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**Women in food and beverages  
business in urban markets  
of Khartoum State**

**WORKING PAPER**



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THE AHFAD-HUMBOLDT LINK PROGRAMME  
WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT



## Women in food and beverages business in urban markets of Khartoum State

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## Preface

This research study was conducted as one of the series of the interdisciplinary researches undertaken within the link program of Ahfad University For Women (Sudan) with Humboldt-University of Berlin (Germany). The study was carried out by; Dr Sumaia Mohd El Zein A. Badawi, Ms. Widad Ali A/Rahman, Prof /Ahmed Hassan El Jack (Ahfad University, Omdurman) and Prof Dr Gunter Lorenzl (Humboldt University of Berlin) in 2002.

## Abstract

This study focused on Sudanese women working in food and beverages business in urban markets of Khartoum State. It aimed at identifying the reasons behind women's work, the constraining and enhancing factors that affect their performance as entrepreneurs, beside their attitude and strategies in dealing with marketing issues, and the socio-economic impact of their work on their families.

A sample of fifty business women working in thirteen urban markets in Khartoum State was interviewed. They were engaged in trading, production, processing and selling of food and beverages.

The research validated the hypotheses that business women are highly stimulated by their socio-economic conditions and that their work in the market has positively affected their families' life and their ability to survive.

**Keywords:** Informal sector, women's empowerment, poverty alleviation, micro enterprise, Sudan

## Zusammenfassung

Das vorliegende Working Paper widmet sich Sudanesischen Frauen, die im informellen Nahrungssektor arbeiten. Es hat zum Ziel, die Motivationen der Frauen zu identifizieren und herauszuarbeiten, welche Möglichkeiten sie haben und welche Grenzen ihnen in ihrer Unternehmertätigkeit gesteckt sind. Darüber hinaus werden Vermarktungsmöglichkeiten sowie die sozialen Auswirkungen auf ihre Familien untersucht.

50 Interviews mit Unternehmerinnen in Khartoum State bilden die Grundlage dieser Untersuchung. Die interviewten Frauen waren im Handel, der Produktion, Verarbeitung und im Verkauf von Nahrungsmitteln und Getränken tätig.

Die Forschungsergebnisse bestätigen die zugrunde gelegte Hypothese, dass Unternehmerinnen im informellen Sektor aufgrund ihrer sozialen Bedingungen hoch motiviert sind und dass die Arbeit im informellen Sektor die Situation und die Überlebensfähigkeit ihrer Familien verbessert hat.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Informeller Sektor, Empowerment, Armutsbekämpfung, Mikrounternehmen, Sudan

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# 1 General framework of the study

## 1.1 Introduction

During the last three decades of the 20th century, pressure on national governments to end women's poverty came from all levels of the society: the United Nations, the Platforms of Action that have come from global conventions, and the community organizations that are representing women in various countries worldwide. In all these, as well as in the development funding organizations and governments, the goal of women's economic empowerment has been the focus of many lengthy discussions and much analysis. In practice, these discussions have resulted in various kinds of income generating projects for women. According to CHITSIKE (1999: 71), since the 1980s and in line with the dominant neo-liberal ideas of promoting economic growth through individual effort, the terminology used is promoting women's entrepreneurship. Despite the term is defined straightforward and gender-neutral, yet, the ILO INTERNAL REPORT (1999: 10) stated that there are some cultural and structural barriers that do not encourage women to behave in an entrepreneurial manner such as their marginalization from economic, political and social resources, and their heavy, multiple workload of family caring as well as production. Thus, they face unequal access to productive resources and services although they are largely dependent on self-employment for which the land, capital, technology and labour are crucial.

## 1.2 Focus of the Study

According to the ILO (1995:13), in Africa, although there are numerically fewer women than men in the informal sector, a higher proportion of the female than the male labour force tends to be concentrated in small-scale, under-capitalized, low productivity market trade and personal service activities. In Sudan in particular, the informal sector has been tremendously increasing since the 1970s. ATTI (1998: 27) explained that the low employment opportunities, low salaries in comparison with the real wages, the increasing poverty and hard economic conditions forced a growing number of labour force (50% in 1996) to join this sector. However, a great portion of them are women engaged in various income generating activities such as petty trading, tea making, food processing and selling, beside others. Most of them are stimulated by the poor conditions their families live in, the consequences of the civil war, the environmental degradation and crisis, the high rates of migration of men, and so on. These factors forced women to play multiple roles in the reproductive, domestic and productive spheres, bearing heavy burden to support their families, through the provision of additional income or holding the whole responsibility alone on being the sole breadwinner of the family. However, what are the conditions in which this type of business women is working in the informal sector? Do they find any kind of support from the governments or the concerned organizations? What is the outcome of women's work in small-scale business or income generating activities for their families and the society? What are the influences and constraints facing them? How do they survive? These questions and others will be the focus of this study, which will attempt to find them some answers.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The study aimed at:

- Identifying the reasons behind women's work in small-scale business in urban markets.
- Figuring out the constraining and enhancing factors that affect women's performance as entrepreneurs.
- Identifying women's attitude and strategies in dealing with marketing issues and survival.
- Finding out the socio-economic impact of working women on their families.
- Coming up with some strategies that could empower women and minimize the obstacles they face in their business.

### **1.4 Research hypotheses**

The study attempted to test the following hypotheses:

- Business women are highly stimulated by their socio-economic conditions.
- Women's work in markets has positively affected their families' life and their ability to survive.

### **1.5 Research methods and material**

#### **1.5.1 Scope of the study**

This study is conducted within the link Program of Ahfad University for Women (Sudan) with Humboldt-University of Berlin (Germany) (Ahfad-Humboldt Link Program), as one of a series of studies (interdisciplinary research projects) that focused on women in development. More specifically, they aimed at casting light on Sudanese women's survival strategies; challenges and vision. The researches were carried out by a team of German and Sudanese staff from different academic levels. It involved joint fieldwork in Sudan and workshops for feedback both in Berlin and Omdurman.

The link program aimed at:

- Assisting the two partners in creating a cultural bridge between Sudanese and German through understanding of the two cultures and experiencing differences between them.
- Developing higher institutions through provision of science enlightenment and knowledge.
- Developing university staff members by exposing them to foreign teaching and research spheres.
- Supporting the diffusion of knowledge generated under different environmental and socio-economic conditions, and
- Stressing the importance of gender relations in development (Otto, 2002: 5).

On this basis, the study was planned to be finished within four years (2002 – 2005). A preliminary survey was carried out in Oct – Dec 2002 to identify the types of food and beverages activities to be included in the study, and to determine the markets and places that women practice their activities in. The fieldwork was conducted within the period January – May 2003.

The preliminary survey showed that women's activities were practiced in various places; in markets, restaurants, streets, and in their homes. Accordingly, the study was carried out in thirteen urban markets and areas in Khartoum State which includes; Khartoum Province, Khartoum North Province and Omdurman Province. The targeted markets were as follows:

#### **1. Khartoum Province:**

- The Central Market of Khartoum (Soug Arabi)
- The Local Market of Khartoum (Soug El Shabi)
- Fruits and Vegetables Central Market (Soug Al Markazi)
- Nasir Extension Market (Soug Emtidad Nasir)
- Al Amarat Market
- Al Riyad Market

#### **2. Khartoum North Province:**

- The Central Market of Khartoum North (Soug Al Markazi)
- Fruits and Vegetables Central Market of Khartoum North
- Saad Gishra Market

#### **3. Omdurman Province:**

- Al Morada Market
- Libya Market
- Al Naga Market (Soug Al Naga)
- Hai Al Sayed Al Mekki.

Focus has deliberately been placed in urban markets of greater Khartoum since a large number of women practicing food business are concentrated there, because of the high density of population that resulted from rural – urban migration throughout the past three decades. This situation offered women working in food and beverages favourable business opportunities and marketing conditions, particularly on part of the increasing demand for food.

#### **1.5.2 Population of the study**

The study focused on women who are engaged in trading, production, processing and selling of food and beverages in the informal sector. As these women practice their activities in the informal sector, it was not feasible for the researchers to get the total number of

the population for proper sampling in the absence of reliable official statistical records. Considering the different types of food activities, it was planned at the beginning to select a sample of 100 women. However, the preliminary findings of the survey mapping revealed high resemblance in the responses of the interviewed women. Thus, it was decided to select a sample of 50 women. However, the sample was deliberately meant to include women practicing variety of food activities. Some of the interviewees were treated as case studies to provide examples for success stories or failure.

The types of food and beverages activities practiced by the members of the sample included:

- Processing and selling of traditional meals (porridge and different types of sauce).
- Processing and selling of beverages (tea, karkade, hilba and special drinks of 'Ramadan' [which is a month during which Muslims fasten and used to have special drinks in it]).
- Processing and selling of traditional Sudanese bread (kisra).
- Processing and selling of peanuts and peanut butter and tassali.
- Selling vegetables, eggs, dried fish and spices.
- Making and selling of cakes, cookies and pastries.
- Food processing and catering services.
- Making barbecue in markets (the case of Soug El Naga).
- Trading in different grocery items.
- Running mills for grinding spices, dura, wheat, etc.

### **1.5.3 Data collection and analysis**

The study used both secondary and primary data. Secondary data was collected from various references, reports, previous researches, papers and web sites in the internet. While, primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews. The interview was considered convenient for the researchers to collect ample and rich data and to allow for further discussions. However, the researchers had to contact the interviewees several times to obtain enough data to support the issues under scrutiny, especially those related to conduct, perceptions and attitudes.

Major questions and points of discussion covered in the interviews were pre-determined. The interviewees were offered the chance to talk freely about their backgrounds and socio-economic conditions, their strategies in running their business, and challenges they faced and how do they overcome them. The researchers attempted, as well, to figure out the socio-economic benefits that the members of the sample and their families gained from their business.

Both descriptive and analytical approaches were adopted, using qualitative, as well as, quantitative data. The study mostly relied on the qualitative data to provide enough room for the researchers to give full justification and explicit interpretation for the collected data, however, it attempted to quantify some of the data obtained through the interviews

whenever it was possible, such as the characteristics of the respondents, to be meaningful. The reviewed literature was made use of in the analysis of data, making links between the theories and the primary data collected. The data is presented in tables and figures, as well as in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Simple computations such as rates and percentages were used wherever they were seen necessary.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 The urban informal sector**

The informal sector is commonly known by various names such as the informal economy, the unorganized or unstructured sector, the trade-service sector, the urban subsistence sector, beside others. It has, also, been defined by different categories in different ways. It is highly heterogeneous, encompassing production units of different features and in a wide range of economic activities, as well as people (i.e. workers, producers, employers) working or producing under many different types of employment relations and production arrangements. Because of the heterogeneity of the informal sector, and its multiple dimensions, conceptual and empirical definitions of this sector are not as clear-cut as it might be expected (ILO, 1995).

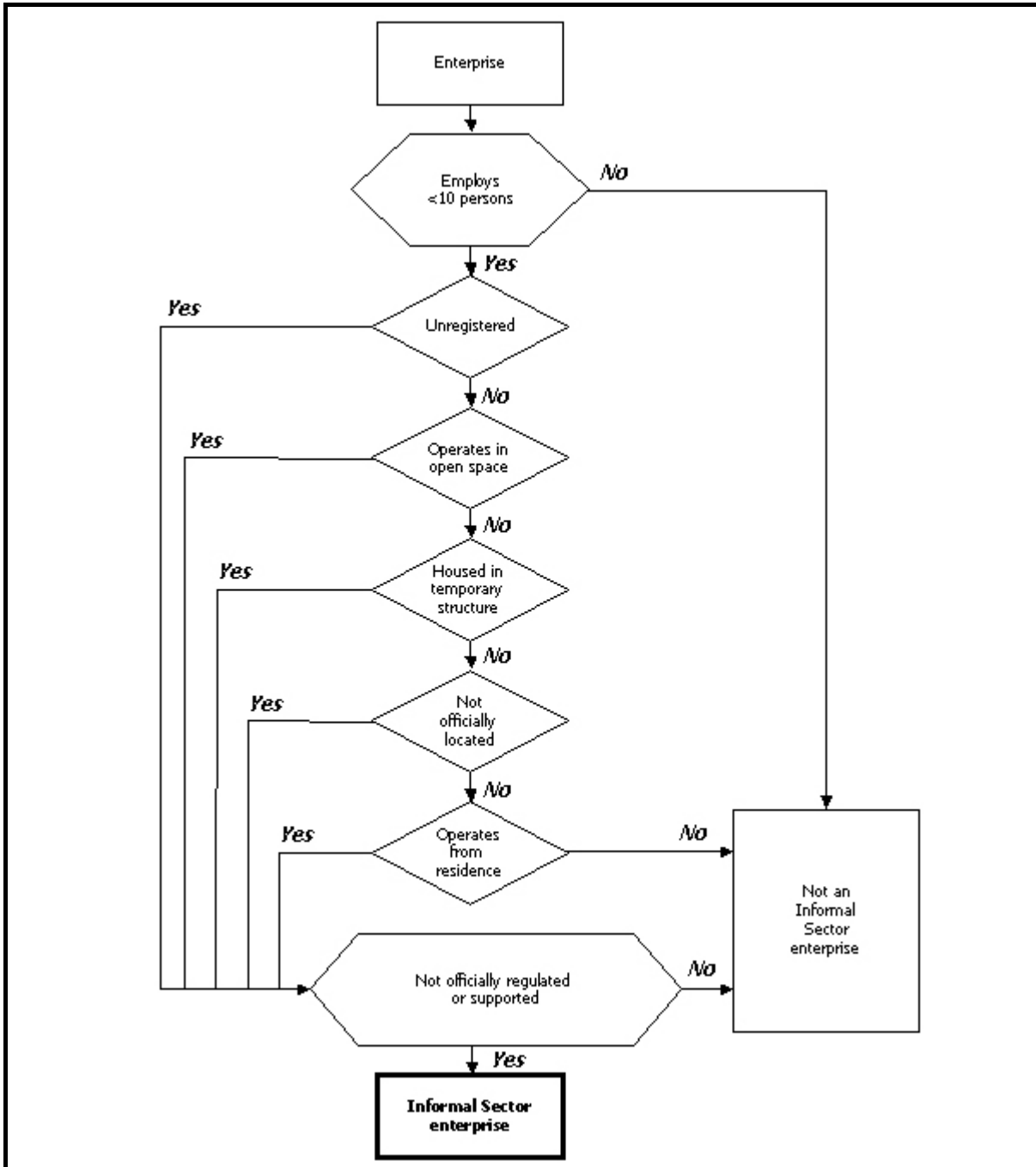
Conceptually, the urban informal sector is defined to include all economic activities which are not officially regulated and which operate outside the incentive system offered by the state and its institutions. In contrast, enterprises which enjoy official recognition, protection and support are defined as formal sector enterprises.

At the empirical level, the ILO surveys in Latin America for 1990-1995, defined the informal sector as comprising economic enterprises which employ less than 5 or 10 persons per unit, depending on the country's official procedures. Besides, it operates in open spaces from residences or backyards, housed in a temporary or semi-permanent structure, is not registered and does not operate from spaces assigned by the government, municipality or private organizers of officially recognized market-places. The following figure provides a decision model for identifying informal sector enterprises in Dhaka City.

