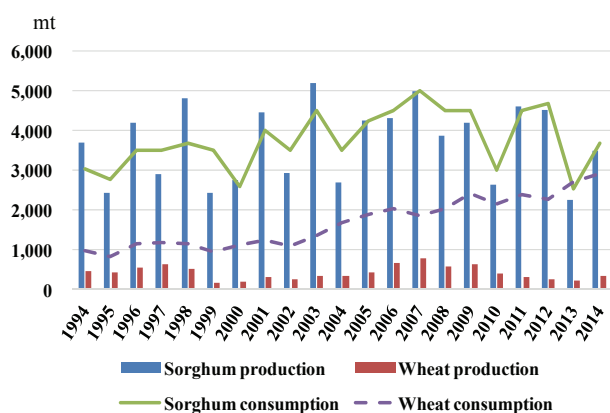


## A Memoir of Kassala, Sudan <Part 4>

### Grain food culture of sorghum and wheat

Although Sudan's total arable land is estimated to be around 84 million ha, the regularly cultivated area is only 14-15% of the total. The actual cultivated areas are estimated to total 12 million ha. With production under irrigation, a wide variety of cash crops are being grown including sesame, Arabian rubber, cotton, ground nuts, vegetables and fruits with some being exported out of the country. Other than cash crops, the majority or 85% of cultivated land is under rain-fed agriculture, producing important grains such as sorghum and pearl millet. Productivity of rain-fed agriculture is low as farmers are dependent on rainfall. This low productivity is augmented by produce grown in large cultivation areas. In Kassala's rain-fed cultivation areas, sorghum is by far the most widely grown crop and its production amount is the highest among the crops.

However, when one looks at recent consumption amount, demand for wheat is growing, getting closer to the demand for sorghum.



Production and consumption amounts of sorghum and wheat in Sudan (Source: Index mundi)

Wheat production in Sudan is expected to grow with increased productivity under irrigation farming. However, for now production is not meeting demand, and the country imports quite a lot of wheat from other countries such as Russia. In my experience from living in Kassala, it seems that more Sudanese people are now buying wheat bread made in factories rather than the traditional crepe shaped sorghum bread called kisra. I asked people the reasons for choosing wheat bread. Changes in taste are one factor. However, another major reason is that it is cheaper to buy wheat bread considering the time and effort it takes within

households to make kisra bread as well as the fuel cost for baking. Food made of imported wheat has become far more familiar to people than domestically produced sorghum.



Sorghum grains on sale



Milled sorghum

There was another interesting discovery related to the use of sorghum in comparison with wheat. I used to believe that sorghum, like wheat, is mainly used in the flour form. However, in Sudan, there is also a traditional way of utilizing grains as food.



Immature ear of sorghum (Acramoi variety)



Immature ear of sorghum (Fatalita variety)

The dish they make is very similar to wheat grain food that can be found in Syria. In Syria, people harvest water rich immature ears and grill it over a fire. This is called "freekeh" and is highly prized as a seasonal food. Exactly the same use is seen in Sudan with sorghum and water rich immature ears here are called "faruk". Although harvesting seasons are different (spring and autumn), it was a pleasant surprise to find, in the remote parts of Sudan, common grain food culture with similar names of Arabic origin. It reminded me of the farming area in Syria where I worked 20 years ago.



Kisra; a typical flour food



A faruk sorghum grain dish