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# COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SECTOR

## The Republic of the Sudan



**COUNTRY  
GENDER  
ASSESSMENT  
SERIES**

**NEAR EAST AND  
NORTH AFRICA**



# **COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SECTOR**

**COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT SERIES**

**The Republic of the Sudan**

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Cover: A young Palestinian agro-entrepreneur shows off some strawberries in her farm near the West Bank city of Jenin.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations I

<b>ANC</b>	Antenatal care	<b>GNI</b>	Gross national income
<b>CBS</b>	Central Bureau of Statistics	<b>HDI</b>	Human development index
<b>CD</b>	Constitutional document	<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced people
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>CGA</b>	Country Gender Assessment	<b>IGA</b>	Income-generating activity
<b>CPA</b>	Comprehensive Peace Agreement	<b>INC</b>	Interim National Constitution
<b>CPF</b>	Country programming framework	<b>IPR</b>	Inactive population rate
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization	<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>EPR</b>	Employment-to-population ratio	<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	<b>MMC</b>	Mixed Migration Centre
<b>FDG</b>	Focus group discussion	<b>MMR</b>	Maternal mortality rate
<b>FFC</b>	Forces for Freedom and Change	<b>MoAF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources
<b>FGM/C</b>	Female genital mutilation/cutting	<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence	<b>MoLSD</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Development
<b>GDI</b>	Gender development index	<b>NBHS</b>	National Baseline Household Survey
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product	<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>GDWA</b>	General Directorate for Women's Affairs	<b>PPP</b>	Purchasing power parity
<b>GDWFA</b>	General Directorate for Women and Family Affairs	<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty reduction strategy paper
<b>GII</b>	Gender inequality index	<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals

<b>SWU</b>	Sudanese Women Union	<b>USD</b>	United States dollar
<b>TBA</b>	Traditional birth attendant	<b>VAWG</b>	Violence against women and girls
<b>UN</b>	United Nations	<b>VER</b>	Vulnerable Employment Rate
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework	<b>WAD</b>	Women and development
<b>UNHCR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	<b>WADA</b>	Women and Development Association
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

# Executive summary



The Sudan has been undergoing major political and social changes since the December 2018 revolution and the end of the 30-year-long dictatorship. The directions and magnitude of these changes are being determined in the current challenging transitional period, which is loaded with internal and external threats, but also with numerous opportunities and possibilities. Although a peace agreement was reached in October 2019, two of the major armed movements are yet to ratify it. In the year and a half that has elapsed of the transitional period, political and socio-economic difficulties have continued to grow and pose a challenge for the transitional government and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). Added to these difficulties are pressures affecting the Sudanese people, as the prices of bread, fuel and other necessities escalate, with no clear economic reforms or solutions on the horizon. Furthermore, the impact of the Sudan Partnership Conference, which pledged almost USD 2 billion, has yet to be seen or felt.

Despite women's rights being ensured in the constitutional document and underlined by the Prime Minister as one of his government's priorities, gender mainstreaming is not institutionalized within government bodies. Consequently, gender equality objectives are rarely reflected in policy frameworks and action plans and, therefore, are rarely operationalized. Moreover, the Sudan's budget and budgetary allocation are gender-blind, and the gender units at the different ministries often have insufficient resources and inadequately trained staff.

The Sudan is quite polarized and duality shapes individual as well as the collective mindsets. Such polarization is manifested in a series of dichotomies: urban–rural; centre–periphery; men–women; old–young; have–have-not; Muslims–non-Muslims; modern–traditional; pro-government–opposition; etc. These dichotomies have contributed to creating and enforcing power relations within Sudanese communities, and are internalized in the mindsets of both men and women.

Agriculture is the most important economic sector in the Sudan, accounting for nearly one-third of national gross domestic product (GDP) and providing livelihood to approximately two-thirds of the population. The agriculture sector in the Sudan is divided into the four main subsectors: crops, livestock, fisheries and forestry. Crop production, in turn, is divided into rainfed and irrigated subsectors. The rainfed subsector is typically divided into traditional and semimechanized farming systems. Although women play a fundamental role in all levels of the Sudan's food and nutrition systems, they face specific challenges and vulnerabilities due to deeply entrenched gender inequalities. Women farmers suffer from marginalization, manifested in poor access to productive resources and services. They are generally limited to the practice of traditional, small-scale production, primarily for subsistence and local consumption. Efforts by United Nations (UN) agencies and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) to further women's inclusion and empowerment have improved the well-being of women farmers slightly, but have not yet achieved gender equality in agriculture. Addressing these gender inequalities is key to unlocking the Sudan's potential in agriculture and rural development.

This Country Gender Assessment (CGA) of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in the Sudan aims to enhance the understanding of gender dimensions in the agriculture and rural sector in order to support the formulation and implementation of informed and evidence-based policies, programmes and services.

The findings show that, despite the common issues facing Sudanese men and women in rural areas, the lack of gender equality in rural areas, and in the agricultural sector in particular, generally places women at a clear disadvantage. This may be due, in part, to the fact that the role of women in agriculture is not well documented, due to the lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive analyses. Many interventions target women without fully understanding the situation from a gender perspective or the root causes that

make Sudanese women particularly vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization.

There is a pressing need to translate the Sudan's political commitment to gender equality into action. A number of specific recommendations, targeted at the Government, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other actors, are provided in the last section of this assessment. These begin with the reform of current laws and regulations to conform to the post revolution constitutional document and international frameworks, as well as the reform of legislative and policy frameworks relevant

to agriculture and the rural sector, in order to ensure women's rights and access to productive and natural resources. It is also vital to develop national technical capacities to work on gender and to integrate gender considerations into the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of agricultural policies and strategies at the national level. Finally, it is recommended that development interventions be soundly based on gender analysis, considering women's basic needs and strategic interests, with attention to social dimensions other than gender that can create marginalization and exclusion (such as age, disability, residency status, etc.).



Sudanese Fishermen  
returning from their  
morning fishing tour  
on the Nile River at the  
Blue Nile State.

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IDP farmer checking  
on her sesame field  
in Azaza village-Blue  
Nile State.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background and objectives of the CGA

Situated in northern Africa at the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, the Sudan is the third largest country in the continent, with an area of 1 861 484 km<sup>2</sup>. It is bordered by seven countries – Egypt to the north, Eritrea and Ethiopia to the east, South Sudan to the south, Central African Republic (the) to the southwest, Chad to the west and Libya to the northwest. The Red Sea borders the country to the northeast. The country's landscape is primarily flat plains, with several isolated mountain ranges and large seasonal valleys. The Nile River is the country's most prominent topographical feature and its primary source of water.

Agriculture is the most important economic sector in the Sudan, and women are key contributors to production in all the agricultural subsectors. However, gender inequalities arising from legislative, economic and societal factors severely restrict their potential as individuals and as farmers. Although progress has been made in recognizing the need for gender equality under the transitional government, this has yet to be operationalized and much remains to be done to improve the status of women farmers and enable them to fulfil their potential.

FAO recognizes gender equality as fundamental to the Organization's values and mandate to achieve food security for all by raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity and natural resource management, and improving the lives of rural populations. The purpose of this Country Gender Assessment (CGA) of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in the Sudan is to enhance the understanding of gender perspectives in agriculture and rural development in the country. It has been designed to provide information to the Government of the Sudan to support the development and implementation of effective policies, programmes and services to tackle gender inequalities and empower rural women in all areas of life. It is also intended to inform the work of FAO and to facilitate the

provision of country-specific inputs into broader UN processes. In addition, the CGA aims to:

- » inform FAO country-level planning and programming in line with national development priorities and the FAO mandate and strategic framework;
- » facilitate FAO contribution to the next Country Programming Framework (CPF) and the next United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the Sudan; and
- » support other key national processes with up-to-date and objective information on the situation of rural women in the country.

This study was conducted using a mixed approach, including a desk review of a wide variety of reports, project documents, statistics and studies; in-depth interviews; and focus group discussions (FGDs) with male and female farmers in rural regions of four states: Khartoum, South Darfur, Kassala and Gezira.

## 1.2. FAO in the Sudan

FAO has been operating in the Sudan for more than 35 years, in close collaboration with the Government of the Sudan and other UN partners. The CPF for 2017–2020 affirms the commitment of FAO to assist the Government of the Sudan in its development goals around food and nutrition security, sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, disaster risk management and resilience building. The CPF is organized around the following three strategic priority areas:

- » sustainable increase in agricultural production and productivity;
- » increase in agriculture-based economic growth and incomes;
- » increased resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

These national priorities are linked to the regional priorities identified and endorsed by the last Regional Conference for the Near East and North Africa, held in 2020, namely:

- » Rural transformation and inclusive value chains;
- » Food security and healthy diets for all;
- » Greening agriculture;
- » Building resilience to multiple shocks.

In terms of gender equality, FAO Sudan has recognized the need for and committed to promoting gender mainstreaming at both the planning and operational levels. This is reflected, for instance, in the Plan of Action 2015–2019 connected to the prior CPF, in which gender equality is highlighted as one of four cross-cutting areas of work.

### 1.3. Methodology and structure of the report

The CGA study was conducted using a mixed approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative as well as primary and secondary data and information. This involved: a) a desk review and analysis of a wide variety of reports, project documents, statistics and studies; b) individual and group interviews; and c) FGDs with women and men farmers in four states. The interviews were conducted with key informants, including FAO technical staff, experts from line ministries and other national authorities, relevant UN organizations, national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and research institutions and universities. Given limitations of time and the complexity of the context, research was conducted using snowball sampling, an approach in which the researcher starts with a limited number of relevant sources of information (documents, institutions and persons) through which more sources are then identified. Furthermore, a data-merging approach was used for analysing and combining the findings. Accordingly, quantitative data in the form of numeric information were combined and thematically integrated with qualitative data from texts and interviews into coherent findings. Finally, the data were triangulated to the greatest extent possible to ensure accuracy.

To provide updated information on the role of women farmers in selected rural areas in Khartoum, South Darfur, Kassala and Gezira, a participatory gender-sensitive analysis was conducted, focusing on the following core questions:

- » Who does what?
- » Who owns what?
- » Who has access to/controls what?
- » Who knows what?
- » Who benefits?

A variety of gender-sensitive tools were employed for the analysis. For example, daily routines were recorded to determine the roles and activities of men and women during an average day in order to assess their workload and gender-ascribed roles and how that links to food security. A gender analytical matrix was used, mainly to assess whether certain food security interventions had an impact on gender relations at individual, family and community levels. In the area of access to resources and decision-making, a simplified form of the Harvard Analytical Framework was used to obtain information about who is doing what, where and when; and who is in control and is making decisions.

There are a number of limitations to this study that are important to highlight. First, the Sudan is characterized by great dissimilarities among different regions, states and localities, reflected in different ecological, socio-economic and cultural conditions, which in turn impact gender dynamics. This assessment focuses on general findings widely applicable to most rural settings in the Sudan, although specific regional differences have been noted to the extent possible. Another important limitation is that much of the available data is outdated, since most of the reports and publications reviewed are based on the (sometimes adjusted) results of the National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS) published in 2009, which contains data collected in 2007–08. (A subsequent NBHS was conducted in 2014, but the results had not been published at the time of conducting this CGA and, despite repeated attempts, it was not possible to obtain the survey results.) Furthermore, the last agricultural census was conducted in 1964 and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF) lacks sex-disaggregated data, although this is available at the state level. Additionally, very little comprehensive data on gender in agriculture is available, since most data is either not disaggregated or is disaggregated by region or by gender, but rarely by both. Another significant challenge in conducting the study was that it coincided with the current transitional period during which new laws, policies and strategies are being drafted, pending ratification and adoption by the relevant bodies.



In addition to providing a gender analysis of agriculture and the rural sector in the Sudan, this report provides background information on the country's agriculture sector and recommendations for improving gender equality in the agriculture and rural sector. The report is structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the Sudan's agriculture and rural sector, laying out key socio-economic characteristics and providing insights into the policy, legislative and institutional context that conditions efforts towards gender equality. Section 3 provides a gender analysis of agriculture and rural livelihoods, presenting existing policies and political

processes as well as institutional capacities around the promotion of gender equality in agriculture and rural development and around the empowerment of rural women. Section 3 also covers gaps that require attention and describes the main causes and areas of gender inequality in the different agricultural subsectors. Finally, based on the information collected and analysed, Section 4 presents the main findings, highlighting the areas that should be prioritized for action and provides recommendations for the Government of the Sudan, FAO and other key partners and stakeholders.



Sudanese women working as plant tissue lab technicians in Zadna Co. in Khartoum.  
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# 2. Country profile



## 2.1. Overview of the agricultural and rural sectors

The Sudan's ecological zones, characterized by diverse patterns of rainfall, soil and vegetation, determine the agricultural production systems and rural livelihood patterns in the country. Five main ecological zones shape the country (Abdel Magid and Badi, 2008). The desert zone (with annual rainfall below 75 mm) covers northern Sudan across North Kordofan and Darfur states. This zone is scarcely populated, with the exception of a limited stretch of the Nile Valley to the eastern half of the northern region. Rural areas stretch south from the desert band. The semidesert zone (with annual rainfall of 75–300 mm) stretches across Um Dam in Kordofan and Um Kaddada in Darfur in the north. Livestock herding dominates much of this zone. The woodland savannah zone (with annual rainfall of 300–1 500 mm) starts south of the semidesert in the form of a belt stretching from east to west, covering the remainder of the country. Within this zone, crop production is the main agricultural activity. The flood zone comprises the swamps flooded by the White Nile and inland shores. Finally, the montane zone (with annual rainfall of over 1 500 mm) comprises four mountain masses where vegetation significantly differs from the surrounding areas due to the higher rainfall.

The agriculture sector in the Sudan is divided into four main subsectors: crop, livestock, fisheries and forestry. Crop production, in turn, is divided into rainfed and irrigated subsectors. The rainfed subsector is typically divided into traditional and semimechanized farming systems.

Traditional rainfed farming is the dominant farming system, covering 60 percent of the total cultivated land and employing about 65 percent the Sudanese agricultural labour force (Ministry of Environment and Physical Development, 2014), with women constituting 17 percent of that labour force (Ahmed *et al.*, 2012). The subsector provides about 95 percent of the country's millet, 38 percent of sorghum, 67 percent of groundnut and 38 percent of sesame (FAO and Government of

the Sudan, 2015). It also produces gum Arabic, rosella and melon seeds for export. The traditional subsector also includes transhumance (seasonal herding), the cultivation of short-maturity subsistence crops, and sedentary agriculture, including livestock.

Despite the vital importance of traditional rainfed farming for the livelihoods and food security of the rural population, its contribution to the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) is limited to an average of only 15 percent (FEWS NET, 2011). This is due to several factors negatively impacting its productivity and efficiency, including land degradation, reduced soil fertility, lack of seed quality control, lack of improved management practices, unpredictability of rainfall (typically allowing only 40 to 80 percent of the area planted to be harvested), and pests and diseases (including locusts). Lack of accessible rural finance and extension services are also major impediments (FAO and Government of the Sudan, 2015). In spite of its great importance for the country and the rural population, the traditional rainfed agriculture subsector receives only 3 to 12 percent of agricultural expenditure (Mirghani, 2014).

Semimechanized rainfed farming cultivates 6.7 million ha, predominantly producing commercial sorghum grain for food security and sesame for export (FAO *et al.*, 2015). It is practiced by large-scale farmers and companies through low-rent leases granted by the federal government and is characterised by cheap access to land, allowing for unlimited horizontal expansion and low-input/low-output systems with limited concern for sustainable land management. Investors plant according to market prices and availability of loans and subsidies. A major problem faced by semimechanized farming is the loss of soil fertility in the areas cultivated due to monocropping and associated machinery usage (FAO, 2017).

Irrigated farming (large-scale irrigation) occupies about 1.8 million ha (9 percent of the cultivated area) and produces almost all of the Sudan's wheat, cotton, vegetables, fava beans and lentils, and a sizeable portion of its sorghum and groundnuts. It contributes

28 percent of agricultural GDP (second to the livestock sector) and receives the largest share of public agricultural spending (IFAD, 2014).