According to the FIFTEENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LABOUR STATISTICIANS (1993), the informal sector was conceived as consisting of production units that "typically operate at a low level of organization, with little or no division of labour and capital, of a small scale, and labour relations that are mostly based on casual employment, kinship or personal and social relations rather than contractual arrangements with formal guarantees". Moreover, these units possess the characteristics of "household enterprises" in which fixed and other assets do not belong to the unit but to the owner; the units cannot engage in transactions or enter into contracts nor incur liabilities on their own behalf; while, expenditures for production and capital goods are often indistinguishable from household purposes. Informality of the sector characterizes not only the management structure of an enterprise, but also the contractual status and conditions of employment. For example, a worker could be hired without an employment contract, or could be

unregistered and undeclared by an enterprise belonging to the formal sector; thus the worker belongs to the informal sector. The widespread strategy of outsourcing and subcontracting services and production to smaller enterprises, family undertakings and home workers has contributed to what is generally referred to as "informalization" of employment.

**Figure 2–1: Decision Model for Identifying Informal Sector Enterprises in Dhaka City**



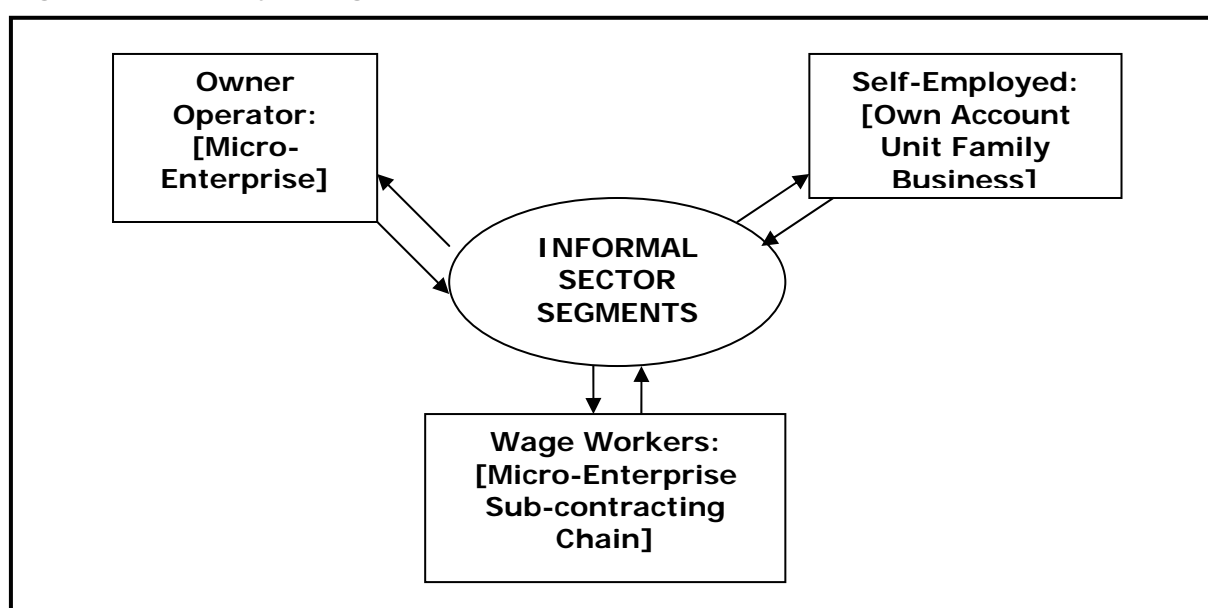
Source: Model Sketched by A.T.M. Nurul Amin, (ILO: 1995), ILO website.

On the other side of the coin, the ILO INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE INFORMAL SECTOR (1999: 12) proposed that the informal sector can be categorized into three broad groups:

- Micro-enterprises owned by employers, which employ few paid workers, with or without apprentices;
- Own-account workers, who own and operate one-person business that works alone or with the help of unpaid workers, generally family members and apprentices;
- Dependent workers, paid or unpaid, including wage workers in micro- enterprises, unpaid family workers, apprentices, contract labour, home workers and paid domestic workers.

The following figure illustrates the major segments of the informal sector according to the status of employment and type of enterprise.

**Figure 2–2: Major Segments of the Informal Sector**



Source: Researchers' own Illustration based on data from ILO INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE INFORMAL SECTOR (1999: 12)

As for the non-agricultural activities in the informal sector, the self-employed workers, most of whom is own-account and unpaid family workers are considered the major component of the rural and urban informal sector. It is noticed that in all regions of the world, the number of self-employed in non-agricultural activities increased between the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, own-account and family workers represented nearly two-thirds of the total non-agricultural labour force in Africa, one-half in South Asia, one-third in the Middle East, and one-fourth in East Asia and Latin America. A dramatic increase in self-employment has marked the transition process in the former centrally planned countries of Europe.

However, in developing countries and particularly in Africa, the activities of the informal sector have been traditionally underestimated at the national level. The lack of data and the general assumption that productivity and incomes in the informal sector are low might constitute major reasons for that. Besides, it is difficult to estimate the contribution of the informal sector to the GDP in the national accounts, as it is still extremely difficult

to estimate the contribution of women to the informal sector and, in turn, to the GDP as a whole, thus it is totally ignored.

According to CHARMES (1998: 72), at least three reasons are behind the underestimation of women's contribution in activities in the informal sector, which include;

- Women's engagement in those informal activities which are the most difficult to capture and measure: e.g. home-based work or outwork, and street vending (often as an extension of a non-measured or non-registered manufacturing activity) which are the most difficult to document. Besides, the non-response rate in surveys which is generally higher for women than for men especially regarding incomes and, hence the fear of underestimation in the registered responses.
- Women's engagement, more than men, in second or multiple jobs, especially in rural areas, as in their main activities in domestic duties in the household, and their contribution to production in unpaid economic activities such as agriculture, the non-measurement of which is a source of underestimation.
- Women's production activities are not only hidden behind their status of the so-called inactive housewives, but also, behind the less "valuable" status of family worker in agriculture or the difficult-to-capture status of independent street vendor. In these types of work, their contribution to the commercial margins is limited, and their value added in the transformation process is overlooked.

Besides, other factors include: women's work in small unregistered enterprises being employers, employees, or self-employed acting in their own or families' businesses, as well as, the difficulty of statistically recording all women's activities in the informal economy because of their diversification and wide range.

However, the economic activities that women practice in the informal sector are of great support to their families, particularly in counties that are suffering economic hardships, war and environmental crisis. It is noticed that female participation in the informal sector has grown considerably over years, not only because of the growing incidence of female-headed households due to migration, war and the like, but also, in response to the increasing pressures placed on the family by the economic recession and the imposed structural adjustment programs. This is also true where male members of the household are, also, employed in the informal sector. Increasingly, women and children are obliged to contribute to meeting the subsistence needs of the family (GOODALE 1989:136). Women's participation in food production is also valued by Alamgir et al. (1991: 88-89) mentioning that women's contribution to food production and food security is of prominent importance. They are often considered the main food producers, income earners and guardians of the family's health and nutrition. ALAMGIR ET AL (1991: 101) further explained that "in Africa today 85% of rural women are involved in agriculture and produce up to 80% of the food consumed by the family. Male migration to urban areas or neighbouring countries in search for employment is increasing, turning the responsibility of households over to women. Thus, the number of female-headed household is increasing rapidly, needless to add; the impact of poverty, civil wars and environmental crisis in Africa".



For many women, the informal sector provides them the only opportunity for work. They cannot usually compete for better paid jobs in the formal sector on equal terms with men, since men are likely to have higher levels of skill and experience. Besides, employers often show preference for male employees. Moreover, women who are employed in the formal sector are more likely to lose their jobs before men when the economy retracts. Therefore self-employment or piece work for a local entrepreneur may be all that is available for many women, especially if they have limited skills. Access to the informal sector is relatively easy, even if not financially rewarding, and work can be combined with domestic responsibilities. In most cases, this means a much longer working day for women, who have to add this productive role to their existing reproductive and community roles (GOODALE 1989: 141).

Generally, women are found practicing various types of economic activities in the informal sector to support their families. These activities might be carried out in markets, streets or home-based. However, home based activities are dominant due to a combination of economic, social and cultural factors. That is, whereas, some self-employed women might choose to work at home for cultural reasons, others might prefer that for social and economic reasons.

However, CHARMES (1998: 67) mentioned that women entrepreneurs face many obstacles which constrain their activities and development in the informal sector. These include:

- Poor pay/return on investment and conditions of work.
- Long working hours and heavy domestic duties.
- Unstable employment and inconsistent income.
- Limited economic and technical capabilities.
- Limited technical skills, knowledge, and poor management skills.
- Poor education and lack of training.
- Lack of protection since their activities are not covered by national labour laws.
- Absence of benefits, including pensions, social insurance, safety and health protection.
- Occupational health hazards arising from poor working conditions, harmful chemicals, instruments, and repetitive movement injuries.
- Lack of organization for bargaining or comparing pay/wage rates.

Moreover, women suffer more from unequal access to resources than men which point to gender segregation that constrain the development of their economic activities.

## **2.2 The gender dimension in the informal sector**

Women's share in employment in the informal sector has remained high for years [estimated at 60% - 80%]. Despite in few countries, men dominate the urban informal sector activities, women most probably number much more than what is reflected in the available statistics. They comprise most of unpaid family helpers and home-based workers, thus fall easily through gaps in enumeration. Productive but unpaid work is often confounded with household work. In many cases, even women do not view

themselves as workers. The widespread strategy of subcontracting production and services to family enterprises and home-based labour has contributed to the further integration of women's home-based labour into the formal production system under informal, flexible employment arrangements. As in the formal sector, in contrast to their male counterparts, women workers tend to be concentrated in a narrower range of activities or occupations; in the informal sector they practice common stereotyped activities such as food processing, garment sewing, domestic services and the like. These types of activities do not require high skill, pay less, and are in the lower-end of the markets (ILO: 1999 and WORLD LABOUR REPORT: 1998).

Even as producers and entrepreneurs, it is widely acknowledged that African women have access to fewer resources than men. For example, relative to men, they tend to have lower access to land, to credit facilities, and to education and training facilities. Even in agriculture where women tend to predominate, credit and land ownership has historically been directed to the male head of the household, to the detriment of women, and, indeed, to the detriment of agricultural development in Africa.

Moreover, in addition to the constraints faced by female workers and producers in the informal sector with regards to assets, markets, services and regulatory frameworks, women face additional gender-specific barriers (e.g. restrictions to entering into contracts, insecure land and property rights, household and childcare responsibilities etc). Accordingly, gender discrimination leads to gender gaps in education and technical skills, access to credit, training knowledge, information, quality and location of business premises, scale of business, time constraints and so on. They, also, suffer difficulties with regard to cultural and institutional restrictions on ownership and control of property and income, household and childcare responsibilities, and the attitudes of community towards women's economic activities inside and outside home.

Furthermore, regarding women's opportunities for training, the gender gap is clearly noticed. GOODALE (1989: 139) mentioned that the assessment of training and employment needs for the informal sector by governments have too often had a male bias. Because women are seen as marginal or as invisible in the employment market, their training needs have tended to be ignored. Women's needs for training in different skills have not traditionally been associated with employment or market opportunities (production), instead it was linked with the housewife duties and the mother's role (reproduction). Many vocational training programs have focused on the traditional apprenticeship trades which usually recruit male trainees, e.g. carpentry, metalwork, masonry, motor mechanics etc. Where government and non-governmental bodies have sought to directly address the training needs of women (largely through non-formal education), they have tended to focus on female productive activities as income generation or 'pin money' and as supplementary to men's income rather than as wage or self-employment as a legitimate occupation for women.

It has been recognized that the meager opportunities which have been offered to women in the informal sector in developing countries have been carried out through NGOs. However, in most cases those training opportunities have too often been offered with no knowledge about potential markets, management skills and stress on good quality

products. Training women in traditional 'female' skills such as tailoring, embroidery, knitting and food production may offer little opportunity for raising income levels or for future development since markets are often saturated with similar products or that raw materials might not be available, or capital investment may be inadequate. Therefore, traditional female products are usually time-consuming and provide little income. Whereas, in some cases women are actually selling at a loss and cannot even recover the cost of their raw materials. GOODALE (1998: 126) views that training in technical and vocational skills alone is insufficient. It must be combined with basic business, marketing and entrepreneurship skills "this is crucial for women who are looking for self-employment and for those situated at the lower subsistence end of the self-employment scale, where it can help them expand their economic base and make it more profitable"

### 2.3 Women entrepreneurship

AUTIO (2003: 3) stated that throughout the history of economic thought, relatively few economists have attempted to define the role of the entrepreneur in economic growth. Perhaps the most influential was Schumpeter, who viewed entrepreneurs as agents of "creative destruction." "In Schumpeter's view, entrepreneurs disrupt the status quo in market supply and demand by introducing innovations". Established firms, Schumpeter argued, have less incentive to innovate because they are driven by the need for efficiency, and the innovation process is certainly not efficient. Entrepreneurs, however, driven by the pursuit of profits, purposefully disrupt the market equilibrium in order to take advantage of the resulting profit-making opportunities, creating temporary monopolies based on their innovations. Established competitors are then forced to react to such challenges in order to survive, and economic growth follows as the competitive manoeuvring creates a new level of efficiency and profitability.

AUTIO (2003: 5) further added that more recently, economic theorist, Paul Romer, has extended the Schumpeterian concept of the entrepreneur; "like Schumpeter, ROMER (1990) in his article regarding the endogenous technological change maintains that economic growth is ultimately set in motion by innovators working to take advantage of the profit potential in their inventions. ROMER argues, however, that these innovators need not be individual entrepreneurs, but that an established organization can also behave entrepreneurially through the introduction and exploitation of new innovations. Thus, when entrepreneurship is addressed by economic theorists, it is most often associated with technological innovation or what is often referred to as high-potential entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is defined by DRURY (1995: 29) as "creating and building something of value from practically nothing. i.e. it is a process of creating or seizing an opportunity and pursuing it regardless of the resources currently controlled. Entrepreneurship involves the definition, creation, and distribution of value and benefits to individuals, groups, organizations and society".

Entrepreneurship refers to enterprising individuals who show readiness to take risks and to start up a new business. Those individuals, known as entrepreneurs, survey their potential business environment, identify opportunities to improve it, assemble resources,

and act to maximize operational opportunities. They portray personal qualities such as self-confidence, autonomy, responsibility, determination, and leadership that help them to be successful in the creation and management of their businesses. In regards to females and the entrepreneurial sector two types of businesswomen are generally found; "those who choose entrepreneurship and those for whom entrepreneurship is the only option for earning an income". Entrepreneurship is quite common in Europe where 60% of female headed businesses in Northern Europe and 70% in Southern Europe are established for this reason (ILO, 1998a) Women's entrepreneurship development has been a very important topic on the global arena ever since the United Nations Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, opened the blinds to the great potential and opportunities it has in contributing to the economic empowerment and wellbeing of women and their societies, and to the underutilized female resource in most countries. It has been recognized that the development of women's entrepreneurs is one way of decreasing the disparities between sexes and at the same time increasing the speed of economic growth. As it is also extremely important in developing countries and transition economies where these disparities greatly exist and where women-headed businesses can play a positive role in the development of their societies (THOMSON, 2002: 36).

