit	No. of farms
Agricultural Bank	52
Friends, merchants and others	9
No credit	39
Total	100

Table 9 Farmers level of education of the surveyed farms, Agelat, Libya, 1969.

Level of education	No. of farmers
Years	
Zero (illiterate)	45
1 to less than 4	51
4 or more	4
Total	100

Table 10 Age distribution of the farmers surveyed in Agelat, Libya, 1969.

Age	No. of farmers
Years	
Less than 30	14
30 to less than 40	27
40 to less than 50	34
50 to less than 60	15
60 or more	10
Total	100

ranged between 10–90 hectares (relatively large) of which 41 % ranged between 10–30 hectares as shown in Table 5. All the farms are located within 10 to 20 kilometers of the nearest city.

Land tenure patterns in the Agelat survey are: full ownership (61 %), part-ownership (30 %), and full tenant (9 %). Family farming is common there where 89 farms in the survey are operated by the farmers and their families, while only 11 farms are operated independently by farmers without their families (Tables 6, 7).

During the interviews, the farmers expressed the need for technical information: an Extension Service to gather information on how to improve productive efficiency on the farms. About half of these farmers use the Agricultural Bank as a source of credit. They get loans to cover costs of production and marketing requirements, at no interest. Some farmers (9 %) get loans from other sources such as friends and relatives, and the rest of the farmers (39 %) do not need credit (Table 8).

Looking at the sociological characteristics of these farmers, we find that most of them are uneducated. They had few, if any, years of education. This might hinder the economic progress that might be achieved via introducing a new technology in Agelat (Table 9).

The age distribution of these farmers is listed in Table 10. About 25 % of the farmers are over 50 years old. This, coupled with illiteracy, form an obstacle to any attempt to transform the traditional agriculture to a developed one. Educating the young is the only hope for Libyan agriculture to reach its optimum efficiency.

All of these farmers have access to the Government Hospital which is located within 5 to 10 kilometers of Agelat. They own their homes and thus pay no rent. These houses are reasonably furnished with local but not running water supply. Every farmer has a radio and this indicates the importance of local broadcasting in conveying the technical news to the farmers in the future. Special radio programs should be designed to help the farmers in solving their problems, technical and/or social. Very few have a television set (4 %) or a car (14 %).

SUMMARY

Relatively little information has existed in Libya concerning the socio-economic aspects of rural people. The object of this study was to determine the socio-economic characteristics of the rural population of Agelat in Libya. A questionnaire was prepared and interviews undertaken in Summer 1969. The economy of Agelat has been, and is mainly based on agriculture. Farm sizes are small, half of the farms having a size of less than ten hectares. Farmers expressed the need for technical information. Most of these farmers are uneducated and this forms an obstacle to any attempt to transform traditional agriculture to a developed one. Educating the young people is the only hope for Libyan agriculture to reach its optimum efficiency. Every farmer has a radio, therefore radio programs should be designed to help the farmers in solving their problems.

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