Livestock has consistently contributed the largest share – nearly half – of agricultural GDP (World Bank Group, 2020). Furthermore, its contribution to overall GDP increased from 16.9 percent in 2011 to 19.4 percent in 2016 (ibid.). In addition to meat, milk and skins, livestock is valued for draught power and transport and as a mobile source of capital and insurance (IFAD, 2014). The Sudan has the second largest livestock inventory in Africa, after Ethiopia, estimated at 110 million head of animals, consisting of 40.896 million sheep, 31.489 million cattle, 32.032 million goats and 4.895 million camels (World Bank Group, 2020). In addition to meeting domestic meat demand, livestock production also represents a significant source of foreign currency, representing about 19 percent of total exports by value (ibid.). With productivity limited by poor traditional herd management practices, diseases and parasites, suboptimal breeding, overgrazing and reduced access to traditional range resources, stock routes, crop residues and water sources, improvement to the livestock sector represents an important area for potential growth. Although no data is available on the involvement of women in animal care, it is common for women to care for the young animals because they are normally kept within the household, while men care for grazing animals.

Official estimates indicate that forestry production contributes only 7 percent of the agricultural GDP and 1 to 2 percent of the overall GDP (FAO and Government of the Sudan, 2015; IFAD, 2014). Forestry is important, however, not just as the mainstay of domestic energy and construction in rural areas, but also as the source of products such as timber and gum Arabic, and due to its protective role in combating desertification. (It is estimated that the Sudan is losing forest cover at a rate of around 0.8 percent per annum, largely as a result of the expansion of agriculture into forestlands, tree felling for charcoal and firewood, overgrazing, forest fires, droughts and erratic rainfall.)

The Sudan is rich in marine and freshwater fish stocks. However, due to lack of data, it is difficult to specify exactly where and to what extent fishing stocks are underexploited or overexploited (United Nations,

Government of National Unity and Government of Southern Sudan, 2007). The main freshwater sources are the Sudd swamps in the south, the Blue Nile, the White Nile, the Great Nile and Lake Nubia. The reported freshwater fish catch rose from 33 300 tons in 1991 to about 68 000 tons in 2003 (ibid.). The Sudan's Red Sea waters are also rich in fish and seafood. The fisheries subsector is treated as a marginal activity in the Sudan. Accordingly, it receives more attention from international organizations from an environmental and climate change perspective than from the Government. As a result, policies supporting the fisheries subsector are inadequate.

The Sudan has historically obtained most of its foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports. While this changed with the discovery of oil at the turn of this century, the secession of South Sudan and the subsequent loss of oil revenues for the Sudan have once again made agriculture a key source of the Sudan's foreign exchange earnings. Agriculture's share in the country's exports reached 55 percent in 2019 (World Bank Group, 2020). The basket of major agricultural export commodities includes livestock, sesame, gum Arabic and cotton. Processing of products such as sheep and goat meat and gum Arabic represent potential areas for export growth (ibid.).

Although agriculture plays an important role in the country and has promising potential for growth, the performance of the sector and its position in the economy at present are not commensurate with this potential.

The main weaknesses of the agricultural sector, as identified in the Sudan National Agriculture Investment Plan 2016–2020 (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2015), can be summarized as follows:

- » inadequacy of land tenure systems;<sup>1</sup>
- » deficient macroeconomic policies, leading to unstable exchange rates, inflation and excessive agricultural taxation;
- » lack of coordination of policies among various ministries and institutions;
- » poor rural and agricultural infrastructure;

<sup>1</sup> Land tenure in the Sudan is a chronically complicated issue, deeply rooted in history and associated with numerous challenges to the development of the agricultural sector. In practical terms, agricultural land in the Sudan is mainly ruled by a combination of two land tenure systems: a) customary land tenure, which is governed by unwritten traditional rules and administered by traditional leaders, contingent upon tribal or community membership; and b) statutory land tenure, which is governed by modern law and supported by documentary evidence, whereby government land that has been registered is granted as usufruct on leasehold or freehold entitlements for a specified period of time (generally 25 years) (FAO, no date). The combination and application of these two systems differs from one region to another and sometimes within the same region. In addition to deficient property rights, the Sudan's land tenure system has encouraged extensive and extractive modes of agriculture and livestock production, leading to overexploitation and degradation of natural resources (FAO and Government of the Sudan, 2015). Moreover, the land tenure system is an ongoing source of social conflict (FAO, 2017).

- » low levels of productivity in all areas of production due to weak technical, managerial and financial capacities of agricultural producers;
- » inadequacy of food quality and safety measures and procedures;
- » weak transfer of improved technologies at the farm level;
- » inadequate incentives to encourage local production of agricultural inputs, particularly seeds;
- » inadequate diversification of agricultural production, lacking minimum inclusion of nutritive foods;
- » accelerated deforestation, land degradation and desertification;
- » insecurity and lack of safety measures in conflict-affected zones.

Climate change is another important challenge to the agriculture sector – increasing rainfall variability, desertification and the frequency of droughts, with negative impacts on agriculture and pastoralism, water resources and energy resources.

## 2.2. Socio-economic characteristics of the country

### 2.2.1. Demography and population dynamics

In 1956, the population of the Sudan was 7.5 million (excluding southern Sudan). Since then, the transformation from nomadic to sedentary lifestyles

and the relative improvement in income and standard of living have led to increased fertility. Likewise, an increase in formal employment in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors has led to the growth of cities and the expansion of health and education services. Fertility has continued to increase and mortality has gradually decreased. As of 2020, the total fertility rate per woman is 4.72 and life expectancy at birth is 66.5 years (CIA, 2020). Both forces of demographic change have resulted in rapid population growth. The current population is estimated to be 43.8 million (UNFPA, 2020), 64.5 percent living in rural areas (UNDP, n.d.). The population growth rate, however, differs greatly from one region to another.

The Sudanese population is very young. The median age is 18.9 years, and 74 percent of the population is under 24 years of age. Currently, the major demographic trends are rapid urbanization and rapid growth of youth and working-age populations.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019), the Sudan's human development index (HDI) value for 2018 stood at 0.507, which put the country in the low human development category, 168th out of 189 countries and territories. Despite this relatively low standing, there have been some advances over the years. Between 1990 and 2018, the Sudan's HDI value increased 53 percent, from 0.332 to 0.507. During this same period, the Sudan's life expectancy at birth increased by 9.6 years, mean years of schooling increased by 2.2 years and expected years of schooling increased by 3.8 years, and the Sudan's gross national income (GNI) per capita increased by about 145.5 percent (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Trends in the Sudan's Human Development Index**

Year	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita, USD (2011 PPP)	HDI value
1990	55.5	3.9	1.5	1 614	0.332
1995	56.7	4.8	2.0	1 855	0.367
2000	58.5	5.6	2.4	2 178	0.403
2005	60.5	6.4	2.9	2 549	0.437
2010	62.8	7.2	3.1	3 128	0.471
2015	64.4	7.7	3.6	3 904	0.501
2016	64.7	7.7	3.6	3 994	0.505
2017	64.9	7.7	3.7	4 092	0.507
2018	65.1	7.7	3.7	3 962	0.507

Source: UNDP, 2019.

Not reflected in these numbers, however, are the great disparities in development progress between regions and, especially, between urban and rural areas. Investments in manufacturing, irrigated lands and services are concentrated in the centre, mostly in and around Khartoum. These disparities have encouraged rural–urban migration and exacerbated poverty in both urban and rural areas (IFAD, 2013a).

Moreover, the Sudan’s HDI values show a clear gender disparity. The HDI for the female population (0.456) is considerably lower than both the national HDI (0.507) and the HDI for the male population (0.546). The only HDI component in which women are in a better position is in life expectancy at birth (66.9 years for women compared to 63.3 years for men). The disparities in education-related indicators reflect low to moderate gender inequality in favour of men. The income component, measured by GNI per capita, reflects the highest rate of gender inequality within the HDI components, with GNI for males at USD 6 168, more than three times that of females, at USD 1 759 (see Table 2).

### 2.2.2. Gender-specific social norms and practices

In the Sudan, gender roles, status and relations are impacted by the country’s diverse ecology and land tenure systems, cultural (partly tribal) factors, and conflict. Gender disparities are particularly magnified in rural areas, in large part owing to inequalities in access to land and other resources.

Although the country’s land laws do not discriminate against women, in practice, local sociocultural factors, including the attitudes of community leaders with the authority to allocate land plots, play a considerable role in determining women’s land rights. As a result, women have significantly less access to natural resources, especially land, and are more likely than men to be landless (JICA, 2012). Figures on land ownership are

not available, but most agricultural land is communal and is managed by men. Furthermore, even in cases where women obtain land ownership rights, their authority, control and management over the land is highly constrained due to social factors. Furthermore, in the event of divorce or the death of the spouse, women also have difficulty gaining access to the family land or maintaining their land rights. In most regions, in these cases, women lose their rights to all the family property, including the land. The widow is “inherited” by her husband’s family or clan, and they decide whether she will have access to the land. If she opts to leave the clan, she is no longer allowed to access the land. As for inheritance from her original family, according to sharia law, a woman is entitled to half the inheritance of her brothers; however, this arrangement generally exists only on paper and women do not actually obtain the land nor do they usually ask for it. Other factors, such as high female illiteracy rates and women’s limited participation in decision-making bodies further contribute to gender disparities in access to and control over land (Gender Centre for Research & Studies, 2009a).

Another major challenge to gender equality in the Sudan is violence against women and girls. According to UN Women (n.d.):

**Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is regarded as a prevalent and critical hindering factor for human development and peace-building in the Sudan. The country has a weak normative framework regarding VAWG, as it is not a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Women are disproportionately affected by the various conflicts and security situations across the country; yet their involvement in leadership and participation in peace talks, conflict resolution and peace building continues to reflect only token treatment.**

**Table 2. Gender disparities in the Sudan, based on Human Development Index data**

Index/Indicator	National	Female	Male
HDI	0.507	0.456	0.546
Life expectancy at birth	65.1	66.9	63.3
Expected years of schooling	7.9	7.7	8.3
Mean years of schooling	3.7	3.2	4.2
GNI per capita (2011 PPP* in USD)	3 962	1 759	6 168

**Note:** \*Purchasing power parity.

**Source:** Data from the UNDP’s 2019 Human Development Report (UNDP, no date).

A study conducted in 2012 by the Unit of Violence Against Women of the Ministry of Social Development, estimated the prevalence of VAWG to be 24 percent. However, the study did not include conflict-affected areas where women, including the thousands of displaced women, are particularly vulnerable to such violence (Mohiedeen, 2019).

Of particular concern from a human rights perspective are practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). According to UNICEF (2019), approximately one in three girls in the Sudan are married before their 18th birthday. To address this, the Sudan is developing national action plans to end child marriage and pushing for immediate law reform. FGM/C has been particularly prominent in the Sudan, affecting as much as 86.6 percent of women in the country (UNICEF, 2020). A positive development in this area occurred recently with a landmark move by the transitional government to criminalize FGM/C.

### **2.2.3. Conflict, security, displacement and migration**

For years, the Sudan has suffered internal conflict, ethnic strife and sociopolitical and economic crises, disrupting the lives of the population, with scores becoming internally displaced and others moving across the borders to Ethiopia and South Sudan. Furthermore, the Sudan is a both transit and a destination country for irregular movements, including for asylum-seekers and refugees using the eastern African migratory route to North Africa and then to Europe. Refugees and asylum-seekers were estimated at 1 104 039 in 2019, the majority from South Sudan, Eritrea and Syria (UNHCR, 2019). The gender dimensions of this situation are multiple, disproportionately impacting women's livelihoods, family roles and safety.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), at the end of 2019, there were 2.1 million people living in displacement in the Sudan. In 2019 alone, over 355 000 people were displaced – 83 000 due to conflict and 272 000 due to disasters, mostly flooding (IDMC, 2019). Such displacement triggers high demand for basic necessities such as food, shelter, water and health services, as people lose their assets, belongings and livelihoods, while simultaneously suffering from trauma and violence.

Around 70 percent of the Sudan's internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women and children, mostly from rural areas characterized by a subsistence lifestyle where cash transactions are limited to complementary goods and services. When these IDPs relocate to areas near towns and cities, they are faced with cash economies where basic necessities, including food,

must be purchased. United Nations agencies and international and local NGOs provide humanitarian assistance during the first period of displacement. However, over time, IDPs engage in income-generating activities (IGAs) in order to maintain their families.

Several studies have shown that it is mostly women who engage in such activities to address the immediate needs of their families (Sahal, 2002; Albatahani, 2000). Faced with new realities in the day-to-day survival of their families, they adopt coping mechanisms and engage in petty trade, work as domestic workers or labourers and engage in other IGAs. This upsets traditional family relationships, in which the father is the head of the family, the primary decision-maker, and has full authority over the women and children. In the context of conflict and displacement, these traditional norms change dramatically. First, most displaced families have lost some or most of the men due to the conflict. In these cases, the women automatically become the heads of their households. Second, the remaining male family members tend to look down on small IGAs, seeing them as unmanly and refusing to engage in them. Thus, the women often become the sole income earners and gradually assume more responsibilities, including partial control over income and decision-making.

Like internally displaced women, women migrants and asylum seekers also face a new reality in which they must find new ways to support their families. Like the IDPs, this situation can help them break out of oppressive gender roles, for example freeing them to work or engage politically or socially. However, it is also true that migrant women and asylum seekers often face both gender and race discrimination in the host country (Jolly and Reeves, 2005).

In the context of ongoing conflict in the Sudan, all the women in the country are much more vulnerable to violence, especially sexual violence. Displaced and migrant women and girls, in particular, are at a high risk of sexual abuse and rape. Such serious forms of violence against women are not adequately reported due to lack of protection and justice mechanisms, social stigma and cultural impunity of the perpetrators.

### **2.2.4. Economy and poverty**

The Sudan is classified as being in the lower bracket of lower middle-income countries, with a per capita GDP of USD 977 (World Bank Group, 2020). Economic conditions in the Sudan have been particularly challenging since the secession of South Sudan in 2011, resulting in the loss of human and land resources, including the loss about 80 percent of the Sudan's oil

fields, accounting for more than half of the Sudan's government revenue and 95 percent of its exports (UNDP, 2018).<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive sanctions on the part of United States of America (the) on the Sudan (levied in 1997, expanded in 2006 and eased in 2017) added to the economic challenges in the country, further worsening the already widespread poverty in the country (IFAD, 2015). Additionally, the armed conflicts in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile contributed to a very significant decrease in GDP real growth from 10.2 percent in 2007 to 3.2 percent in 2017 (World Bank, 2018). Following South Sudan's secession, the Government of the Sudan introduced a new currency – a third edition of the Sudanese pound – but the value of the currency has fallen since its introduction. Khartoum formally devalued the currency in June 2012, when it passed austerity measures that included gradually repealing fuel subsidies. In late 2016, the Central Bank of Sudan introduced an incentive policy and increased the exchange rate in commercial banks. As a result, the US dollar exchange rate rose massively, resulting in high inflation that has only continued to increase. In September 2020, inflation was at 212.30 percent. These long-standing economic challenges and conflicts have driven more people into poverty, especially in conflict-affected areas.

Addressing poverty is a constitutional commitment, as reflected in the Government's Five-Year Program for Economic Reform (2015–2019) aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment and boosting social protection (Government of the Sudan, 2015). According to the 2020 draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 48 percent of Sudanese people fall under the global poverty line<sup>3</sup> and 25.2 percent live in extreme poverty<sup>4</sup> (22.2 percent in urban areas and 26.5 percent in rural areas). The states with the lowest poverty incidence (under 20 percent) are the Northern, Al-Gezira and River Nile states, while the states with the highest poverty incidence (over 60 percent) are Central Darfur, South Kordofan and West Darfur. Darfur, a region deeply affected by conflicts, has the highest overall poverty rate. Generally, states with a majority rural population have poverty rates above the national average. While states with poverty rates above the national average are located in both conflict and non-conflict areas, all states with a poverty rate under the national average are located in non-conflict areas, where the majority of the urban population lives

(Northern, Gezira, River Nile, Sinnar, Kassala, Khartoum, Gedaref and Blue Nile).