Women's entrepreneurship is gaining increasing recognition in public policy circles. National governments and international organizations alike are coming to realize that fostering women's economic development through enterprise creation can have a positive impact in a number of areas. First and foremost, it enhances economic growth and provides employment opportunities for the owners and their workers. In addition, providing economic opportunities for women can, also, improve the social, educational and health status of women and their families

There is a common increasing interest in entrepreneurship among policy makers, academics and practitioners. This interest comes from the recognition that the creation of new enterprises will increase local capabilities to bring economic growth and will help to develop the market economy. Women entrepreneurs play an increasing important role in promoting growth and development. The entrepreneurial skills potential of women is significant because women play a predominant role in micro-enterprise sector. Half of the adult population can consistently contribute to enlarging and enforcing entrepreneurship by demonstrating their proactive capacities and skills in pursuing their own business ventures. However, in recent years, the role of women's entrepreneurship in social and economic development started to be recognized, calling for increasing attention, particularly in the field of small and medium enterprises.

Family businesses possess a unique and winning combination of social, human, and financial capital that equips them to foster the economic and social health of nations. Family firms' unique structures, governance, and cultures enable them to take the risks necessary to create new business and pursue growth, thereby generating employment for relatives and non-relatives alike. Research provides a strong indication that these trends are likely to continue. Though some family firms experience serious problems in managing the transition from the founder to other family members, many survive for generations, creating a stable source of economic, technological, and social progress and

a stable base of long-term capital needed for new venture development. As these firms exist primarily on a local level, they also provide for community investment and overall social stability and welfare (JOSEPH, ASTRACHAN, ZAHRA and SHARMA, 2003: 3).

However, women entrepreneurs face a lot of obstacles in running their business. In addition to the legal and administrative issues and the market conditions, women entrepreneurs, also, suffer from a number of gender constraints, including the need to find day-care, the need to support their family, and the discrimination in financing and networking. Negative stereotypes such as the public opinion of a women's role in society can affect women entrepreneurs for it extends the view that women's jobs are not their primary objective. Women might also face the challenge of being refused from their family members and the society. For example, many husbands are not in agreement or support of their wives desires to start a business and this keeps many from striving to reach their professional aspirations and leadership roles, for they lack the self-confidence they need in order to start up or expand their businesses. Yet, obtaining finance comes on top of these constraints.

## **2.4 Women's access to microfinance**

Since mid 1980s women, as micro and small entrepreneurs, have received increased attention and assistance by governments, international donors and NGOs. Micro-enterprises have been seen as having particular advantages for women: e.g. their flexibility and location in or near women's homes ease of entry and links with the local markets etc. Thus, supporting their entrepreneurship was seen as having important positive effects on wider poverty alleviation and gender inequality (ILO, 1998b: 2).

### **2.4.1 Access to credit and constraints**

The concept of women's credit was born on the insistence of women oriented studies that highlighted the discrimination and struggle of women in having access to credit. There has been a noticeable gap in financing genuine credit needs of the poor, especially women in rural areas. Certain misconceptions about the poor such as that they need loans at subsidized rates of interest on soft terms, they lack education, skills, capacity to save, credit-worthiness were behind that. Nevertheless, the experiences of several self-help groups revealed that rural poor are actually efficient managers of credit and finance.

The lack of access to informal and formal credit by women micro and small entrepreneurs has been identified by numerous studies as a major constraint that faces women micro-entrepreneurs (ILO, 1998a: 4). With informal sources of finance being relatively easy to access, women have been relying on moneylenders and pawnbrokers, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), friends, relatives, suppliers and shopkeepers. While these sources are providing the bulk of financial resources for female entrepreneurs and offer a number of potential advantages, such as proximity between borrower and lender, immediacy of loan disbursement, small loan size, flexible repayment schedules and minimal collateral requirements, they can be costly and discriminatory.

On the other side of the coin, formal financial institutions are less receptive and welcoming to female entrepreneurs. Their collateral requirements, bureaucratic loan application, disbursement procedures, the time and resources necessary to visit the banks and discriminatory banking culture virtually exclude poor women as clients. Thus, the provision of sustainable access to financial services for women has become a core component of many women's micro-enterprise programs, and is at the center of the attention of governments, social partners, civil society organizations and international donors.

Therefore, women as micro and small entrepreneurs have increasingly become a key target group for micro-finance programs. Providing access to micro-finance has not only been considered precondition for poverty alleviation, but also for women's empowerment. Bangladesh is considered a leader among low income countries offering micro-credit. Using a group-based approach, the country's small-scale micro-credit programs provide more credit in rural areas than do traditional financial institutions. The Grameen Bank, founded as a project in 1976 and transformed into a bank in 1983, is the best known micro-credit program. The bank believes that the most pressing need of the poor is credit, which they can use to create and expand self-employment opportunities. Its group-based lending scheme has several attractive features the top of which is that the poor find it easier to access institutional credit through groups and to work with groups that they select themselves (WORLD BANK, 1998: 3).

#### **2.4.2 Sustainable Access to Microfinance**

According to the ILO (1998b: 6), the mechanisms developed to provide women micro-entrepreneurs with access to financial services are extremely diverse, offering alternatives to the formal banking system, while incorporating the advantages of informal savings and credit systems. These include:

- **Social programs** run by commercial banks, which provide borrowers with incentives from the government. However, most commercial bank schemes have failed to reach large numbers of poor borrowers, let alone women. Women's participation in the formal small-scale enterprise lending programs rarely exceeds 20 percent.
- **Intermediary programs** generally run by NGOs offering micro-businesses a link to the formal banking system (for example: Women's World Banking; the original activities of SEWA; Production Credit for Rural Women, Nepal; Institute for the Development of the Informal Sector, Peru). Most programs have succeeded in reaching somewhat better-off women, and SEWA decided to set up its own poverty-oriented bank, because its members encountered too many difficulties in their dealings with banking procedures, application forms, opening hours and attitudes of male bank clerks.
- **Parallel programs** that provide financial services alongside other development and social programs via non-bank institutions (for example: Working Women's Forum, India; Progreso, Peru; BRAC, Bangladesh; Small Business Scheme of the National Christian Council of Kenya). Many of these programs have succeeded in reaching women clients, heavily supported by donors.

- **Poverty-oriented development banks**, generally started as intermediary or parallel programs and then officially registered as banks (for example: SEWA Bank, India; Grameen Bank, Bangladesh). They have adapted delivery systems and loan conditions to meet the specific needs of female clients.
- **Community revolving loan funds**, similar to ROSCAs, with government and donor grants or loans (for example: Partnership for Productivity, Kenya). These funds offer limited but useful services to women. If well managed, they can be sustainable. The major risk is erosion of funds due to default and inflation.
- **Savings and credit cooperatives and unions** providing special schemes for women members (for example: Cooperative Union, Gambia). Participatory methods help ensure that these organizations meet the real needs of members. They mobilize their own capital and are more or less democratic. Cooperatives can, however, be formalistic and financial services are not always readily available.

Women have become the preferred clients of microfinance institutions, as they tend to be better borrowers. Studies show again and again that women borrowers' average delinquency rates tend to be lower than men's, especially for micro-loans.

#### 2.4.3 The Impact of Microfinance on Women Micro Entrepreneurs

It is widely assumed that micro-finance have a positive impact on women's livelihood with regard to the following:

1. Leading to higher income that will help women to better perform their reproductive role as brokers of the health, nutritional, and educational status of other household members,
2. Increasing women's employment in micro enterprises and in improving the productivity of women's income-generating activities, and
3. Enhancing their self-confidence and status within the family as independent producers and providers of valuable cash resources to the household economy.

The plausibility of these assumptions is largely borne out by empirical evidence. Impact assessments provide evidence of the positive effects of micro-finance on the livelihood of poor women, especially in *Asia*:

- A study from Bangladesh confirms improvements in women's physical mobility, economic security, ability to make own purchases, freedom from family domination and violence, political and legal awareness and public participation, as a result of a more stable integration into microfinance circuits (SCHULER and HASHEMI, 1994: 65 -76);
- A study of Grameen Bank suggests that women participants in credit programmes are more conscious of their rights, better able to resolve conflicts, and have more control over decision making at the household and community levels (CHEN ET AL, 1996);
- Credit to women has positive effects on the schooling of girls, it increases women's asset holdings (except land) and is a significant determinant of total household expenditure (KHANDKER, 1998);

- A study in Sri Lanka found that loans contributed to women's independent income, giving them more bargaining power in their relation with male family members (Hulme and Mosley, 1996);
- Enhanced women's empowerment, such as increased self-confidence, and better cooperation with neighbours has also been observed in Thailand.

The findings for **Africa** give a less clear picture, in that there is a positive impact on self-confidence, but little proof of increased access to credit, intra-household decision making and individual assets ownership. In **Latin America**, a study in Ecuador found a significant increase in hourly income for women and in efficiency and productivity of their enterprises (Berger and Buvinic, 1989).

However, some studies have also detected negative impacts on women's income and employment, such as increased work loads and higher social pressure to ensure loan repayment. Also, a positive impact on non-participants, such as the welfare and education of children, cannot be automatically assumed (Hulme and Peace, 1994). Moreover, women often employ daughters and daughters-in-law as unpaid employees thereby increasing their workload. Finally, participation in credit schemes can lead to indebtedness that is unmanageable, simply because there are no sufficiently profitable income-earning activities in which to invest. In this situation, women may end up being even more dependant that they were before.

## 2.5 Marketing patterns in the informal sector

Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and freely exchanging products and services of value with others (KOTLER, 2000: 8). The marketing concept helps a business to focus its efforts on satisfying customer needs in such a way to make a satisfactory profit. This concept is based on the fact that the survival of a small business depends on providing service. Thus, a small business should try to identify a group of people, to buy their products (the target market) and to produce goods or services that will meet the needs of that market (MEGGINSON ET AL., 1997: 226). Therefore, it is essential for a business survival to be consumer oriented which often involves exploring consumer needs first and then trying to satisfy them. Then come the rational use of the marketing mix (product, place, price, and promotion) to successfully carry out the marketing process.

However, in examining marketing in the informal sector, there is the issue of whether conventional economic parameters apply to the economic activity of market traders. Bromley and BIRKBECK (1984: 186) pointed out that there are certain ways in which patterns of competition are different from, and in some ways more complex than, conventionally studied competition in the formal sector. Many studies point out that economic activities in the informal sector are extremely competitive and individualistic. In the marketing branch of the informal sector, people work in close proximity to others and sell similar products. One's success in business may depend on, or lead to, another's failure. However, even though this economic activity is very competitive and an important source of conflict, it should not be taken for granted that every individual market trader



engages in competition and makes decisions in accordance with what mainstream economic models suggest. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the ways in which these market traders make decisions in selling their products in a competitive environment.

Mainstream economic models do not fit the situation of market traders in the informal sector in a number of ways. First of all, an enterprise in the informal sector is smaller in scale compared to an enterprise in the formal sector. Thus, it may be problematic to apply an economic model of competition, used to examine the economic behaviour of large formal firms to much smaller operations. Second, economists use a particular model, the supply and demand curve, as the determinant of prices. It may also be problematic to presume that the assumptions upon which the supply and demand curve are based are universal and can be applied to the informal sector. For instance, a market trader may consider the maintenance of a stable set of buyers and long term relationships with other traders in setting prices. Furthermore, there can be institutionalized price setting mechanisms forced by local authorities. Third, it can also be problematic to presume that all market traders are acting only to maximize profit. There may be a variety of reasons to engage in market trading and, thus, there may be a variety of decision-making processes involved in the selling of goods. Therefore, the cultural values, traditions, and social structures of the societies in which market traders live, to a great extent affect their dealings in marketing their products in the informal sector. This is evident for example in carrying out transactions based on full trust (BEAL, 1975: 3).

One of the common marketing patterns practiced in the informal sector is street vending. WIEGO (2002) states that in cities and towns, throughout the world, millions of people earn their living by selling a wide range of goods and services on the streets. Despite a general belief that street vending recedes as economies develop and incomes rise, it is actually on the increase in many places. Street vendors represent a significant share of the urban informal sector. In many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America women represent a majority of these vendors. Little is known about their links to the formal trading sector or about the size and contribution of street vending to the economy as a whole. As with home-based workers, their numbers and economic contributions are greatly underestimated in the labour force statistics and national accounts. Public policies, urban plans and local government bodies often reflect an inherent unfairness against street vendors. Accordingly they suffer a lot of problems such as the lack of legal recognition, confiscation of goods, harassment by local authorities and evictions from selling places, unsanitary and hazardous workplaces lacking basic services.

However, in most cases street vending is the only occupational option for many poor people for earning their living. Street vendors generate work along a chain of supply and distribution generating a great deal of money flows through informal trade. They contribute to urban life through offering convenient services in quantities and at prices that poor can afford (<http://www.wiego.org/papers/ppt/vendors/street/>).

Pricing decisions in small business in the informal markets usually depend on the value provided, as customers will pay whatever they think the service is worth. However, pricing decisions often consider labour (if not relatives), materials and transportation

costs. While, promoting services mainly depend on word-of-mouth advertising, personal selling, and publicity (MEGGINSON ET AL., 1997: 246).

### 3 Socio-economic context of Sudanese women

Discussing the conditions of Sudanese women in the productive domain necessitates casting light on the socio-economic factors that affect their contribution in various economic activities on an equal footing with men. These factors altogether interact, influencing women's participation positively or negatively. They include the religious view; the traditions, social norms and perceptions; the legal and political views; education and the labour market conditions.

#### 3.1 Religious view on women's work

In Sudan, the majority of the population are Muslims, so the society is to a great extent affected by the teachings of Islam. Satti (1985: 17) explained that Islam's attitude towards women has always been a controversial issue. It is argued that it belittles the role of women in the community considering them as inferior to men. It is, also, maintained that the domination over women is overwhelming that men are described as 'guardians' of women ('Giwama' is the Arabic word mentioned in Islam).

In fact, Islam has honoured women. As for the 'Giwama', the Muslim Imams brought the following reply to the critics of Islam: "There are two kinds of 'Giwama' in Islam. The first is a material one and it means carrying out one's duties towards one's wife. That is providing food, shelter, and all other material aspects of 'Giwama'. Islam has clearly stated that women have to be maintained by their husbands, fathers and brothers" (SATTI 1985: 17-20).

Addressing the husband, the Holy Quran states:

"Let them live in the same style ye live, according to your means, annoy them not so as to restrict them" (Talag, V. (6)).

The other type of 'Giwama' does not advocate degradation or loss of personal identity. The Quran did not mention that men are to be the women's masters. It only stated that men are 'Gawamoon', that is, they are the custodians of women. The literal meaning of the term 'Giwama' in English is straight forward.

The main objective of 'Giwama' or custody in Islam is that family affairs should be handled properly, however, man's judgement is not limitless. For instance, a man can neither interfere in his wife's property affairs nor can he dictate orders to her. Moreover, women can play the role of the guardian if, for instance, her husband passes away (Satti, 1985: 17).

