Chapter 87
Gender, Organization, and Change in Sudan

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ABSTRACT

The position of women and role of gender in Sudan has been researched from anthropological, sociological and economic traditions. This study will review the position of Sudanese women within the formal employment sector, setting this within the specific political, economic and social context of the country. In addition, it will examine women in political and voluntary settings, as these are also important decision making arenas. There has been little published material previously on this topic. The study draws on secondary data from unpublished studies and master's dissertations, and also grey material available in Sudan. In addition, semi-structured interviewing of a purposive sample of selected informants was used. The data were analysed thematically. The findings were that many behavioural patterns seen elsewhere were evident in Sudan, such as stereotyping and discrimination. However, educated Sudanese women sought equality within a man's world, unlike the equal but different gender roles found by Metcalfe (2007) in parts of the Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

The position of women and role of gender in Sudan has been researched from anthropological, sociological and economic traditions. A noticeable gap is gender applied to formal organizations. As female graduates have recently exceeded male graduatesand more educated women move into formal employment, this chapter will review the position of Sudanese women within employment,as well as in political and voluntary settings, setting this within the political, economic and social context of the country.

BACKGROUND

The Sudanese Context

Until the 2011 secession of the South, Sudan was the largest country in Africa, ranging from desert in the north to tropical rain forest in the south. The Nile river is an important source for irrigation and settlement (Badri, 2008a). In excess of 40 percent of the Sudanese population identify themselves as Arabs, although rarely resembling Arabs from the Levant or Gulf (Clammer, 2007). The dominant group is described as Riverine Arabs, overwhelmingly Muslim. In the South (now independent) there are ethnic links with Kenya and Uganda, as well as the Dinka, the largest non-Arab group (Clammer, 2007). There are other smaller ethnic groups, both Arab and non-Arab. The Sudanese are over 70% Muslim, with generally southern Christians, and some indigenous religions (Clammer, 2007).

Sudan gained its independence in 1956 from a British-Egyptian administration. It then declined to join the (then 'British') Commonwealth, instead embracing the Arab League, later changing its principal official language from English to Arabic. Awareness of this political orientation is crucial to understanding the national identity of the country. Sudan had both democratic and military regimes after independence, culminating in the 1989 military coup. Long-running conflict between the north and south, principally about the distribution of resources but also with ethnic and religious elements, erupted into a lengthy civil war, leading to 4.9m internally displaced persons by 2009 (UNDP, 2009).. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005 set up a devolved government in the South and a power sharing administration for the country as a whole (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2009). The United Nations had a peace support mission throughout Sudan (UNMIS), particular focused on the south (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2009). The conflict in Darfur had not been satisfactorily resolved at the time of writing, and the UN had a humanitarian mission (only) to that region. In March 2009 the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for President Bashir, for alleged crimes against the inhabitants of Darfur. In April 2010 there were the first multi-party elections for 24 years (Guardian, 2010), from which the SPLM and Umma (nationalist) parties withdrew in protest at alleged irregularities; President Bashir won. After an overwhelming referendum the South seceded in 2011.

Sudan has recently exported agricultural crops, and also imported food (Clammer, 2007). The commercial exploitation of oil started in 1999, leading to infrastructure developments. The long-standing US and EU embargo on foreign direct investment led to significant Chinese, Malaysian and Arab investment. In 2008 Sudan was ranked near the bottom of middle income countries according to the UNDP Human Development Report, with average income at US$1,887. However as 90% of the population were said to live on a dollar a day, there were large economic disparities. Post conflict 87% of government income was spent on security, with deleterious effects on health and education services. Urban/rural differences were particularly evident in relation to lifestyle and infrastructure.

As in MENA countries, there were three contradictory sources of law relating to individuals: civil, Sharia, and customary. Before 1983 women entered higher education, worked, travelled and had freedom to pursue different lifestyles and dress (Badri, 2008b); then the legal presumption changed and Sharia became pre-eminent (Badawi, 2003). The 2005 interim constitution gave equal rights for all citizens regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, class, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or other status (Al Fatih, 2005). Sudan has ratified a number of UN Conventions includ-

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