Sudanese women are at the bottom of the poverty ladder. As emphasized in the interviews conducted for this assessment, in rural areas, most women are engaged in unpaid or informal economic activities. This renders their work invisible and undervalued, excludes them from social protection schemes and prevents them from benefiting from the same opportunities as men. The Sudanese finance minister of the current transitional government has established a plan for economic recovery that includes social protection schemes for the poor. This will benefit urban and rural women, who constitute the majority of the poor population in the Sudan.

### 2.2.5. Health

Health indicators for the Sudan are generally low, with significant urban–rural, regional, gender and socio-economic disparities. Worldwide, the Sudan ranks 186th in life expectancy, with average life expectancy estimated at 66.5 years – 64.3 for males and 68.8 for females (CIA, 2020).

Regarding child and maternal health, the Sudan has made some significant improvements, although it did not succeed in reaching several of its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets in this area. The maternal mortality ratio dropped from 527 per 100 000 live births in 1990 to 322 per 100 000 live births in 2015, a significant drop, though 14 percent lower than the MDG target. As of 2017, maternal mortality had been further reduced to an estimated 295 deaths per 100 000 live births (CIA, 2020). Likewise, the under-five mortality rate was reduced from 128 per 1 000 live births in 1990 to 72 per 1 000 live births in 2015, again an important drop, but 11 percent less than the MDG target (Government of the Sudan and UNDP, 2016). At present, the rate is 60.5 per 100 000 live births (UNFPA, 2020). Under-five mortality is caused mostly by malaria (17 percent), pneumonia (14 percent), malnutrition (13 percent) and diarrhoea (9 percent) (CBS, 2014).

Limited progress on malnutrition has been made in the country, and malnutrition rates have remained high for the past 25 years, putting the country in a continuous state of emergency. The nutritional status of children under five years of age is low, as shown by the results of the CBS survey of 2014. Almost one in every three

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, despite international sanctions, the Sudan was the 17th fastest growing economy in the world, attributed mainly to revenues from oil production and exports.

<sup>3</sup> The global (higher) poverty line is equal to the food poverty line (an equivalent monetary value of a food basket, as determined by FAO, representing 2 110 kilocalories per person per day) plus the non-food consumption of households whose *food consumption per capita is exactly equal to the food poverty line*.

<sup>4</sup> The extreme (lower) poverty line is equal to the food poverty line plus the non-food consumption of households whose *total consumption per capita is exactly equal to the food poverty line*.



children is moderately underweight. Moderate and severe stunting, which is measured by height for age, is very prevalent among children under five years of age, with an estimated rate of 38 percent (UNICEF, 2020). Among both children and adults, malnutrition is currently on the rise due to increased and protracted displacement, economic decline and inflation, and food price hikes, exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (IPC, 2020). An estimated 9.6 million people in the Sudan were in high acute food insecurity between June and September 2020 (ibid.).

The epidemiological profile of the country is dominated by common communicable diseases and a wide range of neglected tropical diseases, most associated with lack of hygiene, deteriorating environmental and living conditions, low literacy levels, gender disparities and poor health service coverage (Government of the Sudan and UNDP, 2016). Additionally, non-communicable diseases such as anaemia and tuberculosis, are now emerging, further deteriorating the already poor health situation in the country (Ministry of Health, 2017). The Sudan also has a concentrated HIV epidemic, with an estimated prevalence rate of 0.2 percent among adults aged 15 to 49, though much higher rates of up to 7.7 percent are reported in some areas. The country also has the second highest number of new HIV infections in the Middle East and North Africa region, with an estimated 4 400 new infections annually (CBS, 2014). HIV/AIDS has a gender implication as it is mostly associated to sexual behaviour, and in a country such as the Sudan, where polygamy is prevalent and women have less negotiation power when it comes to sexual relationships, this puts women at a distinct disadvantage.

Health services in the Sudan at large, and in rural areas in particular, are poor and suffer from various problems and challenges (Ministry of Welfare and Social Security and UNDP, 2012). One quarter of the population has no access to health facilities. Only 66 percent of rural hospitals offer basic emergency obstetric and neonatal care, and less than half of them can provide the

comprehensive emergency obstetric and neonatal care services needed to save lives (UNFPA, 2013). Small and remote communities, as well as poor rural citizens at large (the majority of the rural population), have either no access or only limited access to any health services.

In addition to the disparities between poor–rich and urban–rural populations in access to health services, there are also gender-based disparities. These are in large part attributed to sociocultural factors, such as restrictions on women’s mobility that prevent women from traveling far from their communities. These sociocultural factors are also responsible for the general lack of women’s control over their health and lives. In some areas, for instance, such as parts of eastern the Sudan, it is socially unacceptable for women to visit or to be examined by male physicians.

The most common health services provided to rural women are delivered by village midwives. Next in importance for rural women are health visitors – certified nurses working in rural health centres and specialized in midwifery. Health visitors are responsible for supervising the village midwives in the communities in the catchment area of a given rural health centre. As illustrated in Table 3, rural women receive far fewer health services from less qualified personnel for both antenatal care (ANC) and assistance at delivery than urban women. These disparities are reflected in higher maternal mortality rates in rural areas.

As to family planning, only 9 percent of married women (or their partners) in rural areas use contraceptives, compared to about 20 percent of urban dwellers. Regional differences in contraceptive prevalence are huge, ranging from 2.9 percent in Central Darfur to 26.5 percent in Khartoum State. The most popular method is the pill (6.8 percent), followed by injectable contraceptives (1.2 percent). Only about 18 percent of the demand for contraception by rural women is satisfied, compared to 39 percent for urban women (CBS, 2014). Data show that, in addition to regional disparities, the usage and the demand for

**Table 3. Antenatal care (ANC) coverage and assistance at delivery in rural and urban areas**

Area	Antenatal care (%)			Assistance at delivery (%)		
	Medical doctor	Certified midwife	No ANC	Medical doctor	Certified midwife	TBA*
Rural	51.4	18.5	23.9	14.2	54.8	22.8
Urban	68.3	14.9	8.8	33.1	55.0	4.7

\*Traditional birth attendant

Source: Developed by author based on the CBS Survey, 2014.

contraception are positively correlated with educational level and wealth. In alignment with the degree of access to contraception, the fertility rate in rural areas (6.2 births per woman) is much higher than in urban areas (4.8 births per woman). The urban–rural difference in fertility is most pronounced for women in the 20 to 24 age group (254 births per 1 000 women in rural areas, versus 119 births per 1 000 women in urban areas).

High fertility is largely due to child marriage (marriage under the age of 18) and early pregnancy, an issue that also greatly affects the health and educational completion of adolescent girls (UNICEF, 2017). Child marriage is more common in rural than in urban areas and varies considerably across the states, while adolescent marriage (marriage at the ages of 12 to 17 years) is widespread. Nationwide, more than one in five adolescents (21.2 percent) are or have already been married, but this is much more common in rural areas (26 percent) than in urban areas (11.2 percent) (UNICEF, 2017).

#### 2.2.6. COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the Sudan's already serious economic problems and deficits in food security, especially for poor populations and female-headed households. Although sex-disaggregated data regarding COVID-19 confirmed cases and deaths is lacking in the Sudan, as it is in most of the countries around the world, the experience of previous pandemics shows that disease outbreaks affect women and men differently, worsening inequalities for women and girls and increasing discrimination against other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty.

The social and economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Sudan are the following:

- » **Women as caregivers and front line healthcare workers:** Women represent more than half the health workforce in the Sudan and are thus more exposed to the risk of contracting the disease. Most women healthcare workers are also parents and caregivers to family members, including those who have contracted COVID-19, further increasing their exposure and workload. This is true of women in general, who do most of the housework and are the primary caregivers for children, the elderly and the sick in the home. The health impacts of the pandemic, along with the lockdowns, have significantly increased women's workload.
- » **Gender-based violence:** For many women and girls, lockdown measures are exacerbating domestic

violence within the home, isolating them from support networks and services and restricting their movement. Stress, financial pressure and alcohol consumption, linked to lockdown measures, all increase the levels of domestic violence, including sexual, physical, verbal and psychological abuse.

- » **Access to sexual and reproductive healthcare:**

As responses to the COVID-19 outbreak are put in place across the world, delays in supply chains and the suspension of sexual and reproductive health services are resulting in shortages of contraceptives, restrictions on access to abortion services and the interruption of healthcare outreach services. The UNFPA has highlighted alarming signs regarding women's access to sexual and reproductive health services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These include disruptions in meeting family-planning needs, the closure of many healthcare facilities and the inability of clinical staff to provide services other than COVID-19 response. Additionally, women are refraining from visiting healthcare facilities due to fears of COVID-19 exposure and due to restrictions on movement. The UNFPA has also warned of the possible delay in the deployment of programs to eliminate FGM and child marriage due to the pandemic.

- » **Economic impact:** In 2021, FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) joined forces with CARE International to undertake a rapid gender analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality and food security. While the study has not yet been completed, preliminary findings from the survey and focus group discussions conducted in South Darfur, Kassala and Khartoum, suggest that the crisis is having, as expected, gender-differentiated impacts. One of the most significant changes observed concerns the increase of women's burden of unpaid care work, which further limit their ability to engage in paid work.

#### 2.2.7. Education

Government policies are geared towards the provision of free and compulsory basic education for all. This commitment is reflected in the Interim National Constitution and in the Twenty-Five Year National Strategy (2007–2031). Additionally, several strategic education plans have been developed at the national and state levels (Government of the Sudan and UNDP, 2016). Combining gross enrolment rates at all school levels and adult literacy, the education index for the Sudan has grown at nearly twice the rate of most other HDI components. The adult literacy rate increased from 61.3 percent in 2000 to 75.9 percent in 2015. Similarly, the primary enrolment rate increased from 62 percent in

2005 to 70 percent in 2010, and the primary school net attendance rate increased from 68.4 percent in 2006 to 71.8 percent in 2010 and to 76.4 percent in 2014.

Despite the progress made, large numbers of children are still out of school, and there are great disparities in educational access and attendance between conflict and non-conflict areas, between rural and urban areas, between different states and between boys and girls. The net intake rate of primary schools clearly reflects such disparities.<sup>5</sup> Although the national average is 36.8 percent, the intake rate for urban areas (56.6 percent) is almost twice that of rural areas (29.5 percent). The differences between states are even greater, varying from 13.4 percent in West Kordofan to 73.6 percent in Northern State (Ministry of Welfare and Social Security and National Population Council, 2015). In rural schools, only 41 percent of the students enrolled are girls. The out-of-school rate for primary school age children (6 to 11 years old) also reflects the disparities in educational access. This age group includes the largest number of out-of-school children in the country (about 2 million, constituting 36.5 percent of children in this age group). With a gender gap of about 4.5 percent, there are more girls out of school than boys (39.6 and 33.5 percent, respectively) at the national level. The gender gap increases to more than 6 percent in rural areas (39.2 percent for girls and 33.1 percent for boys). Furthermore, the percentage of rural children (boys and girls) excluded from education is almost three times that of urban children (36.1 percent and 13.7 percent, respectively). A poor girl in a rural area is about 25 percent less likely to ever access basic education than a rich urban boy (World Bank, 2011).

As to secondary education, enrolment rates are generally lower than they are for primary schooling throughout the country. In the population aged 14–16 years, the net secondary enrolment rate reached only 22 percent at the national level, 37 percent for urban areas and 14 percent for rural areas.

Rural-urban and gender disparities are also apparent in literacy rates. Overall, about six out of ten young women in the Sudan (59.8 percent) are literate, but 79.8 percent of young women in urban areas are literate, compared to 50 percent in rural areas (CBS, 2014). Literacy rates of young women also vary enormously by household wealth, with 92.2 percent of women belonging to households in the richest quintile being literate, vs 31.2 percent of young women

belonging to households in the poorest quintile (Ministry of Education Statistical Department, 2019).

The studies reviewed and interviews conducted for this assessment show that there continue to be many obstacles that limit educational access and attainment in rural areas, especially for girls and women. On the demand side, the tendency is not to send girls to school because of the emphasis on their roles as wives and mothers and the consequent belief that girls don't need to be educated. Additional limiting factors are cultural and security-related restrictions on girls traveling outside their villages (schools may not be nearby); the refusal of fathers to send their daughters to mixed-gender schools; and the prioritizing of boys' education over that of girls' when family finances do not permit all the children to be educated. Finally, early marriage among girls, as described above, is another major factor affecting their education in rural areas (UNICEF, 2017). Related supply-side limitations to girls' education are the lack of girls' schools in conservative areas where the population is opposed to mixed-gender schools and the unavailability of appropriate bathroom facilities, particularly the absence of gender-segregated bathrooms. The disparities in educational access and attainment described in this section have significant impacts on subsequent poverty levels and the socio-economic gap between women and men and between urban and rural populations.

#### **2.2.8. Employment**

Since the loss of the majority of the country's oil fields, agriculture has once again become the Sudan's most important economic sector, contributing approximately one-third of the country's GDP, employing nearly half the labour force and providing livelihoods to approximately two-thirds of the population (World Bank Group, 2020; FAO, 2020). Agricultural employment is particularly significant from a gender perspective as it comprises the majority of female employment. Nationwide, 54.3 percent of women are employed in agriculture, compared to 34.8 percent of men (World Bank, 2020). These rates vary noticeably between states, as there are some states (such as Darfur) in which agricultural work is almost entirely dominated by women, while in other states (such as Gedaref, Red Sea and Kassala), women are banned from agricultural work in all its forms (Ministry of Human Resources, Development and Labour, 2013).

While labour-related legal frameworks guarantee gender equality, employment statistics, together with data gathered through interviews, indicate significant

<sup>5</sup> Percentage of children of school-entry age who enter the first grade of primary school.

gender disparities in the labour market in the Sudan, in terms of respective shares of men and women in the workforce, employment opportunities and types and conditions of work. Other than agriculture, the only sectors in which women's participation is higher than that of men are health, education and social work (Ministry of Human Resources, Development and Labour, 2013). With the exception of these sectors, women's opportunities to access the labour market are extremely limited. The percentage of women in the remaining sectors (such as industry, trade, administration, transport and information) are, in the best cases, half that of men, whereas in certain sectors, such as financial services and scientific and technical professions, women are not present at all.

Employment vulnerability data further reveals the unsecured status of the work of rural women compared to both urban women and to urban and rural men. Overall, the vulnerable employment rate (VER) for rural areas is 61.5 percent, double that of urban areas (31.2 percent). Rural women are further disadvantaged by gender inequality, with a VER of 79.7 percent, considerably higher than that of rural men (55.5 percent) (Ministry of Human Resources, Development and Labour, 2013).

The employment-to-population ratio (EPR) for the 15+ age group, which typically falls between 50 and 75 percent in different country groups, is low for the Sudanese population, at 41.1 percent. However, the EPR is about three times higher for males (61.4 percent) than for females (19.6 percent) (Ministry of Human Resources, Development and Labour, 2013). In alignment with the EPR, the inactive population rate (IPR) is very high, at 49.5 percent, again with great gender disparity as the EPR for the female population is 71.1 percent. That is, seven out of ten females are economically inactive, compared to only three out of ten males (ibid.).

Regarding unemployment, the female unemployment rate (27.8 percent) is much higher than the rate of male unemployment (11.6 percent) (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, the gap between female and male unemployment has widened since 2000, when rates were at 20.4 percent and 13.5 percent, respectively (ibid.). With regard to wages and salaries, on average, female workers in the Sudan earn 34 percent less than male workers.<sup>6</sup> The gender pay gap is larger in rural areas than in urban areas.

Overall, the majority of working women work in

agriculture, the informal sector and low-paying jobs. As such, women more likely to be among the working poor. Key informants (supported by various studies) attribute this to the following reasons:

- » customs and traditions that either directly conflict with the idea of women working or with the circumstances associated with women's employment in certain sectors, such as traveling outside the local community, mixing with the opposite gender, the timing of the work, etc.;
- » women's responsibility for all domestic tasks, including the time-consuming task of collecting water in most rural areas and care work;
- » low education and skill levels among rural women (which are often associated with customs and traditions);
- » difficulties faced by women in accessing the required resources and support for starting their own businesses (information, funding, technical support, marketing, producers' associations, etc.);
- » the preference of private sector employers to hire men, due to concerns about women's limited mobility and time availability as well as maternity and childcare responsibilities;
- » lack of advancement opportunities in the public sector, resulting in much fewer women than men in higher-level positions;
- » lack of safety in certain areas, which places women at heightened risk;
- » lack of appropriate and adequate infrastructure and transport facilities.