Muslim women enjoy the same basic rights and duties as men except in certain issues determined by the divination of Almighty God such as inheritance. Since ancient days, they participated in almost all social, economic and political aspects of life such as in the 'Higra' (*Migration with the Prophet*), the wars, and enjoyed the right of fealty 'i.e. Al

Bayaa'. Islam, also, has entitled women to sign contracts and to enter all kinds of financial agreements such as in trading, renting, mortgaging and transferring of property. The address in the Holly Quran in issues related to the rights of both sexes is always directed to both of them and not to one of them only, *"Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female" (Aal Omran, V. (195))... "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them in a just manner" (Al Bagara, V.(228)).*

On the other hand, there are no provisions in the Holly Quran or the 'Suna' that prohibit women from work or specify for them certain types of tasks. On the contrary, Islam stressed women's work whenever there is a need for that. Yet, some parties of Islam view that if the woman's work will have negative effects on her family or children, the priority should be for her family until she reaches in a position that will enable her to make a balance concerning her various responsibilities. In addition to that, women should not practice any activity that contradict with their biological structure and will affect physical injury or harm to them (OSMAN, 1994: 13).

According to AL BORGADI (1987: 34), Islam does not interfere in classifying or specifying work as what suits men or women that is left to be determined according to the talents, nature and ability of each sex. Thus, the choice for the type and field of work is left to the people's tendencies and qualifications.

However, despite Islam has clearly stressed the major role that women can play in both the productive and the reproductive spheres with no distinctions between them and men regarding their rights for education and work, the discrimination practised against women in some cases is due to other factors such as the traditions and social perceptions.

### **3.2 Traditions, norms and social perceptions**

The Sudanese society discriminates between males and females since childhood and in the way of socialization of boys and girls. The boy is usually prepared to be the man of the house, the supporter and the guardian, while the girl is taught how to be gentle, shy and submissive. "Such patterns of behaviour would be grateful to her or even it could be part of her womanhood" (DOLIEB, 1987: 29). Thus, sexes grow up believing in these concepts and each enjoys playing each role; the man is the stronger and the master and the woman is the weak and the follower. This led Sudanese woman for long time to be closed inside herself, her home, and progressing slowly behind the man and under his shadow.

The Sudanese society prefers women to stay at home to manage their domestic activities and take care of their children. Girls are socialized in such a way to be obedient and to have no say in any issue that is related to them or to their families. They grow up in the same pattern of their mothers and are prepared to hold the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood in the future. Moreover, the predominance of arranged marriage is another socio-cultural constraint which is most vigorous in rural areas, but it also exists to some extent in urban areas.

These traditional norms and views are still valid, particularly in rural areas, despite the efforts Sudanese women exert to get their rights in education and in joining the labour

market. This change in attitude has been noticed mostly in urban areas, where most of the traditional perceptions are altered with the advancement in education. In addition, the economic need was in most cases the catalyst that pushed women forward to achieve their aims and forced the society, as well, to accept their participation in the economic activities inside or outside the household. However, whenever this need vanishes, there is more room to conform to the norms and social values that prefer women to stay at home.

HIGAB (1988: 14) mentioned three conditions for women to be integrated in the labour force which are the need, opportunity and the ability. The absence of any of them will add to the constraints confronting women's participation in the labour force. He further noticed that despite the society relates women's limited degree of participation in the labour force to their limited capabilities, whenever an economic need arises, then what is usually said about women's capabilities immediately vanishes. In the mean time, regarding their capabilities, women are bearing heavier burden than men. Actually, they are responsible for domestic duties, productive and subsistence work, in addition to their reproductive role. Furthermore, in rural areas women practice hard tasks such as fetching water, collecting fuel wood, milking cows, processing food, performing basic tasks in agriculture, and in western and southern Sudan they build houses. Thus, in all cases women play multiple roles, without any help offered to them by men regarding their domestic duties which are usually associated with females.

The social attitude in segregation between males and females extends throughout their lives to future employment. Any work of a physically tough nature or requiring a great stamina is often labelled men's work, while women are restricted to sectors of social welfare, public health services and education as these are considered suitable for them. On the other hand, employers prefer male workers, taking into consideration women's discontinuity in work, their high frequency of absence and their rejection to be transferred to rural areas bringing various excuses for their preference for staying in big cities with their families. Moreover, HIJAB (1988: 16) explained that sometimes the parents do not allow their daughters to travel or go around the country on their work. They even do not prefer them to interact with strangers, particularly men, or deal in markets unless there is a strong need for that "To be fair, our customs are difficult, no one is really to blame but our social customs", he mentioned.

Accordingly, men receive quite satisfactory chances for employment in almost all work fields, while, women are considered subordinate workers. However, with time Sudanese women have succeeded in joining the formal labour market, undertaking various jobs, yet, still the society differentiates between what suits them and what is not suitable or acceptable for them. This is reflected on their limited participation in the male dominated professions such as in technical jobs, and in their promotion upwards in the organizational hierarchy. Thus due to various reasons, women join the informal sector seeking opportunities for income generation and to support or assist in supporting their families. Though, their economic contribution in the informal sector is totally marginalized in both the agriculture and non-agriculture fields.

### 3.3 Policy and decision makers

The existence of visible social distinction between males and females, based on the deeply entrenched traditional beliefs and perceptions, led policy makers and planners to emphasise sex roles and to differentiate between them in offering opportunities in education and employment. The situation is even worsened by the lack of Sudanese women's representation in the bodies concerned with the formulation of plans and the setting of national policies. According to BADAWI (1990: 28), HOOGENBOOM (1988) stated; "In the perception of planners, among whom we hardly find a female present, women are seen as economically inactive, of lower productivity and their possession of certain qualities enhance their suitability for particular jobs only". Consequently, planners offer males wide chances for education and training to acquire various skills to qualify them to join the labour market, as well as, providing them enough chances to generate professionals, leaders and elites in order to monopolise the top jobs that require leadership skills and decision making abilities. This leads to that females options to participate in activities other than those which are usually related to them such as teaching and nursing, beside their domestic and reproductive roles, become very limited. Moreover, HOOGENBOOM (1988) explained that planners view women through their traditional perspectives, while their economic role is still invisible to them. Consequently, this negligence of women's opportunities in work led to completely distorted figures about their participation in various economic activities, which affected their integration in the national economic plans negatively (BADAWI, 1990: 28-29).

However, in late 1990s in Sudan, it is remarkable that although females are offered more chances for education, which might exceed sometimes, those of the males, yet they are not allowed to join certain educational areas such as industrious secondary schools, faculties of survey and certain vocational training areas that are considered unsuitable for them. The few social welfare centres existing for females are planned to teach home economics, handicrafts and other traditional subjects related to domestic work. This shows that policy makers and planners play crucial role in directing males and females towards specific lines that are considered, from their traditional point of view, suitable for each, defining the characteristics and qualifications required for them. This, in turn, limit females opportunities in education, training and employment leading to their absence or scarcity in certain jobs, particularly those require vocational or technical skills for example mechanics, plumbing, carpentry, and so on. All these limit women's chances in education and training, thus most of them practice economic activities in the informal sector that are feasible to them and suits their skills and capabilities.

### 3.4 Women and work legislation

It is agreed that in law Sudanese women enjoy most civil, social and political rights. Most legislation and regulations provide for equality in opportunities, protection and dignity for women in all aspects of employment and social benefits. However, despite most of the work laws are enforced and applied such as the equality in remuneration, pension, social insurance and others, yet the prevailing traditional ideology of men, still, stands as obstacles in front of the attainment of women to some of their rights. Moreover, some of

the legislation contradicts with the right of women to work. BADAWI (2000: 10 and 13) stated that since 1984, some regulations were introduced to control women's mobility. For instance, according to these regulations the Sudanese woman, regardless of her age or qualifications, cannot travel abroad by herself. She must be accompanied by a male guardian or she must submit a written permission from her guardian to the authorities. This in a way inhibits women's career, promotion and chances for training.

Another area that allows for exploitation of women's rights is that all Sudanese laws dealing with labour are, to a great extent, formulated to fit the modern and the formal sectors, thereby they exclude women working in agriculture and in the informal sector. Consequently, they lack the legal protection and fair chances to improve their working conditions. Whereas, with increasing poverty, economic crisis, the prevailing war conditions and men's migration, an increasing number of women are joining the informal sector; supporting their families being the solely breadwinners of their families, though their economic activities are underestimated. Work legislation and regulations that protect women's rights in the formal sector are to a great extent embodied in the Sudanese law. For example, they include certain provisions that cater for women's health, protection and safety, taking into consideration their physiological built, as well as their social and domestic roles. Yet, various socio-cultural and political factors interfere to affect their enforcement negatively, thus depriving women from some of their legal rights regarding their career promotion. However, when it comes to women working in the informal sector the Law is silent (BADAWI, 2000: 10 and 13).

### 3.5 Women and education

Education is an essential factor that largely affects women's position and progress in different aspects of their life and career. However, it is still lagging behind in Sudan. Comparing the statistics of enrolment of 1973 census and 1993 census, the population literacy rate was noticed to be slightly improving. According to 1993 census, illiteracy rate in the Sudan was 47%, which is considered to be high. Yet, it is higher among women (58% than among men (36%). While, in rural areas the illiteracy rate among women was found to be greater (66%) than in urban areas (40%) (AL NAEIM, 1994: 49).

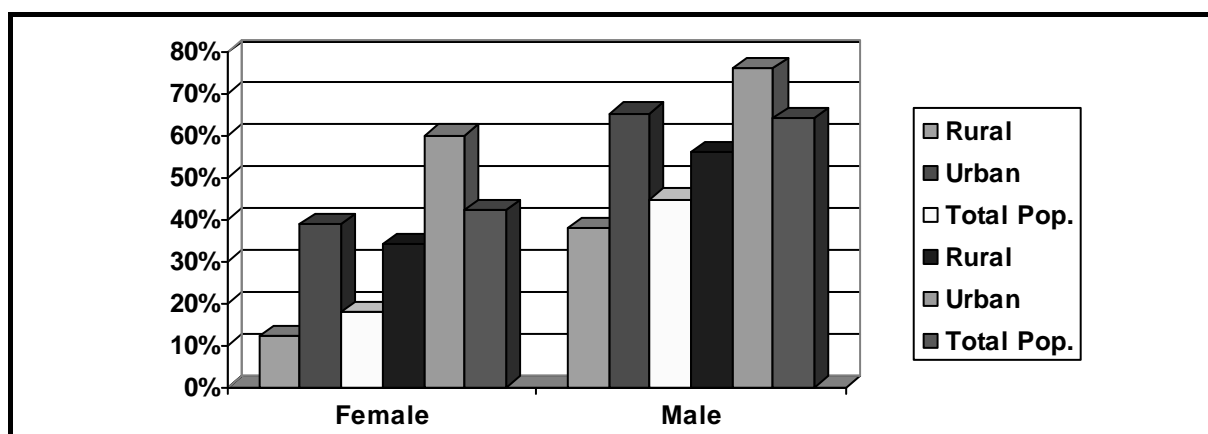
The following table reflects the rates of literate people in the Sudan for 1973 and 1993, illustrated in the figure below.

**Table 3–1: Share of the Literates in Sudan by Gender and Place of Residence, 1973 and 1993**

Year	Residence	Total	Female	Male	F/M Ratio
1973	Rural	24.5%	12.2%	37.7%	0.32
	Urban	53.2%	38.9%	65.3%	0.60
	Total Pop.	31.3%	17.9%	44.7%	0.40
1993	Rural	45%	34%	56%	0.16
	Urban	68%	60%	76%	0.78
	Total Pop.	53%	42%	64%	0.66

Source: Sudan censuses 1973 and 1993, Department of Statistics, Khartoum, Sudan.

**Figure 3–1: Illustration of the Literates in Sudan by Gender and Residence, 1973 and 1993.**



Source: Own figure; Dates: Sudan censuses 1973 and 1993, Department of Statistics, Khartoum, Sudan (Table 3.1).

Recent statistics showed relatively further improvement in the literacy rate of the population as it was reflected in the records of the CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2000) which showed that the literacy rate among the total population within the age of (15 – 24 yrs) was 55% [*Southern States excluded*]; The females constituted 53% while the males 57% (MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, 2003).

However, it is quite obvious that in urban areas females' education is increasing at rates closer to those of males indicating a positive change in the perception of the society regarding females' education. Table 3.2 reflects the percentages of enrolment of both sexes in urban areas at the primary level for five years.

**Table 3–2: Enrolment of Students in Primary Education (Age 7–12 yrs) in Sudan by Gender, 1996/1997 - 2000/2001**

Year	Total Enrolment	Males	Females	Share of Females
1996/1997	35 454	18 891	16 564	47%
1997/1998	36 870	19 211	17 659	48%
1998/1999	42 459	16 974	25 485	60%
1999/2000	43 477	17 062	23 804	55%
2000/2001	43 519	21 026	22 492	52%

Source: STATISTICS YEAR BOOKS OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (1996/1997 - 2000/2001), Khartoum, Sudan.

On the other hand, at the secondary level, the education rates between male and female students are also found to be close in the academic line, but the gender gap again appears in the technical and industrious secondary education. This is expected, since females are not offered chances in the later because of the socio-cultural ideology that classifies mechanics, plumbing, carpentry and other vocational education as males' and prefers the involvement of females in disciplines that are traditionally considered related to them.

At the higher educational level, the rate of the intake of female students to universities and higher institutes, is noticed to be in most cases almost equal to the rate of male students, even in some cases it exceeds that of the males'.

However, the lowest rates for the intake of female students are again noticed in the area of technical sciences, which are considered males' domain. Yet, female students are found in all lines of specialization other than the area of technology with rates almost similar or more than those of male students. Therefore, such discrimination limits women's opportunities in education, as well as in the formal sector of the labour market, forcing women to join the informal sector. This is shown on the statistics in table 3.3.

**Table 3–3: Share of Female Students in Selected Lines of Specialization at the University of Khartoum 1982/83, 1990/91 and 1994/95, %**

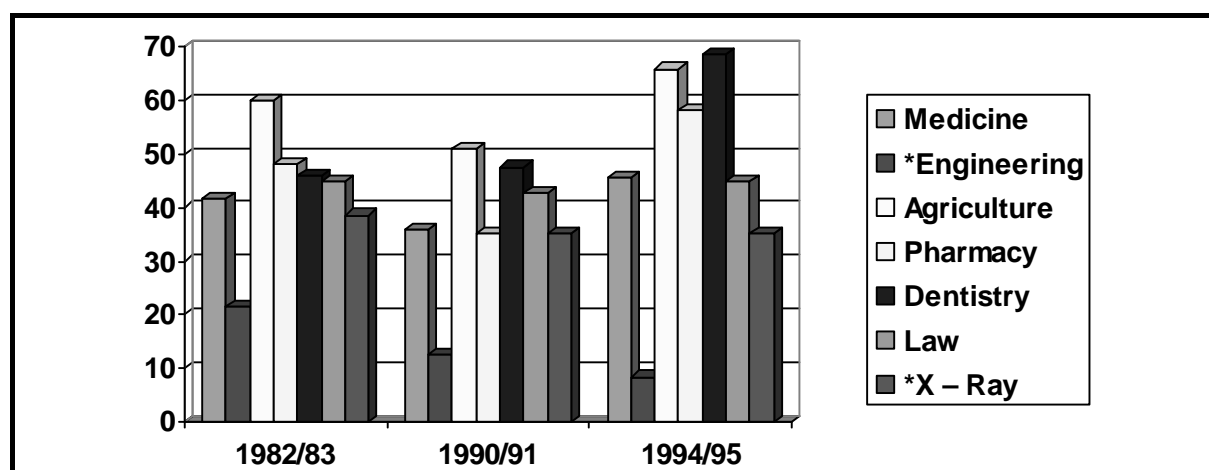
Line of Specialization	1982/83	1990/91	1994/95
Medicine	41.6	35.9	45.5
*Engineering	21.6	12.6	8.4
Agriculture	60.0	51.1	65.9
Pharmacy	48.0	35.1	58.3
Dentistry	46.0	47.6	68.7
Law	44.9	42.6	44.9
*X – Ray	38.6	35.3	35.2

\*Fields in which female students are not commonly found and are socially recognized as males' domain.