### 2.2.9. Political rights and citizenship

Conflict and long years of autocratic rule, along with suppressive laws and regulations, have weakened the understanding of human rights, equality and responsible citizenship in the Sudan. The Sudanese in general, and women in particular, have little knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. This negatively affects their bargaining power, participation and proactive engagement. Responsible citizens within an accountable state are expected to contribute to their own welfare and improve their lives through the full recognition of and the demand for their rights. Equal citizenship is pivotal to empowering citizens

<sup>6</sup> According to 2009 National Baseline Household Survey (NBHHS) data.

to practice the responsibility to participate and be represented in the respective structures at all levels, based on democratic principles and good governance. Although the weak status of rights and citizenship affects all citizens, socially excluded groups are more vulnerable and more severely affected. Women, girls and youth living in conflict areas, who experience the daily effects of impoverishment and marginalization and who are disempowered, experience the gravest, multidimensional effects of their weak citizenship and rights status. The current democratic transformation must be guarded and sustained, along with institutional reform and a change in attitudes and practices, in order to preserve the dignity and uphold the rights of the people of the Sudan.

### **2.3. Policy, legislative, institutional and financial context of gender equality and women's empowerment**

Due to cultural, religious, tribal, geographic and political factors, the Sudanese society is deeply patriarchal, with men dominating at the family, household, tribal and public levels, while women are excluded socially and politically, especially in rural areas. This translates into an imbalance in development, an unequal share of wealth and power, the neglect of social services for women (especially education and health), the imposition of discriminatory laws and regulations, and the prevalence of insecurity and gender-based violence. Women in such an environment have little access to resources, little to no decision-making power, and severely constricted opportunity to participate effectively at any level. This situation only serves to justify the conception of women as weak and unequal and to prolong the injustices that deprive them of their power (Elkarib, 2016). However, women's efforts during and after the revolution grew into a women's movement demanding change in the status of women. As described in the next sections, progress has been made in this regard.

#### **2.3.1. Policy and legislation**

Among the primary demands of the women's movement were that the constitution of the transitional government address women's rights, that women be amply represented at all levels of government, and that the laws of the country be reviewed and brought into alignment with the provisions of the new constitution regarding women. The Constitutional Document of the Transitional Period of 2019 clearly responds to these demands. It makes specific reference to promoting women's economic, political and social rights and to lifting all forms of discrimination against women, as well as urging for positive discrimination to ensure women's rights in all fields. It establishes that women should hold

no less than 40 percent of the seats in the Transitional Legislative Council, once established. It provides for the establishment of the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the first stand-alone governmental entity for the advancement of women in the history of the Sudan. It calls for the application of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which addresses the unique and disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and of the relevant African Union resolutions regarding the participation of women at all levels in the peace process. It also calls for the application of regional and international charters regarding women's rights.

Significant progress has also been made in terms of women's representation at all levels and in all institutions of the government. Two women were appointed to the Sovereign Council (holding 18 percent of the seats), four female ministers were appointed in the Cabinet of the Ministers (holding 11 percent of the seats), and, for the first time in the history of the Sudan, a female judge was appointed as the head of the judiciary system. Additionally, four women were appointed as vice chancellors of government universities, and two women are state governors. Although the transitional parliament is not yet established, according to the Constitutional Declaration, once it is established, women should hold at least 40 percent of the seats.

Of momentous importance was the participation of women in the second track of the Juba negotiations (the first round of peace talks held in September 2019), with a diverse group of women engaging widely with negotiators, urging for the popularization of the peace process and the attainment of peace, and for the inclusion of gender provisions in the peace agreement.

Despite these important changes, however, the Sudan is still far from achieving gender equality on the ground, particularly in rural areas. With a Gender Development Index (GDI) of 0.836, the Sudan is in the category of low gender equality, and this remains one of the most serious challenges of the Sudan's development agenda (UNDP, 2019)

#### **2.3.2. Policy and legal frameworks**

Efforts are under way to ratify the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as promised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and the Ministry of Justice. However, neither has yet been ratified. (The Sudan is one of two countries in the Middle East and North Africa region that has not yet ratified the CEDAW.) Additionally, two parallel committees are working on the amendment of

the 1991 Personal Status Act and on an overall analysis of gender-discriminatory articles in all current laws. Regarding labour rights, the Sudan has not yet signed the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention (1969), which addresses labour in the agriculture sector.

### 2.3.3. Institutional and financial arrangements

There are several institutional mechanisms advancing gender equality in the country. These institutions are currently under review by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which continues to be the focal point for women's issues and is charged with national, regional and global reporting. These functions and institutions will fall under the Women and Gender Equality Commission, once established. The institutional mechanisms are the following:

- » **General Directorate for Women's Affairs (GDWA):** The GDWA is the main institution responsible for the coordination of all gender and women-related interventions. Its mandate includes developing gendered strategies, policies and plans; establishing a comprehensive database providing gender profiles; reviewing national, regional and international commitments concerning women's empowerment; capacity building; and creating linkages between different sectors, the Government and NGOs, most of which address women in their work.
- » **Women's Units:** Based at the ministries of health, justice, foreign affairs, labour, education, agriculture, finance and industry and the National Authority of Statistics, these units function as coordinating mechanisms at the federal level to ensure the incorporation of gender issues into sector plans (JICA, 2012).
- » **Gender Focal Points:** Based at ministries where no Women's Units are established, the Gender Focal Points are nominated from among the existing staff and are in charge of working on gender integration in all relevant activities within a given ministry. A Gender Focal Point generally liaises with other federal ministries and organizations on gender topics.
- » **Family and Child Protection Units:** Based out of the Ministry of Interior, these are located in Khartoum and in each of the 15 states.
- » **Gender research units and initiatives at higher education institutions:** Most prominent among these are the Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies and the Regional Institute of Gender Diversity, Peace and Rights, both at Ahfad University for Women; the Women Unit at the Developmental Studies Institute of the University of Khartoum; and gender initiatives at Omdurman Islamic University, International University of Africa, the Sudan University for Science & Technology, Juba University and Zaeem Ismael Al-Azhari University.

A number of key informants expressed that, despite major developments in policies and mechanisms that support gender equality in general and women's rights specifically, there is still a need for further activation of institutional structures, and for coordination among them, as there is no joint planning or sufficient coordination on the various activities. Informants also indicated that a large proportion of the Gender Focal Points in ministries are ineffective, as they are not qualified to deal with gender issues and lack basic knowledge of the issue. Additionally, they are often tasked with other responsibilities that detract from their gender-related functions.



IDP women farmers  
harvest the Okra  
they planted in Azaza  
village-Blue Nile State.

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IDP family in Blue Nile State, Ganees village, received a washing hand station & a soap box from FAO Sudan, as support in times of the pandemic Covid-19.

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# 3. Gender analysis of agriculture and the rural sector

With regard to the gender analysis of agriculture, it is important to recall the limitations noted in Section 1.3 of the severe lack of data on gender in the Sudan and the difficulty in accessing that which is available, as well as difficulties in comparing data due to regional differences and to the use of different definitions and time frames in the available data. The shortage of comprehensive and reliable gender-related statistics particularly applies to the agriculture sector. Such data is scattered across numerous thematic studies and reports carried out by different actors and, thus, is not unified in terms of definitions, periods covered or frequency. Available data is usually disaggregated either by region (rural-urban and/or by state) or by gender, but not by both. Another major problem that negatively affects gender statistics in agriculture is the fact that all small tenancies are excluded from major statistics (that is, tenancies with fewer than two hectares under cultivation, 100 chickens in poultry production or five cows in dairy farm production). This excludes the vast majority of agricultural contributions by women.

These shortcomings have implications both for the robustness of the analysis to follow, and, more importantly, for the daily realities and development prospects of women, especially rural women. For instance, as small tenancies are excluded from many official accounts, women are widely excluded from a range of agricultural services, such as those pertaining to manufacturing, input supply and extension.

## 3.1. Gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development policies, strategies and investment plans<sup>7</sup>

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, based in Khartoum, develops all agricultural policies and strategies at the national level and is mandated to ensure their implementation at the national and state levels. The monitoring, support and assessment of the implementation at all levels is conducted through the Ministry's various departments and sections.

### Box 1. Sudan's Women and Development Department

In 1994, with support from FAO, the Women and Development Department (WAD) was established at the MoA, with the mandate to ensure that women are integrated in the agriculture development plans. The department established the Women in Agricultural Development Administration (WADA) network, which included women from related ministries, national and international NGOs and from agricultural projects outside Khartoum.

In 2002, WAD was transformed into a unit under the Planning Department of the Ministry to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all the departments and units within the Ministry. However, the unit is one of the smallest units in terms of staff and resources, and in terms of its influence within the Ministry.

<sup>7</sup> The analysis refers to the strategy at the time of the study. The Ministry is in the process of drafting a new strategy which is not yet endorsed.

The analysis conducted showed that the current strategic plan of the Ministry of Agriculture does not take into account nor promote gender equality or the role of women in agriculture. Although the vision of the strategy is to build “an effective agriculture sector in food security and comprehensive development as well as improved use of resources and farmers’ welfare,” the strategy is, in effect, gender-blind.

The analysis of the strategic plan also indicates that a clear concept of gender, and the differentiation between women and gender-based roles and expectations, is lacking and, as a result, all gender mainstreaming efforts are limited to the traditional roles of women. Additionally, the inconsistency of available sex-disaggregated data and poor understanding of gender analysis pose a serious challenge to addressing gender issues in agriculture. The principle of women’s equality and equal rights, which is ensured by the constitution, is absent in the national strategy, which does not address the particular situation of women farmers, including the serious issues of access to resources, including land and capital.

A number of factors detected in the assessment may contribute this situation. For instance, despite the fact that women comprise more than 65 percent of the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, only two women hold senior positions as heads of departments, and women are nearly absent in the crop committees. Furthermore, as determined through meetings with the MoA’s Gender Department, which is charged with ensuring gender mainstreaming in all the activities of the MoA, the Department is not well staffed and is clearly not taken into account significantly within the Planning Directorate. In fact, the Department interacts more with the Ministry of Social Development and Women’s Affairs than with other departments within the Ministry of Agriculture. It has only minimal and sporadic interaction with women’s units in other ministries. In practice, the Department’s responsibility to mainstream gender is limited to organizing sporadic training sessions on gender concepts. Under the current conditions, it is unlikely that the Department will be able to achieve its mandate.

Finally, at the state level, there is normally one female staff member assigned as a Gender Officer whose task is to follow up on issues related to women within or outside the Ministry. However, the officers have no links with the Ministry and are mostly unaware of national gender policies and strategies.

### **3.2. Institutional and financial arrangements for gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development**

National economic policy in the Sudan has traditionally not included any provisions for women in agriculture, and this has not changed significantly under the current transitional government. The Sudan’s three-year National Economic Growth Policy, adopted in 2020, which was based on 15 sectorial workshops, includes “developing new policies for improving production and productivity” as a major pillar for economic reform and mentions seven important aspects to be considered under this pillar, none of which refer to women. Overall, the economic policy does not address women’s inclusion, nor does it consider the recommendations of the “Women and Economy” workshop organized by women’s networks in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Planning.

The three-year National Economic Plan has 10 strategic objectives. Women are addressed in objective number 5, which reads, “Ensuring and promoting women’s rights in all areas with fair and deserving representation.” However, the broad objectives of the 2020 budget (economic reform, improving people’s living standards and reducing poverty rates, state institutional reform, and rule of law) do not include women’s rights. Furthermore, all agriculture-related actions lack gender sensitivity.

### **3.3. Gender inequalities in the context of agriculture and rural development**

#### **3.3.1. Gender roles and dynamics**

Women generally work longer hours than men, due to their multiple roles inside and outside the household. According to a study of rural areas in Western Sudan (Ibnouf, 2009), women in the study area spend an average of 80 hours per week on unpaid activities, the equivalent of two full-time jobs. Interviewees in the present study confirmed that this broadly reflects the situation in most rural areas in the Sudan.

Women’s unpaid household activities typically include family care, food processing and preparation, cleaning, fetching water and collecting wood. A work day of approximately 18 hours that starts around 05.00 hrs is not exceptional for rural women. Women start their day by spending about three hours preparing breakfast and tea, cleaning and taking care of children, before moving to the field. In the afternoon, they go back home to

prepare lunch and then must finish fetching water and collecting firewood before dark.<sup>8</sup> After preparing supper, women still have many tasks in the form of domestic chores, such as cleaning, food processing and, in some cases, making handicrafts.

In terms of productive activities, the division of labour depends on the production system. In traditional agriculture, both men and women (and to a degree children) usually participate in land clearance and preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting and transporting crops; although, overall, women generally carry out more agricultural work than men, particularly in planting, weeding and spraying pesticides. In traditional agro-pastoral farming systems and nomadic and seminomadic settings, men are primarily responsible for raising larger animals, while women participate in support activities such as caring for sick animals, milking and processing dairy products and raising smaller animals, such as goats. In fishing communities, men are in charge of fishing and marketing activities, while women carry out essential supporting tasks such as fish cleaning, processing and fixing nets. The making of handicrafts is generally restricted to women. This traditional division of labour by gender also extends to children, with girls tasked with domestic chores and fetching water like their mothers, while boys tend to seek waged labour in agriculture or other fields.

In terms of intra-household gender dynamics, a variety of factors are at play. Conservative Arab-Islamic culture is predominant, especially in rural areas, and interplays with tribal customs and traditions, resulting in heavily patriarchal social values and arrangements. These are exacerbated by the poor economic empowerment of women, despite the critical roles they play in all production systems, as control over cash and purchase decisions, whether for production-related goods, consumer goods or other family requirements, is primarily in the hands of men (even in areas where women and girls earn wages in mechanized or large-scale agriculture). It can also be generalized, however, that women manage the daily life of the household and make decisions relevant to it, in some cases, extending to important decisions, such as those relating to health and education. Thus, some shared ground can be found wherein men and women participate jointly in economic and other household decisions.

Although these conditions predominate in many areas, current socio-economic dynamics, as well as

extraordinary factors such as climate change and armed conflict, are changing these patterns. For example, droughts and prolonged internal conflict have led to the mass exodus of men from rural areas to urban areas in search of food and off-farm employment. Other men have left their homes to join the conflicts. This has resulted in women a major increase in female-headed households. In such households, women are usually the decision-makers, without interference from the larger family, tribe or local community. The only exception to this is the denial of women's rights to land in the event of the death of their husbands, in which case the ownership of the land returns to the husband's family, who decide whether to allow the wife to use the land or not. It is noteworthy that, despite the many obstacles faced, the poverty rate in female-headed households is slightly lower than that of male-headed households (44 percent compared to 47 percent, respectively) (World Bank, 2011).

A similar situation occurs in IDP camps in terms of women's empowerment largely because of the absence of men in many of the families living in the camps and the associated increase in women's control over available resources (Gender Centre for Research & Studies, 2009b). For example, women in the camps generally have better and closer access to water, sanitation and social services than women in traditional settings. Such facilities enable women to allocate more time to diverse income-generating activities. They are further motivated by the fact that they usually have control over the income earned.

In all settings, women's social status and their involvement in decision-making are associated to a great degree with their economic empowerment. This is primarily the case in urban areas, through education and employment, and is less common in rural areas. However, it also applies to rural women who are skilled and employed in the formal sector. Additionally, in the relatively limited areas where women are landowners (such as parts of Northern State and central Sudan), they play a significant role in economic and family affairs. Education – even a few years of primary education – also contributes to improving the status of women and their involvement in decision-making. The central areas of the Sudan, particularly Gezira State, have the longest history in education, and in educating girls. In these areas, there is huge improvement in the elimination of customs that marginalize women. Women clearly intervene in production and in purchase and sale decisions, and there is more room for joint decision-making in general.