Source: STATISTICS OF THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (1982/83), (1990/91) and (1994/95), Khartoum, Sudan.

Table 3.3 clearly shows the low percentage of female students in lines such as engineering and X-Ray, which are technical studies and are considered by the society as males' domain. Therefore, it is expected that the socio-cultural perceptions affect females' selection for those specializations. The following figure illustrates the data in table 3.3.

**Figure 3–2: Share of Female Students in Selected Specialization at the University of Khartoum 1982/83, 1990/91 and 1994/95, %**



Source: Own figure; Dates: Sudan censuses 1973 and 1993, DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS, KHARTOUM, SUDAN (Table 3.3).



The increase in the number of female students enrolled in various levels of education is mainly due to the increasing awareness of the society for the importance of females' education, as well as the stress of the economic needs as a result of the prevailing hard economic conditions and the families' recognition of the financial support that women provide.

### **3.6 Sudanese women in the labour force**

According to 1993 census, the population in the work age group (15 – 65yrs) amounted to 50%. The labour force of the country was 7.8 million only, constituting 30.6% of the total population. While, its growth rate was about 4.9%, which was considered high compared with that of developing countries in general (1.9%), at that time (DEPARTMENT OF STATISTIC 1995: 47).

As the agriculture sector represents the spinal cord for the Sudan economy, employing most of the population, based on the SUDAN ECONOMIC REVIEW (1993/94) women's contribution to this sector was equivalent to 79.2% and constituting a percentage of 70% of the labour force. Despite women performing the major agriculture and pastoral activities, yet their work in this area is still treated as unpaid work and is economically devalued or not estimated with regard to the GDP. However, in the industrial sector, the working women represented about 6.7% only of the labour force, which is referred to the social concepts regarding women's work in this sphere (SUDAN ECONOMIC REVIEW, 1993/94: 36).

In Sudan, the public sector is the major employer. As a share of the total wage employment, the public sector amounted to more than 80% in 1960s. However, the private sector is small, providing limited chances for employment that are usually male dominated.

The participation of women in the labour market is clear in the rural areas in agricultural activities, pastoral activities, handicrafts, needle and embroidery work etc. In urban areas they are involved in tailoring, petty trading, domestic services, midwifery and nursing. However, with increased education and the expansion of the labour market, women started seeking more positions in various options. Besides, the expansion in education enlightened women and raised their awareness for the significant role that they could play to achieve better social status and create better quality of life for themselves and their families. All that stressed the need for women's participation in economic activities with increasing rates.

However, the increase in the share of females' participation in the labour market is generally attributed to the increase in their education attainments, desertion of men to some jobs that are low paid and lack the prospects of advancement, emigration of men, and the deteriorated economic conditions which encouraged families to accept women's work in various sectors in urban areas. Furthermore, the significant improvement in the work laws such as the equal pay, exclusion of women from night shifts, maternity leave and others, has had its positive impact on their contribution in the formal sector. Accordingly, as the statistics of the Ministry of Labour showed, in 1983 the number of women who occupied different types of posts in the technical and professional fields in the public sector constituted 43.4% of the total female labour force. Most of them were

working in the education and the medical fields, while 27.9% were occupying clerical jobs. However, despite the increase in the number of working women in the public sector, their participation rate is still low compared with that of men. The following table reflects the rate of participation of women in the public sector in 1991/1992.

**Table 3–4: The Participation Rate of Women in the Public Sector compared with the Males in Sudan, 1991/92**

Sex	Number	Percentage
Females	131000	13%
Males	873000	87%

Source: GISM EL SID (1998: 54).

On the other hand, the statistics of 1991/92, also, points to that the number of females working in the private sector constituted 8.3% of the total labour force in this sector, while, the number of males was equivalent to 91.7%.

The recruitment procedures in the Sudan vary from the public to the private sectors. However, legally, all job seekers should be registered at the Ministry of Labour, yet this is not applicable in most cases. Candidates applying to the public enterprises should pass through the National Recruitment Board which is formed of representatives from various Ministries. The Board is responsible for the interview and the selection of appropriate candidates. However, this gives more than a room for gender discrimination, nepotism, preference for political or governor alliances and the like, despite the existence of fair legislation that govern the recruitment board. In all cases women are negatively affected by these practices. The following table reflects the number of the registered and employed of both sexes over five years.

**Table 3–5: Number of the Registered and Employed by Gender in Khartoum, 1988/89 – 1992/93**

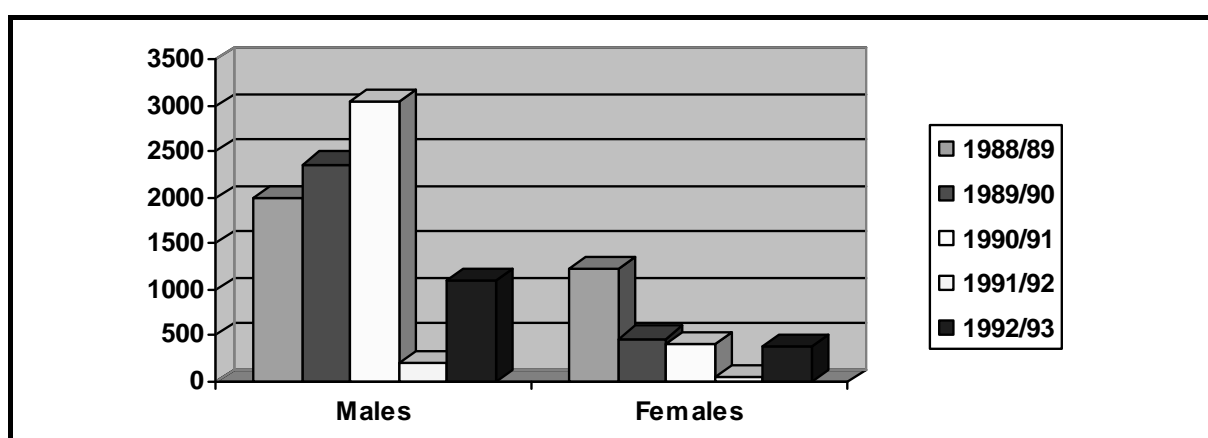
Year	Registration			Employment			% of Female Employment
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	
1988/89	24907	13804	11153	3214	1986	1228	9.1
1989/90	20234	17009	2325	2832	2366	466	5.0
1990/91	16817	14054	2763	3453	3041	412	6.7
1991/92	2425	1911	734	241	194	47	15.6
1992/93	10541	6826	3715	1478	1102	376	10.0

Source: A.HALIM (1995: 23) AND REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC PLANNING (1994), Khartoum, Sudan.

The table clearly shows the declining number of the employed population of both sex compared with those who are registered seeking work chances between 1989 an 1993. In addition to the stagnant economy which was not able to absorb the continuously increasing output of education, this might also be due to the negative effect of the

structural adjustment programs that have been applied in Sudan since late 1970s, which stressed deployment among its package. That even worsened the situation among female candidates. As the data points to that the limited employment opportunities are directed to males, pinpointing the gender segregation of labour and preference of male employees over females, based on the traditional social ideology. The vacancies offered to female candidates did not exceed 10% in average over the five years focused on. Accordingly, this situation forces women to join the informal sector seeking economic activities to earn their living and support their families. The table, also, indicates high rates of unemployment among both sex, due to the limited vacancies offered which is explicitly expected to be higher among women. The figure below illustrates the employment rate for both.

**Figure 3–3: Illustration of the Number of the Employed by Gender Khartoum, 1988/89 – 1992/93**



Source: Own dates (Table 3.5).

More recently, a new factor that has been introduced and pressed a great impact on education, as well as on registration for employment is the compulsory military service. It has been enforced by the current government in 1997 for males in the age group of 18 years old that is after finishing the secondary schooling. A large number of students cut it short and join the labour market with poor qualifications, dropping their chances in attaining higher education, to avoid the compulsory military service period (one to one and half a year), which is a basic condition for joining higher education institutions. On the other hand, university graduates as well cannot register for getting an employment chance without passing the same condition. The main worry of male students and graduates regarding the military service is the fear of involving them in the current on going civil war. That gave room for female students to fill the gaps in higher education, leading to increasing numbers of female students in universities, beside a considerable increase in the number of females who register at the labour office. Table 3.6 presents the rate of registration and employment of both sexes in 1998 and July – Sept, 1999.

**Table 3–6: Rates of the Registered Graduates and Employed of both sexes in Sudan, 1998 and July – Sept 1999.**

Year	Higher Education Institutes	Registered			Employed			Share of Employment		
		M*	F*	T*	M	F	T	M %	F %	T %
1998	Theoretical Studies	391	506	897	181	78	259	46.3	15.4	28.8
	Applied Science	887	879	1766	778	593	1371	77.7	67.4	77.6
	High Institutes	240	213	453	25	9	34	10.4	4.2	7.5
	Total	1518	1598	3116	984	680	1664	64.8	42.5	53.4
1999	Theoretical Studies	131	314	445	43	56	99	32.8	17.8	22.2
	Applied Science	233	162	395	94	87	181	40.3	53.7	45.8
	High Institutes	21	22	43	13	6	19	61.9	27.3	44.2
	Total	385	498	883	150	149	299	135	98.8	112.2

\*M – Males, F – Females, T - Total

Source: MINISTRY OF LABOUR, ANNUAL REPORTS, (1998) and (July – Sept, 1999), Khartoum, Sudan.

Table 3.6 obviously points to the number of registered females which is close to or exceeds that of the males, particularly in the colleges of theoretical studies and the higher institutes. Yet, regarding their employment, again males are favoured over the females as it is clear from the low percentages of employment. However, the high percentage of females employed in the area of applied sciences (53.7%) in 1999, might indicate a sign of slight change in the social ideology about women, or it might, also, be due to the limited period of time of this data (July – Sept).

Remarkably, over the past two decades, and due to various factors among which was the application of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the IMF which called for deployment to reduce government expenditures, meagre job opportunities were offered. In the mean time, an increasing output of higher education institutions due to the educational policies of the horizontal expansion and the increasing of the intake in the 1990s have been launched to the labour market seeking job opportunities. Besides, an influx of the students who completed secondary schooling and could not join higher education institutions was also released to the labour market asking for job vacancies. The result was high unemployment rates that added to the burden of the society. The following table 3.7 clearly shows the situation of unemployment in Sudan within the period 1973 - 1996.

**Table 3–7: The Rate of Unemployment by Gender in Sudan, 1973 – 1996**

Year	Total %	Male %	Female %
1973	5.5	6.5	10.0
1983	8.3	8.3	9.2
1990	16.5	13.0	28.0
1993	11.1	11.2	11.0
1996	16.6	13.1	24.3

Source: A/ATTI et al (1998: 23), the POPULATION CENSUSES (1973, 1983, 1993) and the LABOUR SURVEYS (1990 and 1996), Khartoum, Sudan.

The unemployment rate is noticed to be more among females than among males throughout the different years. However, in 1993 it is noticed to be almost similar, which indicates high economic contribution that might be due to migration of men, and the harsh economic conditions that forced women to join the official labour market. Table 3.8 presents the unemployed in Sudan by sex and mode of living.

**Table 3–8: Share of Unemployment in the Sudan by Sex and Mode of Living, 1996**

Mode of Living	Total %	% of Male	% of Female
Total	16.6	13.1	24.3
Urban	19.6	15.1	33.3
Rural	15.3	12.1	21.4

Source: A/ATTI et al (1998: 23) and THE LABOUR FORCE AND MIGRATION SURVEY (1996), Khartoum, Sudan.

Table 3.8 points to the increasing unemployment through years, reaching its maximum in 1990 and 1996 (16.5% and 16.6% respectively). While, in the same years the female unemployment rates (28.0% and 24.3%) were exceeding those of the males (13.0% and 13.1%). However, considering the mode of living, the rate of female unemployment in rural areas (21.4%), is noticed to be less than that of the females in urban areas (33.3%), which is natural because the former are not employed in the formal sector in high rates.

Under such conditions of unemployment, the only alternative for getting job chances is through self employment and joining the informal sector. That was the logical interpretation of the diminishing unemployment rate from 16.5% in 1990 to 11.1% in 1993 as it was recorded. Since, the same economic conditions and employment situation were prevailing during that period of time (1990 – 1993) the only conclusion drawn from the analysis of the data of 1993 census was that the difference in rates was absorbed by the informal sector, which was increasing tremendously reaching 48.9%.

On the other hand, talking about the employment conditions necessitates casting light on the remuneration of employees. In the Sudan the public sector provides low pay compared with the private sector. Wage differentials exist in the private sector, as it is the case elsewhere. However, large enterprises pay high wages but they require higher levels of skills and qualifications. The government has no say in the terms and conditions of employment in the private sector, yet it stipulates a minimum wage. According to A/ATTI ET AL. (1998: 24), the public sector pay has declined tremendously over the past two decades. In 1995 the minimum pay of the public sector represented 36% only of its value in 1990, which means a loss of 64% of the value of the wage. While, the real salaries of the senior employees in the public sector in the same year were equivalent to 28% of their value in 1990. Table 3.9 reflects the diminishing rates of salaries within five years.

**Table 3–9: Real Salary Index for Selected Grades of the Civil Service in Sudan, 1992 – 1995**

Year	Grade 1	Grade 4	Grade 9	Grade 15	Grade 17	CPI
1990	100	100	100	100	100	100.0
1992	50	69	63	87	83	650.9
1993	39	51	56	74	68	1310.7
1994	31	39	42	61	53	2843.2
1995	28	36	41	52	36	4787.5

Source: A/ATTI ET AL. (1998: 24).

The declining rates in the money wages of employees compared with the real wages, indicates the hardship of living conditions for families. In addition, the high unemployment rates for both sexes, placed more burden on women which were thus forced to seek income generating activities. Thus, most women working in the formal sector are found practising other additional economic activities in the informal sector.

### 3.7 The informal sector

The term informal sector has been brought to the surface in the 1970s by the ILO. It was originally recognised as the non-modern employment sector in the urban areas of the developing countries, which includes street traders, small-scale businesses or home-workers, in which the workers has very low pay or regular incomes. Its workers are usually non-skilled, unable to use modern technology and have no employment or social security protection. According to the ILO (1999: 9) the informal sector is characterised by ease of entry, the small scale nature of activities, self employment with high proportion of family workers and apprentices, little capital and equipment, labour intensive technologies, low skills, low levels of organized markets, and cheap provision of goods and services to low income groups. World-wide, this sector accounts for 500 million workers which is equivalent to a quarter of the world's working population, providing about 35% of the world-wide gross national capital. Between 1990 and 1994 it was estimated that in Africa, 60% of the workers are employed in the informal sector.