<sup>8</sup> Fetching water and collecting firewood does not apply to the majority of women in the eastern states.

Several gender development interventions have affirmed that the social status of women in the family, their self-esteem and their involvement in household decisions differed after they were economically empowered and underwent training and awareness raising on their rights (see, for example, UN Women, 2016). Furthermore, studies have shown that women's degree of control over income directly impacts the family situation, as the spending patterns and priorities of women differ from those of men. Income earned or controlled by women is more likely to contribute to sustaining household food supplies and other basic necessities. This in turn impacts the nutritional status and well-being of the family (Ibnouf, 2009). Despite these important findings, many development interventions, both of the Government and international organizations, do not directly and significantly tackle the conditions that marginalize women. Gender equality is absent from most projects, and these project yield to the status quo. This means women are often excluded from project target groups. Even projects that are undertaken under the banner of "women's development" (which is often confused with the concept of gender) tend to yield at least partially to the status quo. In extremely conservative areas, some projects resort to registering men from the targeted women's families and providing them with assets in observance of the local customs, which reinforces existing power imbalances, instead of attempting to gradually change them. On a more promising note, a number of key informants felt that most men would agree to women's names being registered if project managers insisted on this as a condition for obtaining the economic benefits and assets granted by the project.

### 3.3.2. Gender and crop production

Small-scale rainfed crop production is practiced by sedentary households and nomadic and transhumant groups that move with livestock and grow short-maturity subsistence crops. Agricultural operations are handled mostly by family members and depend on the use of locally made hand tools. Most of the families keep some animals for food, milk, fieldwork or transport. The production is primarily oriented towards self-consumption and, to a limited but increasing extent, towards marketing of cash crops or surplus of subsistence crops, although in many cases this combination of practices is insufficient for sustaining families. Small-scale rainfed crop production is spread over a vast area stretching from western Sudan (Greater Darfur and Greater Kordofan) to areas in the Gezira, Sinnar, Blue Nile, White Nile, Gedaref, Kassala and Red Sea states. Farming practices are based on ethnotechnologies in crop rotation and cultivation methods. Such practices are often combined with

animal production (84 percent of the time) and in many areas with forestry production, especially of gum Arabic.

Of the different livelihood regions in the country (see Section 2.1), four rely predominantly on irrigated agriculture. The poor small-scale producers in these zones cultivate crops such as wheat, sorghum, vegetables and fruits for home consumption, and sell their surplus in the market. Many also keep some livestock, though crop production remains the main source of livelihood. There are also a small number of small-scale, semimechanized farms spread over a large area of the clay plains in the high rainfall savannah belt, comprising only about 1 percent of farmers. For the most part, mechanization covers two agricultural operations, namely land preparation and seeding, while weeding and harvesting are undertaken by manual labour. The main agricultural products in the country are sorghum, sesame, millet and sunflowers. Large families depend on family labour more than on expensive wage labour.

The production capacity of most traditional small-scale farmers (in all the above-mentioned subsectors) does not cover their family needs. As such, they resort to supplementary sources of income such as agricultural wage labour (mostly seasonal); non-agricultural wage labour (partly skilled labour and salaried work); labour migration; labour as herders; selling of tea and other products; collection of firewood, grass and fruits; charcoal production and sale; construction; brick making and remittances.

At the national level, women represent 49 percent of farmers in the irrigated sector and 57 percent in the traditional rainfed sector, but over 85 percent in Darfur and Kordofan (World Bank Group, 2020; Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2014). Women in the rainfed sector are primarily subsistence farmers, but they also work as seasonal wage labourers in the rainfed mechanized sector and as hired or unpaid family labourers in the irrigated sector. Female engagement in agriculture has been on an upward trend due to the involvement of men in armed conflicts and to the migration of men in search of agricultural or non-agricultural supplementary sources of livelihood. In areas of armed conflict in particular, agriculture depends greatly on the work of women who move on a daily basis from their IDP camps to the farms where they are engaged as wage workers. Furthermore, women's participation in rural non-farming activities has also been on the rise, albeit mostly in the informal sector. Women have thus successfully increased the diversification of their livelihood systems through activities such as family farming and backyard

gardening, domestic poultry and animal production, processing and preserving of food products, forest fruit collection, agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour, producing and selling handicrafts, as well as establishing and owning micro businesses (mostly in retail trade and in selling tea and prepared food).

Despite these and other advancements, women's engagement in agriculture as a form of livelihood, and in crop production in particular, is hampered by a number of barriers. Among these barriers is that, in a predominantly patrilineal society, the rights of women farmers are rarely addressed or protected by institutions or customs, directly affecting their access to livelihood sources. Women's livelihoods in traditional agriculture are, therefore, more exposed to risk than men, since risks are not restricted to climatic and economic factors, but also to sociocultural factors. A major hindrance to women in crop farming is their lack of land rights, as elaborated upon previously. Women most often acquire only indirect access to land through their husbands or male family members, with their acquired rights being weaker than the primary male rights. Due to weak land rights, women often prefer to obtain a share of the land income as a relatively secure source of livelihood than to claim the property rights of their land.

In addition to weak land rights, there are other barriers to women's ability to generate income. One is that women in traditional agriculture typically carry out unpaid work. A case study of Sudanese women in traditional agriculture found that nearly half the women had not been paid for work outside the home within the previous month (OECD, 2015). A second barrier are the different area- and tribe-based rules that limit women's access to certain sources of livelihood. For example, women are usually not allowed to grow perennial crops or plant fruit trees. A third barrier, which is a major bottleneck for women in pastoral areas, is their limited access even to local markets, which prevents them from selling their products (e.g. dairy products) to consumers or retailers. Finally, there are some areas, such as parts of the Kassala, Red Sea and Gedaref states, where women are not allowed to work in agriculture or to work at all.

Women in the Sudan are also more directly impacted by changes in technologies and land-use patterns. Although traditional farming relies on limited technological tools and does not usually include the use of machinery, such as tractors and harvesters, an increasing number of farmers are expanding their cultivated areas and are in the early phase of transitioning to medium- and large-scale production, thus increasing their income. Almost all of these are male farmers benefiting from relatively better access to

resources and services. Generally, more women work in traditional agriculture than in mechanized agriculture, in small farms rather than large-scale projects, and in subsistence farming rather than cash-crop production. Consequently, the introduction of modern large-scale agricultural projects may further marginalize women, relegating them even more to weaker and less profitable production systems.

### 3.3.3. Gender and livestock production

Livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, camels and poultry) in the Sudan plays a vital, multidimensional role in the economy and in the lives of the rural population. Livestock is a key asset, serving as a source of food and nutritional security (providing milk, meat and eggs), a source of livelihoods, a buffer against crop failures and disasters, a safety net for social stability, a means of social solidarity, a means of access to power and authority, and a source of finance for crop farming where official credit is inaccessible. Moreover, livestock is a major means of transport and draught power to support crop production and processing, and a source of fertilizer and fuel. Raising livestock is also a significant field of employment.

The Sudan's ecological variation provides for an extensive and diverse traditional pastoral system, consisting of nomadic and transhumance subsystems as well as sedentary and semisedentary agro-pastoral subsystems. Approximately 90 percent of the Sudan's livestock is managed in these traditional pastoral systems. (Most of the remaining 10 percent is managed in industrial poultry, egg and dairy production schemes [Wilson, 2018]). The main animals raised in agro-pastoral systems are small ruminants, particularly sheep, while sedentary farmers primarily raise goats. (Goats are the main restocking choice in many places, in efforts to alleviate rural poverty, support livelihoods and address emergencies among internally displaced people and drought-affected communities.) In nomadic and seminomadic subsystems, cattle and camels are dominant, in addition to sheep, which provide livelihood diversification. Geographical location and mobility patterns influence the number of animals in the herd and the relative importance of livestock production and crop agriculture in the livelihood of the households.

While gender inequality is present in the livestock sector, animal production is a major contributor to the economic and social empowerment of rural women, who often raise small ruminants and poultry and sell milk and dairy products. In many areas, women (and children) who have no access to land have priority access to animal products for consumption or sale. Moreover, animals ease the work of women and children as they provide transportation and draught

power in agricultural and non-agricultural tasks. A main source of women's livestock assets is the in-kind dowry paid by men, which usually consists of camels or cows.

Women also dominate traditional poultry production through low-input, free-range systems, which are the most prevalent poultry-keeping systems in the country. Poultry production is both an important source of food for households and an important source of income for women. In the poultry production system, even if other household members are engaged in the production, women are primarily responsible for production and marketing, selling primarily to consumers in towns and, in some cases, to traders.

In the context of the declining mobility of nomadic families, women and children stay behind in villages and keep a small number of cows to supplement their income through the sale of milk, mostly for cheese production. The sale of milk is a source of gender empowerment, as milk is the sole domain of women in pastoral communities. However, this source of livelihood is abundant only during the rainy season, pasture is rich and the milking animals get enough feed, and in areas near urban centres. It is also contingent upon the availability of infrastructure, such as proper storage facilities, and transport. Furthermore, in some areas (such as parts of Kassala) and among some tribes (such as the Beja of eastern Sudan) only men are allowed to milk animals. Thus women in those settings do not have access to this source of livelihood.

#### 3.3.4. Gender and forestry

Forestry and wild food products contribute to household livelihoods in the Sudan by providing supplemental food items for daily consumption and as a source of income. Forests are also a source of fuelwood for much of the population, and a source of raw materials for construction and charcoal production. Non-wood products such as gum Arabic, acacia, cashew nuts, honey, beeswax, fodder, oils, medicines, dyes and fibres are also supplied by forests. Wood and gum Arabic are the most important commercial forest products. The gum Arabic belt occupies one-fifth of the total area of the country and accommodates one-fifth of the population and two-thirds of the livestock. With an estimated 70 percent of the national population considered forest-dependent, official accounts of the contribution of forestry to the national economy are underestimated (UN-REDD, 2014).

Access to forests is loosely controlled by the Government of the Sudan. Most forests are divided into management units, with each unit following a sequential agro-forestry system that includes gathering

forest products and cultivation. The accessibility of forest-based livelihood sources is based on local forest/tree customary tenure systems, which are very complex, like those of land tenure. Forest/tree tenure and management systems vary considerably in terms of the actors involved and the situations or contexts in which they operate. These systems include exclusive state property (to which the general public does not have access), communal common property, individually owned private property, and jointly owned private property, with or without unilaterally tradable shares. In addition, there are cases in which some trees are individually owned while others are seen as the common property of the tribe or village (Suliman, 2005).

Most commonly, the right to use the forests near a village is defined within a certain area of the forest, beyond which the forest is common property. Within this limited area, an elected local council of village residents, often headed by an elder or chief, organizes the right to use the forest. Usually, pastoral use is available to all while agricultural use occurs based on the allocation of areas to families or individuals. These arrangements are generally permanent, and in spite of being allocated on a usufruct basis, they act almost as ownership rights, whereby rights to the land can be transferred and inherited in accordance with customary laws.

In the agro-forestry sector, almost all members of small farming families are involved in seasonal activities related to gathering and selling forest products. These activities constitute seasonal employment during off-season periods of agricultural activities. Collection of forest tree and wild food products is almost exclusively the responsibility of women (usually with the help of their children). In addition, women are generally responsible for seedling preparation and weeding. However, the role and representation of women in decision-making pertaining to the forest sector are very limited.

Allocation of forest areas for women is rare, except in the cases of breadwinning women. Even when women are allocated forestland, they are not granted formal or customary rights. Rather, the matter is dependent on the attitudes of the local community and village elder or chief. Even in cases of inheritance, as indicated previously, women inherit the area allocated to them in accordance with sharia law on paper only, but in fact usually have no right to use these areas or obtain the yields or profits from them. These matters are often left to the individual decisions of male members of the family, and women are often pressured into selling their shares to their brothers or spouses, as customary

laws dictate that women must sell by intercession (to relatives). There are variations of this rule according to location. For example, in North Kordofan, women do not inherit their right to forestland and cannot use it, whereas in South and West Kordofan, they inherit the land but cannot use it. When new forestlands are allocated, if there are no men in the family, women are sometimes granted their rights to the land in the form of monetary compensation, but they are not granted an area of forestland.

Another barrier for women in the forestry sector is their limited mobility, as local customs and their household workload prevent women from going beyond the surroundings of their villages. As a result of these conditions, women's work in forestry is often limited to wage labour or gathering fruits for personal consumption or to sell. In most areas, women are also involved in charcoal production and timber cutting, as these are not considered typically male activities. Regarding paid labour in gum Arabic production, men almost exclusively carry out the tapping work, since it requires physical strength to manipulate the heavy tools used for tapping. Women play other diverse and essential roles related to collecting, grading, cleaning, packaging and selling gum Arabic, but the wages for this type of work are lower.

### 3.3.5. Gender and fisheries

The fisheries sector represents an important source of livelihood for individuals and communities. However, the populations that depend on the sector presently suffer from poverty and deprived living conditions (Anton and Curtis, 2017).

In addition to the territorial waters of the Sudan on the Red Sea, inland fishery activities are centred on the Nile River and its tributaries, as well as man-made lakes on the Nile River and its tributaries. Additional water bodies include irrigation canals, non-Nilotic streams (khors) and natural and excavated rainwater impoundments (haffirs). The Sudan's fisheries are divided into three classes: subsistence, artisanal and commercial (FAO, 2017). Subsistence fishing, using basic methods, is practiced mainly in the inland waters of the Sudan. Artisanal fishing is undertaken mostly on the Jebel Aulia Reservoir, as well as downstream on the White Nile. Motorized boats are employed in commercial marine fishing, which is largely underdeveloped, and is carried out by relatively well-off fishers and fisher associations, such as cooperative societies.

Inland fishing communities are often located in isolated and marginalized locations. Consequently, their potential is hidden and often forgotten, and they are rarely integrated in market value chains. Fishers suffer from lack of infrastructure, fishing inputs and proper and timely transport.

The livelihood generated from fisheries is dominated by men, since fishing and marketing are almost entirely restricted to men. Women do make essential contributions to fishery-based livelihoods, but mostly in the form of unpaid and invisible work within the household, including cleaning and processing of fish, and fixing nets. Women's participation in the sector is limited in part by mobility restrictions (Anton and Curtis, 2017). In some coastal areas, women are also engaged in producing handicrafts made from marine products.

## Case studies: findings from interviews and focus group discussions

The information presented in the following case studies was gathered primarily through focus group discussions and interviews with women farmers in South Darfur, Kassala and Khartoum.

### South Darfur (Bilail locality)

South Darfur is the largest state in greater Darfur. It has one of the highest population densities in the country, with 5 million people living in the state. Armed conflict plagued Darfur for nearly 20 years, causing high levels of forced displacement from rural to urban areas. Agriculture and animal husbandry suffered the most as a result of the conflict. Since 2019, however, Darfur has become relatively stable and displaced people in the camps return to their villages during the farming season and go back to the camps during the off season.

### Women farmers in Bilail locality, South Darfur, Nov. 2020



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**Land in Darfur is communally owned and is distributed to the men of the tribe. Traditionally, women work on the family farm, owned by their husbands, performing most farming activities, in addition to their domestic work. Women farmers can only be granted land if they are widowed or divorced, at the discretion of the head of the tribe. However, the arrangement is not permanent and it is not guaranteed that the women will be able to cultivate the same land during the next season. Such uncertainty negatively affects women farmers and their household food security.**

There is a common perception that women in Darfur are economically active. While it is true that women are freer to work outside the home, both on and off the farm, and have a great deal of knowledge about local farming practices and related activities, they work almost twice as much as men, while the men control the income and hold the decision-making power. Income earned on the family farm may even be used by the husband for another of his families, as polygamy is a common practice in Darfur.

Women's and men's daily routine demonstrates the great discrepancy between their workloads. While women work an average of 11 hours per day (ranging from a maximum of 16 hours to a minimum of six hours), men work an average of three hours. Women perform both household and production tasks, while men are more engaged in community work. That is why the men are always available for missions to meet, for assessment and other activities. Men spend the bulk of the day playing cards, lingering in market places and socializing.