In Sudan, as in other developing countries this sector has been tremendously increasing since the 1970s due to economic bottlenecks.

According to A/ATTI (1998: 27), the low employment opportunities, the low salaries in comparison with the real wages, the increasing poverty and harsh economic conditions forced a growing number of the labour force to join the informal sector. However, despite it has been able to absorb the mass of migrants from rural areas, as well as, the high rates of the unemployed; its contribution to the GDP is under estimated. In 1996, the employment rate was estimated to be approximately 50% of the total employment, of which 86% are males constituting the majority of the informal sector. Yet, a large number of women were, also, active in this sector. They were self- employed, engaged in petty trading, selling tea and food items, tailoring, hairdressing, cosmetics and body decorating, beside other activities. At the beginning of their involvement in the sector,

women were noticed to be from the poor, old ages, immigrants, illiterate and those who lack the technical skill. However, with the deteriorating economic conditions and low salaries, the need for extra income forced the educated and young women to join the sector introducing new forms of activities such as painting fabrics, providing the super-markets with bakery products, processed food and beverages and so on.

To conclude, the participation of Sudanese women in the labour market in urban areas is conditioned by the development of the socio-economic conditions. However, the involvement of women in economic activities is considerably affected by their level of education, familial and cultural discriminatory norms, values and practices against women and the work laws. Besides, policy makers and planners are to a great extent defining the path for women to cross, being themselves part of the society and deeply affected by its customs and traditions.

On the other hand, being faced by the economic difficulties, unemployment, the increasing emigration of men, the environment and war hazards, in addition to their traditional roles, Sudanese women are struggling vigorously in various directions in order to maintain relatively good quality life for their families and their survival, being in most cases the sole bread winners for their families or that they are required to provide support through generating second income.

## 4 Research findings, discussion and analysis

This section presents the findings of the interviews conducted by the researchers with fifty female entrepreneurs working in the processing and selling of food and beverages in urban markets in Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman Provinces.

### 4.1 Characteristics of the respondents

Regarding the interviewees' age, the majority (31 women) were found to be within the age range of 36 – 55 years old, i.e. being at a relatively mature and responsible age. Eight of them were 56 years old or above, while the rest were less than 25 years old (6 women) or between 26 – 35 years old (5 women). Table 4.1 presents the distribution of interviewees' age.

**Table 4–1: Distribution of the Interviewees' Age, Khartoum, 2003**

Age (years)	No. of Responses	Percentage
< 25 years	6	12
26 - 35	5	10
36 - 45	16	32
46 - 55	15	30
56 and above	8	16
Total	50	100

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.

Taking into consideration the traditions and social values of the Sudanese society, the distribution of interviewees' age can be considered normal and expected since the relatively elder women (36 – 55 years old) are accepted to be engaged in commercial transactions or activities in the market. However, the involvement of some young women (25 – 35 years old) in such economic activities indicates that there is a relative social change regarding women's contribution in economic activities and mobility which were not easily accepted in the society. This change might be due to the prevailing economic difficulties and hardship facing families in providing support for living that forced some families to over pass previously adopted social attitude and points of view.

Regarding their educational level, 74% of the interviewees were found to be illiterate, 16% attained primary schooling, and one only completed secondary school and four were university graduates, as table 4.2 shows.

**Table 4–2: Level of Education of Interviewees**

Level of Education	No. of Responses	Percentage
Illiterate	37	74
Primary	8	16
Secondary	1	2
University	4	8
TOTAL	50	100

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.

The majority of the respondents (90%) were illiterate or of primary schooling level, which may indicate that they lack the basic knowledge for managing a business properly [e.g. planning, using book keeping etc]. However, few of the respondents attained relatively higher level of education that could enhance their capabilities to manage their business (10%).

Being asked about their social status, nine of the interviewees mentioned that they were single (18%), the married constituted (32%), the widowed (30%), the divorced (12%), and those who were separated (the husband deserted his family) constituted (8%). This is reflected in table 4.3.

**Table 4–3: Interviewees' Marital Status**

Marital Status	No. of Responses	Percentage
Single	9	18
Married	16	32
Divorced	6	12
Widow	15	30
Separated	4	8
Total	50	100

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.



The data in table 4.3 reveals that the majority of the respondents (74%) were most likely responsible for their families. This was ensured by the interviewees who stated that they were either the sole breadwinners heading the household or supporting the family through the income they generate from their business (37 women). Despite 32% of the interviewees were found to be married, 3 of them (6%) stated that their husbands were unemployed, of low income, or sick. The rest mentioned that they basically seek additional income to assist them with the living expenses and improve the standard of living of their families.

This indicates that in, almost, all studied cases the economic need is found to be the major motive behind the interviewees' engagement in food and beverages activities, being the only providers for their families' basic needs. However, this situation adds to their responsibilities, domestic load and time trap. It, also, shows that a new productive role has been added to their traditional one.

Another factor that was found constituting a motive for the interviewees was the absence of their husbands and/or male guardians. This provided them the chance to take decisions and to be self-dependent.

The interviews, also, showed that all women in the sample were taking care of their family members including their children and other dependents such as the elderly and the sick. The following table 4.4 presents the distribution of the interviewees according to the number of their children.

**Table 4–4: Distribution of Interviewees According to the Number of their children**

Number of Children	No. of Responses	Percentage
No Children	9	18
1 - 3	22	44
4 - 6	10	20
7 - 9	8	16
10 - 12	1	2
Total	50	100

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.

The data in table 4.4 showed that 16% of the respondents have seven to nine children, and few (2%) have 10 to 12 children, however, the majority of the interviewees (64%) had between one to six children, which points to the economic and social burden they bear. In such conditions it is expected that responding to the needs and services of their children would necessarily affect the running of their business. Accordingly, this is expected to constrain them. Although, the rest of the sample (18%) were found to have no children (single women), yet, they explained that they support their families and take care of them. That includes the sick and the children.

As for the ages of the children, the data showed that most of the children (62%) were within school age (5 – 17yrs), 13% of them were below that age and the rest (25%) were above that age. That forced women to struggle hard for the provision of their basic needs specially education. Despite taking care of the children add to their burden, the elder daughters were found to be assisting in the domestic duties and looking after the sick and the young, while, the sons sometimes provide some financial support, working as daily workers or street venders. However, their earnings were mentioned to be meager and inconsistent.

Regarding the economic activities the interviewees practiced, table 4.5 presents the following types.

**Table 4–5: Types of Interviewees' Economic Activities**

Type of Activity	No. of Responses	%
a) Food and Beverages Processing and Selling*	29	58
b) Trading in food items	11	22
c) Provision of Food processing and Catering Service	4	8
d) a + b + c	1	2
e) a + c	5	10
Total	50	100

\*Those who purchase the raw material process it and sell it.

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.

The majority of the interviewees (58%) were found to be involved in food and beverages processing and selling, which included traditional meals. Those involved in making meals were observed to be mostly from middle to old age, married and take care of the household as it is shown in table 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4. Thus, they found this activity suitable for them since some of them cook the food in their houses together with other domestic duties, assisted by other female family members. Besides, normally it takes them a relatively short time to sell their products at the market place and return home to resume other responsibilities for the rest of the day.

The others were found to be involved in processing and selling beverages such as tea, coffee and other traditional drinks such as kharkade, hilba etc. This group was noticed to be of relatively younger age and in most cases unmarried, thus they were to some extent less constraint by domestic duties and spent most of the time practicing their activities till late time in the evening.

The table, also, shows that 22% of the interviewees were trading in various food items such as eggs, vegetables, dried fish, spices and grocery items. While, the third category (8%) was involved in food processing and catering services. This category does not incur the cost of purchasing raw materials but only process and/or service food mostly upon customers' orders. However, some of the interviewees were recognized to mix between two or more of the mentioned activities.

It can be revealed that the type of activities practiced by the members of the sample were of domestic nature and do not require much capital, technical skills or high qualifications, which indicates that it suits the interviewees' capabilities.

As for the location of the activities, 70% of the respondents practice their activities in markets; however, some of them process food in their houses and sell it in the market, while the majority processes and sells it at the market place. Four of the interviewees have restaurants or cafeterias. Three of them cook and serve food in rented small shops (as it is the case in Soug Al Naga), while the others were located in sheds.

**Table 4–6: Location of Interviewees' Activities**

Location	No. of Responses	Percentage
Markets	35	70
Street	6	12
Home-Based	9	18
Total	50	100

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.

The interviews, also, showed that 12% of the respondents practice their activities in various places along streets (see table 4.6). They usually select places of population concentrations near schools, official settings, hospitals, sport stadiums, social clubs, transportation locations etc.

The rest of the sample (18%) carries out their activities at home. They were of two categories: those who process and serve traditional meals to customers to be served at the house, which is arranged in a form that resembles a cafeteria during the day time. While, for the rest of the day the same house functions as a normal traditional one joining all family members. This situation reflected a new phenomenon within the Sudanese context. The other category processes food upon customers' orders, be it an individual or a grocery. In that case, the products were collected by customers or delivered to their selling points.

Therefore, it can be revealed that the number of children the interviewees has and their domestic load, to a great extent, influences their choice for the type of business they practice and its location to be compatible with their household obligations.

As for the regions of the interviewees, it was noticed that the majority were from different areas in western Sudan (80%), while the rest were from northern Sudan (8%), the White Nile area (6%), southern Sudan (2%) and two interviewees were migrants from Chad (4%), as it is presented in table 4.7.

**Table 4–7: Regional Distribution of the Interviewees**

Interviewee's Region	No. of Responses	Percentage
Western Sudan	40	80
Northern Sudan	4	8
White Nile Area	3	6
Republic of Chad	2	4
Southern Sudan	1	2
Total	50	100

Source: Researchers' Data from field work, 2003.

The presence of a relatively high percentage of the sample from western Sudan can be considered normal, as most women working in the informal sector are migrants from pushing areas in various Sudanese regions. The west is among these regions which have been seriously affected by drought and desertification, economic hardships and other crisis throughout years, which forced families to migrate to urban areas seeking better life conditions.

## 4.2 Reasons behind respondents' work

Almost all interviewees stated that they started their economic activities due to financial hardships. Taking into consideration the characteristics of the women in the sample, this coincides with their socio-economic situation, which indicates a real need for financial support to satisfy the basic needs of their families. The majority (73%) was found to be heading the household and the only responsible for providing them with their different needs.

According to their origins, it was found that most of the members of the sample are migrants (about 90%). They moved as individuals or families to urban areas in certain periods of time (during the 1980 or 1990s), due to various reasons such as war, tribal conflicts, drought and desertification etc, and settled in displaced camps or peripheral areas seeking better chances of education, employment, and improved living conditions. Some of those who settled in displaced camps, were supported by the aid of NGOs' for a limited period of time, after which they were left to be fully dependent on themselves and to find a way for survival. Thus, they were placed in a rather difficult situation with their children, having little or no education, with poor skills, and no financial support. Besides, they lacked any kind of support from the state, in terms of financial aids or social services.

Those who migrated to urban areas in families, were supported by their male guardians who started seeking jobs in the informal sector and got involved in marginal activities since they were lacking the required skills and qualifications for good employment chances. Therefore, their income was inconsistent and insufficient. In such situations women found it necessary to search for additional sources of income, utilizing their limited resource which is mainly their effort.

Socially, it is noticed that a relative change occurred in the structure of their families, since they were living in extended families in their places of origin supporting each other, while, in urban areas they live in nuclear families lacking the support of the large family. This makes migrant women live in a time trap due to their full obligations towards their family members, which in turn, influenced their decision regarding the type of activities they undertake. Besides the situation migrant women were forced to live in together with the burden they bear forced them to play additional productive roles seeking economic support. All these points to women empowered by the hard situations of being left solely responsible for their families, self dependent, and without any type of support from the authorities.

On the other side, one of the interviewees mentioned that the major reason behind establishing her food activity is to achieve financial independence and to feel self-worthiness. She explained that her husband is well off and almost all family needs are satisfied. In addition her children attend schools and most of her home duties were done by domestic helpers, thus, she has much time saved for herself which she makes use of in running her business. This indicates that not only the economic need can empower women to assume new roles, but also the existence of an educated and enlightened husband might also provide women the opportunity to take decisions and behave in a different way to achieve self satisfaction.

### **4.3 Selection of the type of economic activity**

The interviews showed that 20% of the respondents started their business as tea-sellers. This could be due to the fact that this type of activities does not require much capital. Usually, the required utensils are available in their houses and the different inputs of production can be attained through borrowing a small amount of money from their friends or relatives, or to be purchased from traders on credit. Besides, it does not need much qualification, technical skills or know how. Therefore selling tea suits their capabilities, since 73% of them is illiterate or of little education. Some of the interviewees mentioned that with time they shifted to other activities mainly food processing and selling. The reason was found to be that for tea selling to be profitable they need to work for long periods of time that necessitates their staying away from their home most of the day, which contradicts with their domestic obligations.

Those who started functioning in food processing and selling based their selection on the assumption that there is continuous and high demand for food, particularly in busy markets with large numbers of customers, therefore, they could guarantee a reasonable return on their activities. In addition, they felt that they can well master that type of business since it is part of their usual domestic activities. Therefore, to some extent, it does not contradict with their daily home activities. In the mean time, the interviewees mentioned that food making enabled them to maintain their families' need for food, keeping them in a good nutritional status.

However, some of the interviewees mentioned that working in food processing and selling is inherited from their elders, thus, they were well trained and well aware of how to manage and control it.

## **4.4 Factors affecting women's work in food and beverages**

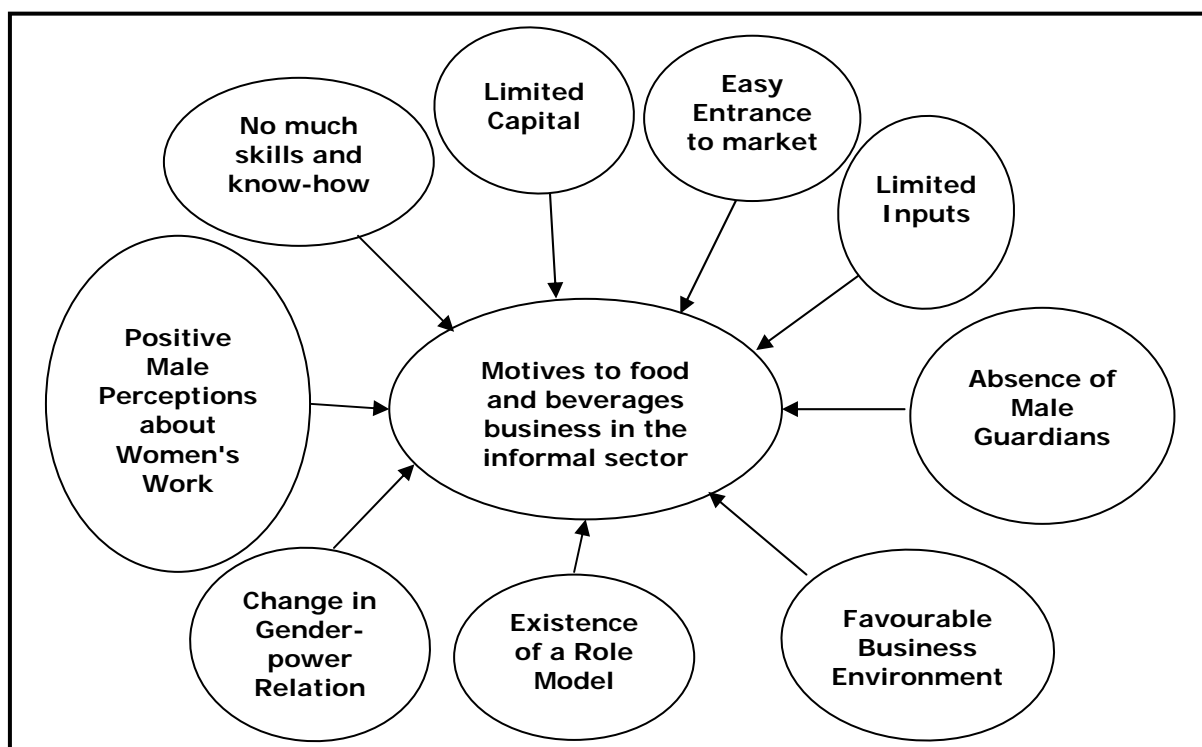
### **4.4.1 Enhancing Factors**

Several enhancing factors were recognized to constitute motives for women working in the informal sector in Sudan and promoted their economic activities. The prevailing economic hardships that the majority of women suffered from were from the major factors. These constituted a major motive behind women's involvement in food and beverages processing and selling activities. It was found to be a common factor among all members of the sample.

Another motive was found to be the ease of entry to markets. Most women were found operating in the informal sector, which is characterized by the need for small capital, limited inputs, no much qualification or skills, no need for advanced technical know how, and to a great extent practices are not bound by formalities or regulatory laws. In addition, the access of women to financial resources through informal channels was another enhancing factor since the practiced activities (processing and selling food and beverages) do not require much capital. Moreover, inputs to economic activities in the informal markets are limited, of low cost, and not much technical know-how is needed.

Another encouraging factor for women was noticed to be the favourable business environment they operate in. This was clearly reflected in the high demand for food products in most of the markets that the interviewees dealt with (dense population since most migrants are involved in trading or other activities in the informal sector), the relationships with traders is based on trust, which facilitated business transactions, and promotion is mainly done by the women themselves through customers' relationships.

Besides, in some cases, food activities practiced were found traditionally practiced by elders in the family which represented a role-model. This saved the required skills and facilitated women's dealings in markets despite the anti socio-cultural norms. While in other cases the absence of the male guardians was found to be a major motive that empowered women to take their places and support the family. The later enabled woman to act independently and to take decisions. It has also been noticed that the change in gender - power relations constituted an enhancing factor for women. The loss or lack of male power gave room to change of gender roles in favour of women. Besides, in some cases the existence of an open-minded male guardian was recognized to be a significant factor enhancing women's engagement in food activities.

**Figure 4–1: Factors Enhancing Business Women in the Informal Markets**

Source: Researchers' Illustration for motives behind women working in food and Beverages in the Informal Sector.

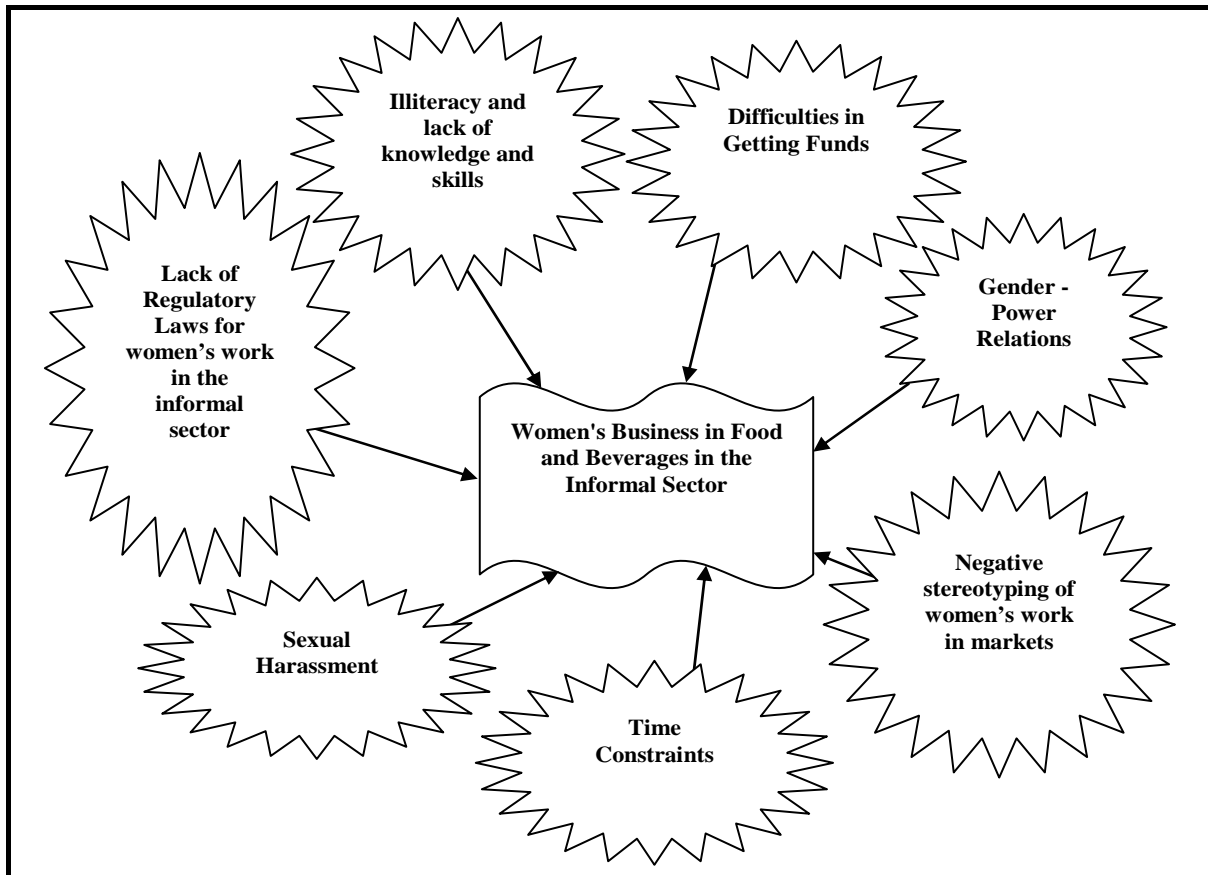
#### 4.4.2 Constraining Factors

As women are motivated by several factors to enter the informal sector and play ensemble of roles to support their families, the study showed that their economic participation was constrained by various elements. Obtaining the required capital to start their business was on the top of these difficulties. Though the required capital is small, yet it was found to be difficult for women to get it. This was validated by the ILO (1998b:4) regarding the lack of access to informal and formal credit by women micro and small entrepreneurs. In addition the majority of women operating in the informal sector is illiterate and lacks the necessary knowledge and skills. These are mainly reflected in some aspects of managing their activities e.g. book-keeping. Most women entrepreneurs depend on their experience for managing their activities.

Social wise, women suffer time constraints due to gender division of labour that traditionally exists in the Sudanese society, the dual roles they in the reproductive and productive spheres and their burden with domestic duties. Moreover, the gender - power relations assumes male's leadership over the family which gives room to male control on women's mobility in some cases regardless of their ages or educational level. In addition the negative stereotyping of women's work in markets marginalizes women's activities and exposes them to act in harsh socio-cultural and regulatory environmental conditions. The lack of Regulatory Laws for women's work in the informal sector lead to total lack of protection against mal-treatment of authorities, harassment, and confiscation of women's equipment or other inputs related to their activities. This hinders women's economic participation and exposes them to great losses that hurt them badly both economically

and morally. Besides, in the absence of legal protection, women are exposed to sexual harassment in the informal markets practiced by both male customers and some of the officials, exploiting the form of power gained through their positions. Women's constraining factors can be summarized in the figure that follows.

**Figure 4–2: Obstacles to Micro-business Women in the Informal Sector**



Source: Researchers' Illustration.

#### 4.5 Women's attitude towards marketing their products

Despite their limited marketing knowledge, women were found practicing the marketing of their products in the informal sector based on their experiences and innate talents. They deal with the marketing-mix according to common practices they used to among their mates.

As for the type of the product they process or sell, the majority of women base their decisions on the customers' demand, with consideration to the level of their income and purchasing power. Most of their customers are of low – medium level of income, so they prefer traditional food items that are relatively cheap. Such types of products match women's skills and limited resources. However, in some cases when the business women are educated and have relatively good access to knowledge and resources the selection of the food products might be based on women's interests, skills and resources. In such cases the customers of those specialty products are of relatively high taste and purchasing power.



The product's price is usually set upon women's awareness with their competitors' price which they try not to exceed. However, they are also conscious about the cost – return dimension. They are keen to limit their costs which might sometimes be at the expense of the quality of their products. Most of them try to cover their expenses on daily basis and to save what assist them in their subsistence. However, some of them were found to be mixing between the accounts of their business and their living expenses in a way that lead to the wearing away of their capital.

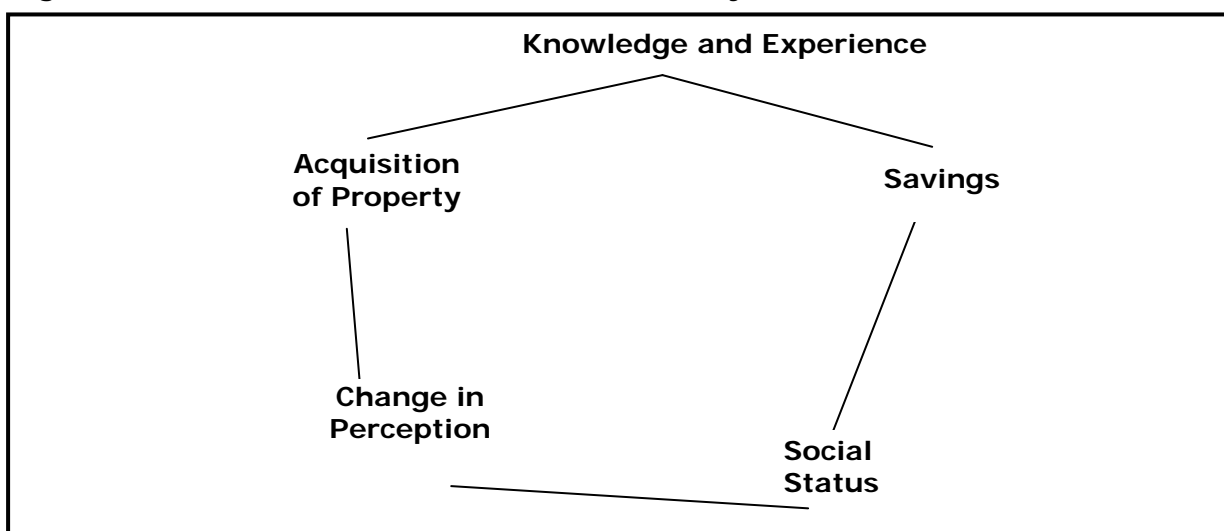
Regarding the location of practicing their activities, it is noticed that most women focus on locations of dense population to guarantee high flow of customers and high return. Accordingly, they sell their products near schools, clubs, stadium, central markets and the like. Some of the women prefer to carry out their economic activities at their home to take care of their children and their domestic duties in the same time. This might also enable other family members to assist them with their activities, in addition to reducing transportation costs.

- To promote their sales, women apply traditional methods and advertising through words of mouth, personal ties, social relations and networking. They maintain good relations with customers through trustworthiness, good presentation of products, cleanliness and caring for self image. Besides they offer some of their food products to neighbours and relatives in the form of gifts in social occasions and festivals.
- Tax aversion is found to be common, which is to a great extent related to traders' culture. Besides, commercial transactions are mostly based on trust. This is manifested in selling and purchasing on credit, despite the women's lack of book keeping knowledge.

#### 4.6 Socio-economic impact of women's work

The findings of the study showed that women's work in food and beverages has had both positive and negative effects on themselves and their families; however, the former was the dominant as the following figure shows.

**Figure 4–3: Socio-economic Benefits Gained By Interviewees**



Source: Researchers' Illustration

It can be generally revealed that women's work has up lifted their welfare position, improved their standards of living and in some cases led them to acquire a better style of life, according to which they achieved better social status. This can be observed in their abilities to provide their families with the basic needs, particularly housing (either rented or constructed), education, and their abilities in running the household and maintaining living.

The interviewees stated that education attainment is considered a top priority for them. Almost all of them showed their emphasis and keenness, assuring that their children should attain high level of education. "...so that our children should not suffer and face the same miseries as we had", said one of the women. Children in school age are sent to schools and some have already graduated from universities. However, some school dropouts were found among the relatively elder children either because the family does not have enough financial resources or due to the need of the mother to their help in the domestic duties in case of daughters.

Another aspect that women's activities enabled them to meet, as they mentioned, is the provision of health care expenses. Many of the interviewees take care of their elderly sick parents, relatives, or chronically sick husbands and pay medication for them. This is in addition to any other occasional ill health situation and provision of medical care.

Besides, all interviewees agreed that they became better off in spending in dressing up, and satisfying other personal needs for themselves and their children, specially those who have daughters in high level of education, who needs to spend on clothing, transportation, stationeries and to have daily pocket money. The group of educated women in the sample reflected high aspiration to a more sophisticated standard of living and modern life style noticed from the schooling of their children.

The interviewees, also, stated that they became more able to spent in social occasions such as "Eids" - the annual religious festival of which the Sudanese Muslims are very conscious and is considered a period of high celebrity-. Families usually buy new clothes, furniture, household equipment and utensils in addition to special types of celebrity food for the occasion. The ability or inability to spend in this occasion has a social implication linked to the family status.

The interviewees, also, revealed that through running their food business, women became more aware of the need to save and they actually participate in saving groups "ROSCAs" (an informal saving plan based on collecting shares and rotating payments among the group members) the sums of which are used to meet various needs and in some cases are employed to improve their working conditions through acquiring new facilities or equipment however simple they could be. Yet, some of the interviewees mentioned that they were not able to get involved in any fixed saving plans due to the fluctuations in their incomes. Nonetheless, they reflected their awareness with its importance for their economic well being and the development of their activities.

Women's food activities were, also, noticed to have some impact on their social life. It is well known that within Sudanese society people are very supportive to each other in different occasions such as wedding ceremonies, childbirth, and funerals. People make

contributions in cash or in kind -the Arabic word is 'Mujib'- to assist each other to face hardships or unpleasant situations and to cover the expenses of celebrating happy events which are relatively costly. The interviewees were so rejoiced that they became able to contribute from their own income in such occasions and to assist their relatives and friends when the need arise. This practice denotes social worth and acknowledgement. Fatma, one of the interviewees who sells 'Kisra' in 'Soug Arabi' remembered how she used to get so embarrassed not to give 'Mujib' to her neighbour when she gave birth several times, " however, that neighbour insisted to give me 'Mujib' every time I give birth. I used to accept it though it made me feel unease and sorry, however, I was sure that my neighbour is willing to help" Fatma said. Such situations are very much related to the social status of the interviewees in the sense that they help in networking and creating a space for those women among their social group with the sense of dignity and respect.