The change in gender roles and, in many cases, the absence of men from the villages, both induced by conflict and displacement – resulting in many women becoming the sole providers for their families, performing most of the farming and work during the off season in the towns of host communities – is not necessarily accompanied by positive change in gender relations.

Table 1 presents the productive and reproductive responsibilities of women and men in South Darfur. Women farmers perform all farming activities with the exception of selling the crop, and their total workload is almost double that of the men. Even during the off-season (Table 2), women's workload continues to be much greater than that of the men. To empower women economically, it is not enough to provide them with technical support. It is equally important to work on changing behaviours and attitudes in order to balance the gender-based power relations. Gender roles are socially prescribed; thus, social change, through awareness raising, is crucial.

**Case study table 1. Productive and reproductive responsibilities of women and men in South Darfur\***

Activity	Women (%)	Men (%)
Land cleaning	40	60
Land preparation	40	60
Planting	80	20
Weeding	80	20
Thinning	80	20
Harvesting	70	30
Collecting	70	30
Threshing	90	10
Marketing	10	90
Packing	70	30
Transport	20	80
Household chores	95	5
Animal care	40	60
Average	60.4	39.6

\*A ten-point scale was used to estimate the relative workload percentage of men and women.

Source: Author's own elaboration.



Case study table 2. Daily routine during off-season in South Darfur

Activity	(%) Women	(%)Men
Household chores	100	0
Fetching water	60	40
Collecting firewood	60	40
House chores	20	80
House repair	40	60
Care of small animals	80	20
Care of large animals	20	80
Making handicrafts	100	0
Outdoor IGAs*	40	60
Indoor IGAs*	80	20
Average	62	38

\*Income-generating activities

Source: Author's own elaboration.

### Kassala State

Kassala State, located in eastern Sudan and bordering Eritrea, is relatively isolated. It suffers from a high levels of poverty and food insecurity. The region is vulnerable to climatic change and natural disasters and has limited economic opportunities, poor social services and weak state institutions.

Two groups of women farmers were identified during the field survey: those who work on family farms (normally owned by the husband or a male family member) and those who have their own farms, whether rented or owned. For women who work on their family farms, their role is limited to harvesting and packing the produce, and, sometimes, to weeding. (Their role in the proper storage of the produce, particularly sorghum, which is stored in hermetic bags, is an important contribution to the family farm. As indicated by a male farmer, "Women are more patient than us in dealing with the process of storage in these bags. They take their time in the process and that is why they are benefiting more than us.") These women have no control over the produce and they see themselves as "helpers". They are not paid for the work they do on the farm. As indicated by one of the male farmers during a FGD, "I might buy my wife a toub or shoes after selling the crop, but I am not willing to share with her how much I earned."

Only five of the 41 women interviewed have their own farms, on which they produce mainly food crops, primarily for family consumption. This small group indicated that they have full control over their

farms and perform all the productive tasks, from land preparation through harvesting. When it comes to marketing surplus production, if any, the situation is different. Going to the market is a gender-prescribed role for men, who believe that women need not travel long distances to the market. Furthermore, market places are traditionally occupied by men, except for small areas called "women's souqu" where women sell handicrafts and off-farm products. In a FGD, men indicated that women lack negotiation power and skill as they have no access to market information. (Within the family, market information is not normally shared with women as it is culturally considered to be the purview of men.) Thus, all the marketing is handled by the men of the family and the income generated is also controlled by them.

During the agricultural season, women farmers (those working on their own or family farms) work an average of 14 hours a day performing productive and reproductive tasks, with rest only in the evenings. During the off-season, women have flexible schedules, working up to eight hours performing household chores including cleaning, cooking and caring for children. During the off-season, the women can rest during the day and have a full-night's sleep (Table 2). The off-season in Kassala is very much suited to conducting training and encouraging off-farm IGAs. As one of the women indicated during the FGDs, "We are ready to attend literacy classes and trainings during the summer." Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the average daily routines of women during the off-season and during the agricultural season.

**Case study table 3. Average daily routine for women farmers during the off-season in Kassala**

Time	Activity
06.30	Cleaning
07.30	Making bread and preparing breakfast for husband and children
08.30	Breakfast with husband and children Coffee with husband
09.30	Chatting and coffee with neighbours
10.00	Preparing dinner: porridge and milk
17.00	Dinner
<b>Average hours per day</b>	<b>8</b>

**Source:** Author's own elaboration.

**Case study table 4. Average daily routine for women farmers during agricultural season in Kassala**

Time	Activity
06.30	Preparing children for school
07.30	Cleaning
08.30	Making bread and preparing breakfast for husband and children
10.00	Breakfast with children
10.30	Taking breakfast to husband in the field
11.00	Agricultural activities with husband and preparing coffee
15.00	Return home
15.30	Coffee
16.00 - 18.00	Preparing dinner (porridge and milk)
18.00	Dinner
21.00	Sleeping
<b>Average hours per day</b>	<b>14</b>

**Source:** Author's own elaboration.

At the community level, men dominate the traditional structures as well as the formal associations, such as committees and farmer associations. When women farmers are able to organize, they form separate women's associations. The absence of women in the main committees and associations of the community isolates them and reinforces the concept that women have little to contribute to their communities.

Table 5 clearly demonstrates the triple role held by women (reproductive, productive and community). Women are solely responsible for all reproductive tasks except collecting water, and are equally engaged in productive roles, working on their own farms as well as helping with harvesting and threshing on the

family farms. Women participate very little in marketing activities. (The few who do are in the North Delta locality.) Table 5 also shows that boys and girls are socialized to follow the same gender-based division of labour. Girls help their mothers and boys help their fathers. Hence, the traditional gender identities and roles are reinforced.

Case study table 5. Aggregate activity profile for farmers in Kassala

Type of activity	Women	Girls	Men	Boys
<b>Reproductive role</b>				
Cleaning	Xx	X		
Washing clothes	Xx	X		
Making coffee	Xx	X		
Caring for children	Xxx			
Fetching water			x	X
Fetching firewood	Xx	X		
<b>Productive role</b>				
Agriculture	xxx			
• Own farm (All processes)	x		xx	
• Family farm				
Harvesting	xxx			
Collection and storage			xx	
Trade			xxx	
Income generation activities	X		xx	
Care of domestic animals	Xx	X		
Herding			xx	X
Marketing	X		xx	
Labour	X		xx	
Community role	X		xx	
Local committee			xxx	
Native administration			xxx	
Farmer association	X		xx	
ROSCAs*	Xx		x	

\* Rotating Savings and Credit Associations

### 3. Khartoum State

The data for Khartoum was collected from women farmers in South Khartoum and north Omdurman.

In South Khartoum, women engage in subsistence farming, cultivating crops, vegetables and some fruits. Land preparation is performed by both male and female family members. Seeds are brought from the agricultural extension office in Jabal Awlyya, under the supervision of the farmer training school, or are purchased directly

from the markets. Women also perform all the harvesting and post-harvest conservation. In addition

to the farm work, women care for the children and the elderly. The land is owned by men, but women make decisions regarding their crops. However, most crops and vegetables are consumed by the family.

The Ministry of Agriculture is represented by the local agricultural extension unit, which provides training for women in farming and technical packages and practices in harvesting, irrigation, land fertilization and food processing. There is also a direct relationship with the Social Development Foundation, which provided women farmers with microloans for agriculture.

**A woman farmer in Aldikhanat locality, South Darfur, Dec. 2020**



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As for northern Omdurman, there are large commercial farms located along the main northern road. These farms belong to Sudanese investors and to foreign investors, including Turks, Egyptians, Palestinians, Syrians, Saudis and Iraqis. A variety of fruits and vegetables are produced for export on the farms. About 3 000 women are employed on the farms, performing various farming tasks including cleaning, weeding and harvesting work, while men are employed to work in activities related to irrigation, pesticide application and the operation of machinery.

The women start their day as early as 02.00 hrs, when they head to a gathering point on the main road where they are picked up by buses and travel for about one and a half hours to reach the farms. They work from 05.00 to 03.00 hrs, with a one-hour break. Women return to their homes at approximately 21.00 hrs. Some go to the market at that time to buy their daily food (milk, bread and sugar), while others go home to prepare food and wash clothes, in preparation for the next day's trip.

**Women farm labourers in North Omdurman, Dec. 2020**



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IDPs in Blue Nile  
State, Azaza village,  
suffering from the  
floods this year.

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Sudanese farmers  
harvesting watermelon  
in Kassala State.

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# 4. Access to resources

Access to resources has always been one of the major barriers to women's empowerment in the Sudan. The issue is more important than ever given the current context in which growing numbers of women in rural villages and in situations of displacement are assuming the role of head of household, because of the absence of men due to economic migration or conflict, without having the necessary access to basic resources, such as land, information and technology. Women's access to resources is limited by:

- » The legal framework: Laws and regulations that are either discriminatory or silent when it comes to women's rights. Despite the fact that the Bill of Rights in the interim Sudan Constitution asserts non-discrimination on the basis of gender, this has not been transferred to the normative legal framework. Discriminatory laws and regulations that constrain women's access to resources include the following:
  - › land laws, especially regarding communal land, which deny women the right to own land;
  - › inheritance laws, which, in most cases, grant women half the share allotted to the men in the family,
  - › bank regulations, which require collateral for loans, which the land and inheritance laws prevent women from having.
- » Norms, customs and traditions: Sociocultural gender norms consider men to be leaders and women to be followers, and deny women access to physical resources on the basis of patriarchal inheritance customs. In such an environment, even the women see themselves as less worthy. It is not uncommon for women to decline their rightful inheritance in favour of their fathers, brothers or husbands. Access to information, training, education and markets is also restricted as women are viewed primarily in the context of their reproductive roles and very little in the context of their productive roles.

## 4.1. Access to land

A study by the Gender Centre for Research & Studies (2009a) summarized barriers to women's acquisition of land rights under both customary and statutory land tenure systems. These barriers also came up in the interviews with key informants conducted for this assessment. The study categorized the barriers as follows:

- » Barriers linked to socio-economic conditions:
  - › high female illiteracy rates;
  - › ignorance of land rights among women;
  - › lack of resources to claim land rights;
  - › internalized discrimination;
  - › limited participation of women in decision-making bodies on land tenure issues.
- » Barriers linked to customs and traditional law:
  - › limited rights of women to own land due to patriarchy;
  - › land allocation administered by traditional leaders;
  - › traditional leaders do not know about land laws that provide for women's rights;
  - › inheritance regulations;
  - › limited participation of women in traditional community decision-making.
- » Barriers related to statutory law:
  - › the Land Law does not have a clause that promotes the land rights of women;
  - › the Land Law is non-discriminatory but is not harmonized with other laws in the system;
  - › lack of capacity and knowledge on the part of implementers.

Given this reality, women have significantly less access to land and other natural resources than men, despite their significant role in agricultural production. Even when land is granted to them, they rarely own it and must rent the land or depend the will of others to lend

them the land. Furthermore, their decision-making power regarding the use of the land is restricted by social norms. For instance, in some localities, social norms dictate that women may not plant perennial crops or fruit trees. Also, women are rarely able to use the land as security for loans because of the lack of land titles. (This also applies to men in many cases.)

As indicated previously, in the event of divorce or the death of a spouse women also face problems gaining access to land or maintaining their land rights. In the event of divorce, in most regions, women lose their right to all the family property, including the land. In the case of the death of the husband, the husband's family "inherits" the widow and she retains user's rights to the land, at the discretion of the family. There is an emerging trend for family members, such as brothers or children, to sell the family land and property without the woman's consent or even without informing her. In the event of the death of the husband, a woman must go through administrative procedures including presenting a death certificate to qualify for a land plot under leasehold, which is often difficult to obtain. As to the woman's inheritance from her own family, according to sharia law, women are entitled to half the inheritance of their brothers. However, they generally do not receive the inheritance, nor do they request it. Informants agreed that there is extremely limited public awareness, particularly among rural women, regarding legislative regulations addressing their land rights and that men often resist giving up their old privileges.

Gender inequalities related to land differ from one region to another and even within the same region. In the rainfed sector, it is not uncommon for land not to be demarcated or registered. In these cases, land rights are governed by local customary law, which depends on unwritten traditional rules administered by traditional leaders, contingent upon tribal or community membership. Under this system, households have strong, exclusive residential rights, seasonally exclusive rights to arable land, and shared rights to grazing land and other common resources. This is the most

common pattern of land tenure, particularly in Darfur, Northern and Southern Kordofan, the Nile Valley, Blue Nile and Eastern Sudan (Gender Centre for Research & Studies, 2009a). Under this framework, the main means of access to land for women is through their male relatives. That is, women gain access to land indirectly by birth or marriage, as daughters, wives or mothers. Even more limited is women's access to semimechanised, rainfed lands and mechanised irrigated lands.

Women's access to land in Darfur is particularly constrained. Generally, the land tenure system in Darfur is based on the hakora system – communal land belonging to a certain tribe, clan or extended family. In this system, the allotment of land follows a hierarchical structure in which women do not exist. A FGD in Darfur revealed that women are absolutely denied the right to own farming land. According to a group of tribal leaders, women cannot own land because they could marry into another tribe or clan, and the land can by no means belong to the woman's husband or sons. They also argued that women can access land if they ask for it. The women consulted in an FDG confirmed this, but indicated that they cannot decide on the type or the location of the land that is granted to them. Generally, women are given land that is difficult to till, and if the land is far from the village it becomes a challenge for them to work the land, given their household workload. The issue of land ownership for women in Darfur poses a major challenge to gender equality efforts in the Sudan, and, as indicated by the foregoing description of their actual rights, the commonly held assumption that Darfuran women are economically empowered because they have more freedom of movement and because they work on farms requires deeper investigation.

In Kassala, on the other hand, the situation of women's land ownership is changing gradually. Despite the fact that land is still under the control of men, women are gradually accessing land ownership, especially in rainfed areas (see Table 4). However, this increase is mainly in urban and semi-urban settings. Additionally, during an

**Table 4. Development of women's ownership of rainfed land in Kassala State**

Year	Total number of farmers	Male farmers	Female farmers	% of female farmers
2017	2980	2530	450	15
2016	1475	2458	17	1
2015	1330	1321	9	7

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Kassala State, 2019.



interview with some of the women farmers who own their land, it was found that they are entrepreneurial women with access to financial resources which enabled them to purchase the plots in rainfed areas. They were also found to be relatively educated and socially and economically empowered.

## 4.2. Access to finance

The Agricultural Bank of Sudan (ABS) is the most important player in agricultural credit in the country. However, throughout its history the bank has focused mostly on large-scale irrigated schemes and semimechanized farms, despite the Agricultural Bank of Sudan Act (1991/92), which stipulates that 40 percent of credit should be dedicated to small farmers, with equal access to credit, irrespective of gender. However, this percentage has remained a theoretical target. Small-scale farmers, who represent the majority of farmers, and female farmers in particular, have extremely limited access to the agricultural credit system. Additionally, livestock producers in general have no access to capital, finance or rural credit. The 2009 NBHS showed that 93 percent of households that borrowed money secured private loans from family or other individuals, while only 3 percent borrowed money from banks or government agencies. FAO has identified the lack of access to financial services as a main constraint on rural livelihoods (FAO and Government of the Sudan, 2015). Rural development projects supported by governmental and development agencies aiming to eradicate rural poverty have often failed to achieve the desired results due to the lack of access to sustainable rural finance (IFAD, 2013b).

Both men and women small-scale farmers lack financial services and access to agricultural credit for the following reasons:

- » lack of appropriate collateral to secure loans due to the lack of land titles and official property rights;
- » lack of personal identification documents (such as birth certificates and IDs);
- » high agricultural risk attributed to the vulnerability of small farmers;
- » lack of information, qualifications and skills needed for complicated lending procedures;
- » distance from most bank branches, which are mostly in urban centres, and related transportation costs;
- » in the case of women farmers, financial institutions

favour men and have an unconscious bias against women

Although these factors affect both men and women farmers, women are significantly more disadvantaged in each of the factors than men. It is especially difficult for rural women to borrow from banks, as most do not have bank accounts and lack collateral to offer the bank in exchange for loans. Most women are unfamiliar with the procedures involved for accessing bank loans. Practical and logistical issues, such as the distance and the hours of operation at banks, may require women to be outside their homes for hours at a time or to make many return visits, which increases the cost of accessing loans and negatively impacts their family and work commitments. There is also a general tendency for banks to regard women as borrowers for consumption purposes rather than as productive borrowers (FAO, 2017, 2015). This was reflected in the results of the NBHS 2009, which indicated that 73 percent of the money borrowed by private households was sought for consumption purposes.