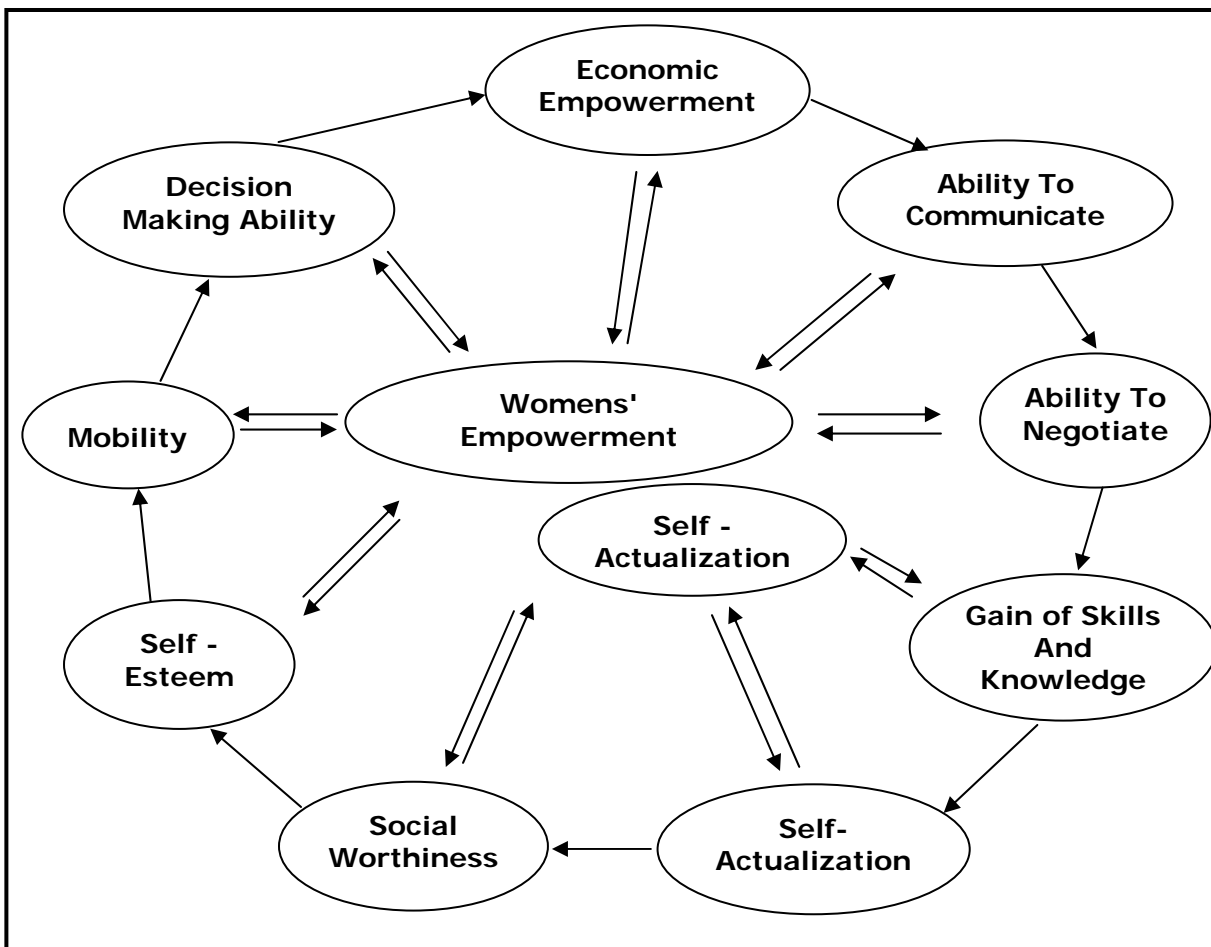
Another social impact that was made clear by the interviewees is that they have been considered by their families a good example, resembling a role model to be followed, as they also started playing leading roles in supporting some members of the family to follow their steps. e.g. Zeinab, one of the interviewees who supported her sister to establish a similar activity to hers; which is home-based food processing and selling.

Women's engagement in food activity and their ability to provide living resulted in more stability and cohesion among their families, even those who were very poor and depending on the aids of NGOs during former periods became more settled and less tensioned.

In most cases, it was found that the business added to their empowerment and changed in the power-relations within families, which gave women more control over the family members. Besides, it made them gain self esteem and self actualization. Moreover, through their continuous contacts in markets with customers and traders, women became skillful in communication and negotiation, as both processes are considered essential for the success of their activities.

The figure below reflects the indicators to women's empowerment as they were revealed through the interviews.

Figure 4–4: Indicators To Interviewees' Empowerment



Source: Researchers' Illustration

On the other hand, the findings showed that these women challenged many of the cultural norms and values, especially those pertinent to the patriarchal ideology, causing relative change in the traditional and social values. Issues such as women's mobility, division of labour and decisions about financial and familial matters are the most significant areas that have been subjected to change.

Despite the positive achievements that resulted from the interviewees' involvement in their economic activities, some negative impacts were mentioned.

In some cases, the continuous contribution of women to maintain living led husbands to opting out of family support and responsibility. Some of the interviewees stated that their husbands stopped supporting them and in other cases stopped work all together. Other reasons may be related to this situation; however, it is felt that it could be very much related to males' dependence on their wives' provisions to the family. Besides, other males such as grown up sons might not assume their socially supposed roles of supporting their families. Fatma, an interviewee of a home-based food activity stated that her 26 years old son, who used to work as a mechanic, stopped assisting her in supporting other family members. He joined a religious sect and became a follower, spending most of his time in the worship place.

By their involvement in food activities women became more burdened by their work, carrying out a dual role; productive and reproductive. This is more apparent in cases of women with relatively high number of children. Most of them, specially those who work in markets stay for long hours to sell their products yet, they carry out all the activities necessary for keeping the house after they return home, so they spent a lot of effort and time doing that. Few get some assistance from their family members.

In some cases, children are neglected and are left to hazards, being left unattended for long periods of time, while women are at work.

#### 4.7 Interviewees' success criteria and indicators

The analysis of data revealed several criteria that served as indicators for the success of women entrepreneurs in food and beverages. These criteria included:

- **The life-span of the activity practiced by women:** Most activities continued for five or more years. Therefore continuity of the business for such a period of time is an indicator for its success. During that period women proved to be able to survive and cope with seasonality, various fluctuating demand and face all market forces including competition.
- **Development of the activity:** that was to a great extent reflected in the women's ability to expand their business and diversify their products. Most of the interviewees mentioned that they changed their products several times during its span of life according to the market demand and needs to be able to survive.
- **Trustworthiness:** This was clearly shown in women's dealings with other traders and suppliers as well as the increasing the number and regularity of their customers.
- **Stability of income:** Most of the interviewees enjoyed relatively stable income in spite of its limited size and assured profit optimization. This also points to their success in running their business.
- **The socio-economic benefits they gained from their economic activity.** These were obvious in the women's outlook, satisfaction, the relative well-being of their families, their ability to financially support their children's education, satisfy their families' basic needs and flourish their strong ties and social relations with friends, neighbours and relatives that represent an important tradition and cultural aspect. Besides, their ability to acquire properties and assets and to save also indicates women's success in running their business.

## 5 Summary and Conclusions

### 5.1 Study background

This study is one of the series of interdisciplinary researches conducted within the link program of Ahfad University for Women (Sudan) with Humboldt-University of Berlin (Germany). The studies focused on women in development to figure out Sudanese women's survival strategies; challenges and vision. The researches were carried out by a team of German and Sudanese staff from different academic levels. The main aims of the researches were to

- Assist the two partners in creating a cultural bridge between Sudanese and German through understanding and experience.
- Develop higher institutions through provision of science enlightenment and knowledge.
- Develop university staff members by exposing them to foreign teaching and research spheres.
- Support the diffusion of knowledge generated under different environmental and socio-economic conditions, and
- Stress the importance of gender relations in development. (OTTO, 1985: 5).

This study was carried out within four years (2002 – 2005). It focused on women in food and beverages business in urban markets of Khartoum State. It aimed at identifying the reasons behind women's work in small-scale business figuring out the constraining and enhancing factors that affected their performance as entrepreneurs. Besides, it tried to identify women's attitude and strategies in dealing with marketing issues and survival, and to find out the socio-economic impact of their activities on their families.

The research was based on the hypothesis that business women are highly stimulated by their socio-economic conditions and that their work in markets has positively affected their families' life and their ability to survive.

The study followed the descriptive and analytical approaches making use of both secondary and primary data. The preliminary survey conducted during Oct-Dec 2002 showed that women's activities were practiced in various places; in markets, restaurants, streets, and in their homes. Accordingly, the study was carried out in thirteen urban markets and areas in Khartoum State which includes; Khartoum Province, Khartoum North Province and Omdurman Province. A sample of 50 women practicing varieties of food and beverages activities was interviewed.

Based on the data analysis the following can be revealed:

## 5.2 Background of respondents

1. Most of the interviewees were found to be originally from rural areas of Sudan who immigrated to Khartoum State due to various reasons such as the prevailing hard economic conditions, emigration of the male guardians, the environmental degradation and war. All these factors forced women and their families to move to more secure areas seeking better life conditions to support their families and to survive. Few of the interviewees were found to be educated and practice food and beverages activities to support their families financially.
2. The majority of the respondents were illiterate (74%), while 16% received primary schooling and few (4%) completed secondary or university education.
3. Almost all respondents were found to be responsible for supporting their families financially; 77% were fully responsible because of divorce, separation, death of the husband, while 23% were partially responsible providing additional income. This new productive responsibility adds to their traditional roles and home duties.

## 5.3 Reasons behind women's involvement

1. Many factors altogether were behind women's involvement in small-scale business and entrepreneurship. The economic hardship prevailing in Sudan, the high employment rates, males' migration, war and poverty constituted significant motives that led women to assume new productive roles and practice different economic activities to assist them in supporting their families.
2. Women were obliged to select specific activities that suit their limited capabilities. Their high illiteracy rates, limited skills, and lack of finance, in addition to their household responsibilities constituted major reasons for selecting food and beverages business as an economic activity in the informal market.

## 5.4 Enhancing factors

1. The easy penetration to informal markets, the inputs of the food and beverages activities that require limited capital, low costs and no much technical know-how, in addition to the favourable business environment that provided great and continuous demand for the service constituted significant enhancing factors.
2. The role model in the family served as guidance for some women in their business and provided all required skills and knowledge that facilitated dealings in markets and minimized socio-cultural resistance for similar economic activities.
3. Business women were also found to be enhanced by the absence of the male guardian, the existence of an open minded male member and the loss of the male's power. All of which gave women room to be independent, to take decisions, and to change gender roles and power relations in their favour.
4. A relatively positive socio- cultural change in the perceptions of the society towards women's work (particularly the young) in markets was noticed to be an enhancing factor, influenced by the prevailing deteriorating economic conditions.

## 5.5 Constraining factors

1. Though the required capital for the business is small, yet women suffer difficulties for obtaining the required starting capital.
2. Time Constraints was a common factor among all respondents due to the traditional division of labour.
3. The prevailing gender - power relations in the Sudanese society that imposes males' control on women's mobility appeared to be an obstacle in some cases.
4. Women's illiteracy and lack of knowledge and skills were obviously reflected in some aspects of managing their activities e.g. book keeping. Most interviewees were depending on their own experience.
5. The negative stereotyping of women's work in markets on part of the society marginalized women's activities and exposed them to act in harsh environmental conditions (both socio-cultural and regulatory).
6. Lack of Regulatory Laws for women's work in the informal sector constituted a major constraining factor. It was clearly reflected in the total lack of protection against maltreatment of authorities, harassment, and confiscation of women's equipment or other inputs related to their activities.
7. Sexual harassment was reported, practiced by both male customers and some of the official personnel, each of which were exploiting their forms of power.

## 5.6 Respondents' attitudes for marketing and survival of their business

1. The Selection of the food and beverages products was based on the customers' demand with consideration to the level of their income and purchasing power as well as women skills and resources.
2. Prices were set according to the women's awareness with their competitors' price and their consciousness of the cost – return dimension, trying to cover their expenses on daily basis.
3. Locations for selling products were selected based on the size of the population to guarantee high flow of customers and high turn over.
4. Promotion is made through personal ties and social networking, in addition to maintaining good relations with customers through trustworthiness, good presentation of products, cleanliness and caring for self image.
5. Tax aversion is found to be common.
6. Commercial transactions were in most cases based on trust.



## 5.7 The socio-economic impacts of women's business

These were reflected on the following:

### 1. The Positive Impacts:

- Gaining of knowledge and experience.
- Developing Role Models.
- Increased the ability of acquisition of property.
- Enhanced women's ability to save.
- Enabled women to meet expenses of children's education, health and medical care.
- Resulted in more stability and cohesion among family members.
- Affected relatively positive change in the social perception regarding women's work in markets.
- Improved women's social status and changed the power-relations within families.
- Empowered women economically and socially. That was clearly shown in their mobility, their ability to communicate and negotiate their self esteem and self-actualization, and feeling social worthiness.

### 2. The Negative Impacts:

- The continuous contribution of women to maintain living led some husbands to skip their families' support and responsibility.
- Sons tended to stop their socially assumed roles of supporting their families.
- Women became heavily burdened by the ensemble of tasks they perform due to their multi-roles.
- Children are neglected and left to hazards, being left unattended for long periods of time during women's working hours.

## 5.8 The research hypothesis

The findings of the study validated the two hypotheses that Business women are highly stimulated by their socio-economic conditions and that their work in markets has positively affected their families' life and their ability to survive.

## 5.9 Suggested recommendations

Despite women's economic activities in the informal sector in general are marginalized by the government authorities and ignored statistically, it was clear for the researchers that the number of business women providing services in food and beverages is quite large and will continue to increase as long as there is no economic and political stability. Accordingly, small-scale business women should be offered ample facilities and support. Women unions, Trade unions, NGOs and civil societies beside the Ministry of Social Affairs should be responsible for that. Thus, it is recommended that:

At the institutional level:

- A higher committee should be formed of members from the above mentioned organizations, and representatives from the business women working in food and beverages in the informal sector.
- Research studies should be carried out to provide comprehensive information and statistical data regarding the size of business women in food and beverages to assist in setting policies in this regard.
- The proposed committee should:
  - Call for assurance of legislation and regulations to protect the legal rights of working women in the formal sector.
  - Carry out campaigns to raise women's awareness about their working conditions, human and legal and rights.
  - Encourage women to attend literacy classes and provide educational facilities for that.
  - Give women access to soft loans (credit) and legal and technical advice.
  - Offer women the chances for technical training to upgrade their skills in food and beverages processing and services.
  - Provide women the chances for training in management of small-scale business and save the required facilities for that.
  - These organizations should also work for establishing co-operatives to facilitate communication with business women and assist in the organization of tidy and attractive local markets and small shops for selling their products.

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