Another important aspect of the gender gap in access to agricultural financing is the lack of access that women farmers have to alternative lending mechanisms, which men farmers do have access to, largely as a result of men's wider interaction with other men and with informal institutions. These include:

- » personal savings;
- » loans from family and friends;
- » lending from informal systems;
- » purchasing inputs from agricultural companies and traders with deferred payment (normally at high prices);
- » off-farm activities; and
- » migrant work and remittances.

Beyond bank restrictions, tradition and local customs also limit women's control over financial matters. However, the last two decades have witnessed increasing efforts to provide financial services to disadvantaged population groups, including the poor at large, small farmers, women and rural women in particular. Most important among these are microfinance initiatives. In 2006, microfinance was shown to have the potential to play a key role in poverty reduction. As such, the Government of the Sudan incorporated microfinance into its official credit policy, making it a key component of its banking

strategy in support of poverty reduction efforts. This prompted the Central Bank of Sudan to establish an independent unit specialized in microfinance. Additionally, microfinance units were established at Central Bank branches at the state level and at the headquarters of commercial banks.

The Central Bank of Sudan, moreover, established policies directing that all national and commercial banks allocate 12 percent of their lending caps to microfinance. It also encouraged the establishment of microfinance companies at the national and state levels to cover urban–rural development efforts and to provide credit to small-scale producers. There are currently 61 microfinance institutions operating in the country, including 22 banks and 29 non-banking institutions (Abou Kasary and Abdelrahman, 2014).

The Central Bank's initial directive regarding microfinancing services stipulated that 30 percent of credit resources be allocated to women and 70 percent be allocated to rural areas. The new comprehensive Micro-Finance Strategy 2016, increases the percentage allocated to women to 50 percent. Moreover, a new agency was established to provide guarantees for debtors. However, despite these directives, the actual average financing offered by banks to women from 2009 to 2015 was a mere 4 percent.

As for the Agricultural Bank of Sudan, the value of microfinance offered from 2007 to 2015 was approximately SDG 2.265 billion, granted to 510 447 customers, about 22 percent of them women.<sup>9</sup> The total number of women who have obtained loans from the Agricultural Bank of Sudan is approximately 19 000, which constitutes a very limited number, yet reflects exponential growth, given that the number of women benefitting from the bank was just 290 in 2008 (Ministry of Welfare and Social Security, 2015a). In the same period, the Family Bank offered about SDG 139 million in microfinancing to 22 610 customers, about 38.5 percent of them women.<sup>10</sup>

With regard to non-bank microfinance institutions, approximately SDG 761 000 was offered to women in 2015. Although this is a small amount, it is worth noting that this was 235 percent more than the amount offered in microfinance to women by banks. The number of women benefitting from non-banking financial institutions is approximately 314 percent more than those benefitting from banks.

In addition to such institutions, there are many internationally supported local initiatives aiming to lend to rural women and support lending, alongside other goals. Among the most important initiatives are those of the Sudanese Women General Union (SWGU), key among which is the National Project for Rural Women Development, supported by the SWGU and executed by the Saving and Social Development Bank at the national level. The project aims to reduce poverty and empower rural women economically, socially and politically, with microfinancing comprising a key aspect of the programme (Ministry of Welfare and Social Security, 2015b).

Despite the existence of increasing sources of finance for small-scale farmers and low-income rural residents, and for women in particular, they nonetheless remain extremely limited. This is true in terms of the amounts available and the number of beneficiaries, particularly in view of the large segment of the population that is unable to access financing, despite their extreme need for it.

A large number of studies indicate that there are limited and insufficient lending institutions that take into account the particular situation of rural women. Most lack specific policies and operational structures set to meet the needs of women and close the gaps, taking local customs into consideration. Moreover, there is a serious lack of training of bank employees to increase their sensitivity to gender issues, particularly at the local level.

Women's groups and NGOs have made efforts to overcome this obstacle by promoting collective insurance schemes for women's groups in which the women guarantee each other's loans. This modality works with some success in microfinance. However, the lending limit for microfinance loans is very low and such loans are provided generally to what are called "productive family" microbusinesses. As shown in Table 5, only 3 percent of clients accessing microfinance for agriculture were women.

The fact that women cannot access financial resources limits them severely in their potential as food producers and entrepreneurs. Investing in agriculture and animal production is affected by both access to land and access to credit. Thus, if these two hurdles are not removed, women's contribution to food security will remain minimal, which will adversely affect the potential to achieve zero-hunger in the future in the Sudan.

<sup>9</sup> Calculated based on the 2015 annual report of the Agricultural Bank of Sudan, Khartoum, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Rural–urban disaggregation is not available.

**Table 5. Number of microfinance borrows, by gender**

Locality	Men	Women	Total
Khashmelgirba	315	26	341
Atbara River	250	0	250
Rural Kassala	150	0	150
Total	715	26	741
Percent	97	3	100

Source: SORD, Kassala, 2014.

### 4.3. Access to agricultural services

The circumstances determining access to agricultural services are related those that determine access to finance. Thus, in addition to lack of financing, both male and female farmers suffer from a severe lack of agricultural services. This particularly applies to small-scale farmers in the traditional subsistence sector, the sector in which most women farmers participate. In the limited settings in which such services are available, access to them is subject to systematic gender inequalities, with women having significantly less access due to both demand and supply issues. On the demand side, the socio-cultural and economic conditions in which female farmers live and work limits their access, and, on the supply side, the design of agricultural services, which put women at a disadvantage, further limit their access to such services.

The Sudan's agriculture is characterized by low productivity, which is widely attributed to the limited facilities and resources allocated to agricultural extension and technology transfer. Research and extension systems are ineffective in developing new knowledge and technology due to insufficient capacity and experience on the part of their personnel, poor research output, poor budgetary allocation and low levels of investment for generating appropriate innovations for adding value (FAO, 2017). In 2010, the Sudan had one of the lowest per capita expenditures on research in Africa. Extension units lack sufficient operational funds and physical resources, and therefore many of the competent staff have left (ibid.). As a result of these conditions, there is a limited supply of and access to improved technology in the form of improved seeds, cuttings, breeds, vaccines and agrochemicals. Weak linkages with farmers for the uptake of innovations, related to technological constraints, worsens the situation even more. Moreover, research and extension activities have been focused on cash crop production in the irrigated sector, while the traditional rainfed sector, where women represent a majority, has received limited attention (Ministry of

Agriculture and Forestry, 2015). Institutional constraints also create particular hurdles for services in livestock production. Research does not generate sufficient problem-solving technologies to fuel livestock systems, particularly for the production side. Extension units and institutions are ineffective in shaping producers' visions with regard to manipulating the resources at their disposal to produce efficiently, economically and sustainably.

Against this backdrop, rural women in the Sudan have far less access to agricultural services, technology and inputs than men. This is due to their household workload and cultural norms on the one hand, and to the scheme, structure, policies and performance of the service providers on the other hand. Social structure and economic disadvantage reinforce each other and work against women's equal access to agricultural services (as is the case with assets). Moreover, interventions targeting smallholder farmers often fail to redress women's lack of access to and control over important agricultural resources. While some interventions are designed, in the best cases, to adapt some activities to existing constraints related to gender norms, they do not address the constraints themselves as a targeted outcome or impact.

One positive development in this regard is the national Women's Empowerment Policy (2007). This policy targets rural women and focuses on: 1) enhancing opportunities for women to gain agricultural knowledge; 2) enhancing opportunities for women to obtain technology and skills; 3) policy development to create opportunities for administrative and developmental capabilities; and 4) eliminating arbitrary restrictions on women's participation in non-traditional fields of employment (JICA, 2012). Nevertheless, traditions and social and cultural norms are the main factors hindering women from accessing agricultural services and obtaining inputs and new technologies. Women are usually not allowed to contact male service providers such as agricultural extension agents and trainers, nor are they allowed to

travel outside their communities to locations where the services are available. Another important factor is the high rate of illiteracy among women and their lack of information and awareness about available services and how to benefit from them. Additionally, fewer women are enrolled in community farmer groups, committees or cooperatives, which can be attributed both to socio-cultural restrictions and lack of awareness of the benefits of participating in such groups and organizations. According to key informants, women's participation in the two most important bodies representing farmers and nomadic pastoralists (the Pastoralist Union and the Farmers Union) is very limited.

#### 4.4. Extension

Centralized extension systems tend to promote innovations that benefit farmers with more assets and higher levels of education, thus excluding the majority of Sudanese farmers, particularly women. Gender disparities in accessing extension exist throughout the country; however, their extent varies by region and farming system. In cash crop production areas, men represent almost the entire target group of the extension services. For example, in the Gezira scheme, out of the 120 000 farmers targeted by extension services, only 11 percent are women (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2015).

The means of delivery of extension services also marginalizes women. Extension training is often provided by a cooperating partner organization, which target male farmers, with women expected to receive the information second-hand. In rural areas, extension services are provided through direct demonstration and meetings with farmers, which women may not be able to participate in, due to time and other constraints. (Extension workers do not use communication media enough to share information, which would provide an alternative means of access to the information for women.) Furthermore, the majority of extension workers are men, which represents an additional obstacle hindering women's access to such services. On a more positive note, some UN institutions and NGOs (including FAO, IFAD, WFP and Practical Action) have recently delivered training and extension services targeting women and tailored to their needs.

#### 4.5. Mechanization and technology

The Sudan's crop sector as a whole, and the rainfed sector in particular, is deficient in the generation and transfer of innovative technology. In almost all Sudanese villages, food production, processing and storage is carried out using the most basic, traditional

technology. Furthermore, land tenure systems in which communal land is divided into small plots, together with limited production capacities, hinder the adoption of new agricultural technologies on the majority of farms (particularly in the rainfed subsistence sector, dominated by small-scale farmers and women). Technology transfer is also marked with gender inequality. From technology research through the physical and technical features of agricultural machines and tools, the entire scheme of agricultural technology is male-oriented, while women are essentially excluded from the process, even in government farm-aid technology programmes. This is due, in part, to the gender gap in education and to the belief, on the part of research and technology institutions, that technology is gender-neutral.

On larger, mechanized farms, mechanization mainly facilitates tasks that are usually performed by men, such as land preparation, sowing, fertilizing, herbicide use, harvesting and post-harvesting activities, while women usually perform the non-mechanized and more labour-intensive tasks, such as hand-weeding and vegetable and fruit picking. Conversely, women have very limited access to technologies (such as agricultural tools and transportation facilities) that could facilitate their work and increase their income. Furthermore, available agriculture and irrigation machines and tools are mostly unfriendly to women, since they depend on physical power (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2015). With regard to tractors in particular, according to key informants, where tractors are available, women are discriminated against in obtaining tractor services as lands owned by men are usually given priority and more time for such services. The delay in ploughing women's fields often results in crop failure. Finally, the lack of secure land tenure, which is the case for women more than men, makes women less willing and able to take the risk of owning (or even applying) new technologies.

An additional consideration is that mechanization has mixed implications for women's workloads, depending on the technology and how it is applied. Rural women spend long periods of time every day performing tedious and mostly unpaid time-consuming, labour-intensive and agricultural and domestic work (Gender Centre for Research and Studies, 2009a). In some cases, women's access to home-based technologies (such as electricity, piped water, improved sanitation facilities, ovens, sewage disposal, cooking stoves and cold storage devices) has reduced their workload and led to significant improvement in many areas. At the same time, in some cases, mechanization has replaced a large number of women in the performance of certain

tasks through which they earned needed additional income for their families.

In a survey conducted by the Social Studies Department of the Agricultural Research Corporation in 2000, the end user of technology is perceived to be a man. Technology is not gender neutral, and by producing technology assuming that the end user is a man, women are automatically excluded as beneficiaries of such technology. For instance, women farmers get pregnant and carry their babies into the field with them. Technology must be appropriate and sensitive to these particular needs of women. A typical example of gender-blind technology is the size and weight of tractors and spray pumps, which are designed to be driven and carried by men and are difficult for women to manipulate. In fact, even simple agricultural tools, such as hoes and weeders, are produced to suit men more than women, especially considering that many women continue to farm while pregnant and many carry babies with them when they work in fields.

#### 4.6. Access to information

Rural women have less access to different types of information, including agricultural production information, than their spouses and male family members, and men in general. This limited access to information is associated with other gender gaps and the limited choices open to rural women in the Sudan, key among which are:

- » relatively high levels of social and political marginalization;
- » limited access to land and to finance and extension services;
- » lower educational levels and higher illiteracy rates;
- » limited participation in agricultural and other community organizations;
- » limited exposure to mass media and to in-person information sources;
- » poverty and its many negative effects; and
- » limited ability to use modern communication tools.

Lack of information is linked to the disadvantages rural women experience in almost all aspects of rural life, including agriculture, livestock farming, harvesting, marketing, health and environmental issues. It is notable that socio-cultural factors play the determining role in creating gender inequality in

terms of access to information. For example, while rural women are generally too poor and less likely to allocate their income to obtain their own means of telecommunications, they are reluctant to visit public communication facilities, such as internet cafes, as they are owned and frequented by men. (This also applies to girls.) The same can be said of women attending public gatherings and awareness-raising events.

Information that is not directly targeted at women, generally does not reach them. That is why, in information-based initiatives, assuming that the household is the unit of intervention is an invalid assumption. Furthermore, designing training and education sessions for women, in agriculture or any other topic, without considering their daily routine often results in wasted time and resources. To help women access information, planning must be gender-sensitive and responsive. The design of events and activities must consider the reproductive roles of women, especially in rural areas.

#### 4.7. Animal health

There is a severe general lack of veterinary health and feed-related services, as well as advisory extension services, within traditional animal production systems, in all its forms (including sedentary farming systems and nomadic herding). Assistance provided to producers and pastoralists to develop management practices and adapt them to the evolving animal production conditions is very limited. Research and extension services in support of production options, technology, inputs and marketing are almost non-existent. Medicines and vaccinations (if available) are not affordable to most producers. Veterinary care (if available and accessible) is very poor and mainly focused only on treating animals, without providing any training for producers (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2015). Gender differences in accessing veterinary services are difficult to assess, due to limitations of evidence and limitations in overall access to such services.

#### 4.8. Access to agricultural inputs and markets

Timely access to required agricultural inputs (such as improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides) is extremely limited among small-scale farmers in the Sudan (FAO, 2017). This is reflected in low usage of purchased agricultural inputs. The use of fertilizer, for example, is almost entirely limited to urea, at an average of 5 kg per 0.42 ha (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2015). The use of other modern inputs is minimal. These limitations also apply to the livestock

and fisheries subsectors (ibid.). As in the case of agricultural services, women generally have less access to purchased inputs than men. Gender inequality in accessing input markets is attributed to economic as well as social factors. Sudanese rural women generally have much less purchasing power than men. Lack of control over resources and products and lack of access to finance are the main factors behind rural women's limited liquidity. Moreover, even when some money is available, women usually prioritize urgent household expenditures, such as food and education, over agricultural inputs. In terms of social limitations, women's limited access to extension services and information, as well as mobility restrictions, further hinder their access to agricultural inputs.

As indicated previously in the analysis of gender roles, although women sell vegetables and handicrafts in markets in certain parts of the Sudan (such as Darfur and Gedaref), the marketing of food and agricultural crops in the country is generally dominated by men. Marketing is a process that goes beyond the market place, including the processes of storage, transport, grading, pricing and selling of agricultural products. Since women are almost absent from this entire range of activities, their access to information about marketing is reduced to a bare minimum, especially in more traditional areas such as eastern Sudan. The market place provides an opportunity for men to exchange news and information, negotiate deals, make alliances, share experiences and have fun. This exposure, from which women are excluded, further widens the gender gap and weakens women's position in negotiations and in financial issues in general.

Without steps to bridge these gender gaps in access to production inputs and services and to market information and networks, women engaged in farming will remain confined to low-productivity agriculture. Infrastructural development and other measures taken to revive agriculture will not reach them. Given the growing importance of women in food production systems, this will grossly undercut the country's potential to increase agricultural output and ensure food security.

#### 4.9. Access to product markets and value chains

Several factors hinder small farmers in the traditional agricultural sector from benefiting from marketing and post-harvest opportunities, including:

- » lack of infrastructure (transport, storage and market) and post-harvest facilities;<sup>11</sup>
- » traders' and brokers' monopolies;
- » weak market position (due to the small production capacity and the lack of effective farmers' organizations);
- » unavailability or high cost of transportation (considering the limited production capacity);
- » low prices at harvest time (when small farmers are forced to sell due to the pressing need for money);
- » price fluctuations and market instability;
- » lack of market information.

Due to gender inequalities in market access, each of these challenges is magnified for women, and women face additional obstacles to accessing product markets as well. For instance, in most rural areas, women do not have control over the crops they produce. Mobility restrictions further hinder women's access to market opportunities as women in many areas are not allowed to move outside their villages or to use means of transportation.

#### 4.10. Participation in development planning and decision-making in the public sphere

Organized social participation is generally weak for rural men and women in the Sudan, as is reflected in low levels of community organization and involvement in parties, associations, unions, committees and other types of organizations. Women's participation in such organizations is even weaker. For example, all political parties in the Sudan are led by men. The Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) coalition is predominantly comprised of men, with a single woman representative out of 27 members. Although women participated in the Juba Peace Agreement, an important achievement, they participated in the second track, but were not included in the first track. The High Council for Peace included one woman as a gender advisor. Furthermore, out of 18 state governors, only two are women. Other than farmer's and pastoralist's associations created specifically for women, farmer's associations and pastoralist associations generally do not include any women at all. Finally, although the number of women in

<sup>11</sup> Road density in the Sudan is extremely low, at 4.6 km per 1 000 km<sup>2</sup>. By comparison, the average road density for sub-Saharan African countries is 20.4 km per 1 000 km<sup>2</sup> (World Bank Group and Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2016).

the line ministries is estimated at over 60 percent, their representation decreases at top leadership levels.

The gap in women's involvement is not attributed to legal constraints that prevent their involvement in organizations and activities, but rather to socio-economic and cultural factors, most importantly customs and traditions. Rural women's poor economic status and their limited mobility further hinder their participation in such activities. Moreover, women's much weightier workload leaves them with little time or energy to participate in non-household or productive activities. An additional limiting factor is that many institutions are not women-friendly and have no measures to specifically target and involve women.

At the community level, men are much more involved in formal organizations, most of which have an economic focus, such as village committees, associations and producers' unions. Women are implicitly excluded from economic organizations wherein membership is contingent on land ownership or the right to use resources, such as associations for water, agriculture, gum Arabic, etc. In all such organizations, possession is evidenced by customary allocations and witness testimonies. Since the vast majority of women do not own assets, they are excluded from joining such organizations and participating in their activities.

The gap is even larger with regard to community organizations which are governed by local customs and informal laws. These local bodies make the most important decisions at the community level around resource governance and conflict resolution. These include decisions related to the distribution of land and provision of agricultural inputs, as well as the regulation of the use of public natural resources such as irrigation water, fisheries and forests. Women are almost entirely absent from such community organizations, which negatively impacts the protection of their rights.

In terms of personal rights and social roles, displaced women are subject to the rules of the tribes from which they originated, irrespective of the locations to which they have been displaced. In many cases, however, displaced women – including those who have become integrated into new communities and those who live in IDP camps – have more freedom of mobility and participation in economic and social activities, as well as participation in projects and events. For those on their

own, this is permitted due to their characterization as heads of their households. For those living with their husbands, this is permitted so that their husbands will not lose the benefits provided to the family through the women. This has led to positive social changes and, in some cases, to greater gender equality in displaced communities (although, as mentioned above, migrant and displaced women also face certain vulnerabilities, such as increased incidences of gender-based violence).

On the institutional side, while there are numerous institutions that support women's social participation, most of them are concentrated in the capital and in other urban centres. Their presence and activities are sparser the farther one goes from these urban centres and they are non-existent in most small villages and remote areas. In spite of this, women's participation is gradually increasing in some rural areas, thanks to scattered efforts in this regard. For instance, women's participation is increasing in agricultural associations in mechanized agricultural areas and in women-centred business development institutions focused on processing non-wood forest products in the eastern states. Other examples include FAO-supported women farming centres in the eastern region and IFAD's programmes supporting small-scale traditional rainfed producers in Sinar State.

Activities such as these have boosted women's participation and to a certain degree have begun reducing gender segregation by activating interaction between men and women in local communities. Additionally, certain interventions that have helped to lessen women's workload in the home (such as the installation of running water and stoves in homes) have also indirectly contributed to increasing their participation in their communities by freeing up hours of women's time that were previously dedicated to fetching water and wood. The introduction of electricity and the provision of refrigeration methods have further decreased women's household burden and increased the time they have available to participate in community and other activities.

It is noteworthy that in the rural communities in which women's economic empowerment has increased, the community's view of women has begun to change and women's social status has been raised. The women in these villages have become more involved in village meetings and are taken more seriously, with more consideration given to their opinions and interests.



  **US AID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE  
CROP SEED : SORGHUM  
VARIETY : ANEAA GADAMAKI  
PROJ : OSROI SUD / 100RISA  
WEIGHT : 50 KG  
YEAR OF HARVEST : 2020 / 2021  
SUPPLIER : ARAB SUDANESE SEED CO.LTD  
LOT NO. : 712010-210  
NOT FOR HUMAN OR ANIMAL CONSUMPTION

  **USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE  
CROP : COWPEA  
VARIETY : BUFI  
GERMINATION RATE : 75 % min  
YEAR OF HARVEST : 2021  
WEIGHT : 60 KG  
PROJECT NUMBER : 8004096  
SUPPLIER : AGRIBUSINESS  
SUDAN COMPANY  
7 BAGS FOR 10 HOUSEHOLDS

During the seeds distribution in Red Sea state.  
©FAO/Hashim Onour



# 5. Conclusions

## 5.1. Gender issues at the national level

Progress has been made towards gender equality in the Sudan in terms of developing strategies that address gender equality implicitly or explicitly (mostly under the banner of women's rights). Furthermore, several institutional structures have been established in ministries and government bodies to facilitate the promotion of gender equality, and there has been a marked increase in the focus given by national and international NGOs to gender equality and to integrating gender-related issues into programmes and projects. Education, economic and political participation are among the areas in which such achievements are more evident. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) value for the Sudan witnessed significant improvement over the last decade, dropping from 0.708 in 2008 to 0.560 in 2018.

In terms of employment, women's employment has gradually improved in the public sector and in urban areas. However, the employment-to-population ratio (EPR), which is generally low, still shows a great degree of gender inequality, with men's EPR being three times higher than women's. The gender gap in favour of men is more pronounced in the private sector than in the public sector and in certain professions in rural areas. Furthermore, as discussed in this report, women make up a larger part of the workforce in the informal sector and in vulnerable, insecure jobs.

Despite this important progress, the Sudan is still far from achieving gender equality. As demonstrated by the value of its Gender Development Index (0.836), gender inequality remains one of the most serious challenges facing the country's development agenda.

Based on the analysis conducted, some of the major challenges that remain to be addressed are:

- » Despite being recognized in the Constitution and among the priorities of the current government, women's rights are not sufficiently promoted and protected by the existing legal framework. Women's

participation and representation in the various transitional government structures and institutions also remain low.

- » Currently, there is no national gender equality or women's empowerment policy to guide and coordinate the gender-related work of different institutions and organizations. The Women and Gender Equality Commission is not yet formed.
- » The National Action Plan 1325 (for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security), although endorsed by the Council of Ministers, is not yet implemented and the mechanism for implementation is not clear.
- » To different extents, the awareness and capacities of institutions and organizations to work on gender remain limited and require further strengthening. The concept of gender itself is often confused and used interchangeably with other concepts, such as women's rights or women's empowerment.
- » There is a pressing need to develop technical capabilities to integrate gender considerations into planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The majority of those involved in this work are dedicated and have a positive attitude towards gender equality but lack the tools to translate this commitment into action.
- » Gender mainstreaming is not appropriately institutionalized in ministries and government bodies. Gender issues are entrusted to individuals (focal points) rather than structural units. The focal points are rarely specialized in gender and rarely dedicated to gender issues full-time. In addition to their high turnover rates, gender focal points often do not have clear terms of reference nor sufficient resources to fulfil their role. This also applies, to some degree, to gender focal points in a number of international development organizations working in the Sudan.

- » Policies and strategies that implicitly or explicitly address gender equality dimensions are often not necessarily translated into resourced actions plans and, thus, are not sufficiently operationalized. As a result, many interventions are gender-blind or address gender issues only on an ad hoc basis.
- » There is a general lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive baseline studies and impact assessments that can inform evidence-based policy and programme development.
- » Most interventions address women by simply setting quantitative targets (for example, to ensure women's participation in project activities), but do not really assess benefits and impact from a gender perspective nor investigate the root causes of gender inequality in the Sudan.
- » Most development interventions consider the sociocultural conditions and social norms that constrain women's participation and representation to be unchangeable. In the best cases, they are taken into consideration during the project design phase, but no attempt is made to foster social change through the implemented interventions.
- » Poor access to credit, production inputs, information (and training) and markets: Although the entire agricultural sector is afflicted by poor opportunities to access credit, inputs, information and markets, women are at a very marked disadvantage in access to all these resources due to both supply and demand aspects, and largely to limiting societal norms.
- » Women participate in the poorest agricultural subsectors: Women participate most in traditional, small-scale, subsistence farming. Their possibility to participate in larger-scale and more productive farming is severely limited.
- » Women contribute as much as men to production, but do not have decision-making power regarding income generated: In all agricultural subsectors, and in fisheries, women work at least as much as the men, but only men are involved in marketing activities and they generally have the full decision-making power regarding the use of the income earned. (In some cases, women, or women together with men, decide on household-related expenses, especially regarding health and education.)
- » Women's excessive workload: Women's double, and sometimes, triple roles, in production, reproduction and community, make their workload such that they are unable to participate in activities that promote their development as individuals and as farmers.
- » Livestock production supports women's empowerment: Rural women are empowered socially and economically by raising small animals and producing and selling dairy products. However, they are disadvantaged in this sector as well.
- » The non-wood forest products sector is an area in which women are active: The collection of forest fruits and wild food products is almost exclusively the responsibility of women, however their rights to access the land depends on the local community and on the village elder or chief. This also applies to the key non-wood economic forest product – gum Arabic.

## 5.2. Gender issues in the agriculture and rural sector

The small-scale agriculture sector in the Sudan suffers from multiple weaknesses, key among which are limited production capacities and productivity, institutional weaknesses and difficulty in accessing financing, agricultural services, technologies and markets. These obstacles impede the progress of both men and women farmers. However, due to legislative, institutional, economic and sociocultural factors, women farmers experience these limitations to a much greater degree than men.

Although there is a great deal of variation in gender status in agriculture, depending on ecological factors, production patterns and livelihood composition and their interaction with sociocultural and tribal factors, the following general observations can be made:

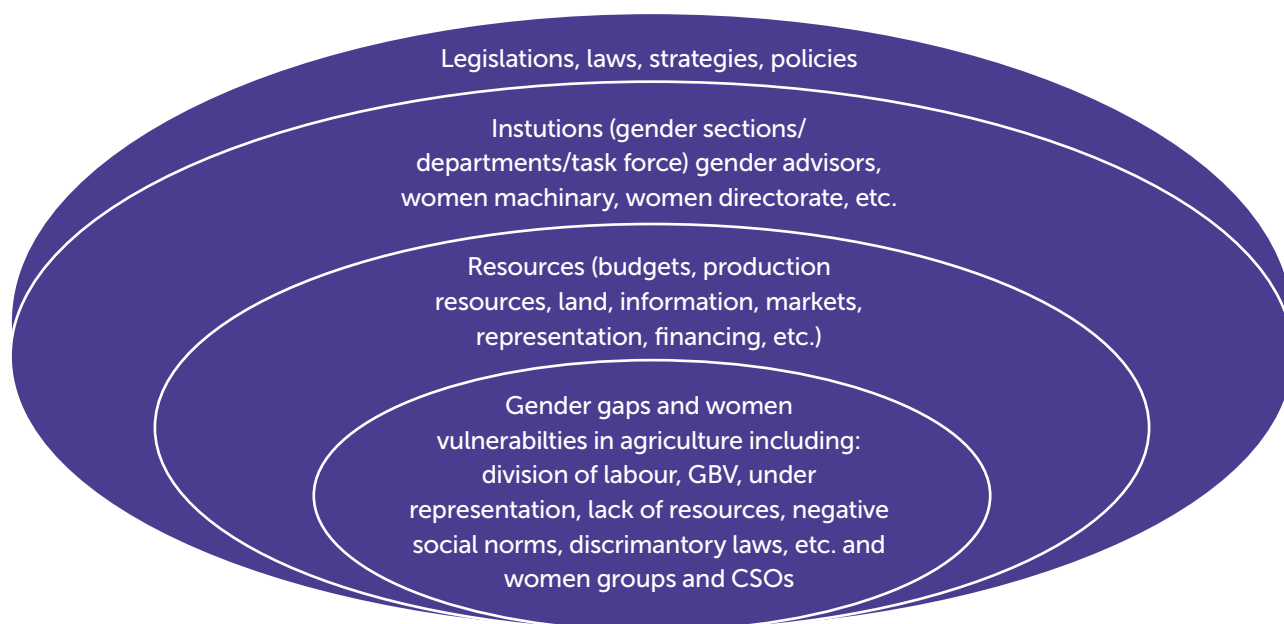
- » Poor land access and rights: Women's land rights established in legislation and in sharia law are not respected. In practice, women have very little access to land, except through male members of their family. Women heads of household tend to have somewhat more access to land, however, in some circumstances male family members continue to have final decision-making power over the use of the land and any income from it.

Mention must be made in regard to this topic of two important gaps in the panorama of gender in the agriculture and rural sector. One is the Ministry of Agriculture's lack of a clear gender strategy or policy and the insufficient funding, human resources and power of its Gender Unit, the primary instrument dedicated to gender issues in the sector. The other is the lack of information, data and in-depth studies addressing gender in agriculture and rural areas. The

data that are available are not sufficiently disaggregated (by gender *and* by area) and most gender-related data

that are available at the state or district level are not integrated, available or even visible at the central level.

### Process to ensure gender mainstreaming



**Source:** Author's own elaboration.

The above diagram suggests that to ensure gender mainstreaming and inclusion in agriculture and rural development, two parallel processes must work simultaneously. A top-down process, including proper legislation, laws, strategies and policies, supported by the necessary institutions and resources, is necessary to ensure the development of a facilitating and encouraging environment for women's inclusion and gender mainstreaming. A bottom-up process is also

necessary, in which the necessary information and analysis regarding the realities of women must be provided and CSOs and other partners must advocate for the development of this facilitating environment with reference to the CD, the SDGs and other women's rights, and must hold the Government, UN agencies and other development partners accountable for ensuring these rights.



During the seeds distribution in Red Sea state.  
FAO/Hashim Onour

# 6. Recommendations



Based on the findings of this Assessment, listed below are recommendations to enhance the promotion of gender equality in the agriculture and rural sectors, targeted to the Government, FAO and other partners/ stakeholders.

## 6.1. Recommendations for the Government

The recommendations for the Government are the following:

1. Reform the current policy and legal framework to align it with the constitutional document.
2. Review and reform the legislative frameworks relevant to agriculture and the rural sector, ensuring attention to gender dimensions and prioritizing women's rights and access to productive and natural resources.
3. Effectively implement land ownership laws by transforming social norms and attitudes, and by increasing legal literacy, providing legal aid, and sensitizing land registration officials and the Judiciary to gender issues. The media and civil society organizations can play a significant role in promoting these measures. The Government can also facilitate women's access to land through subsidized grant-cum-credit schemes for purchasing or leasing land.
4. Strengthen the national gender machinery by establishing the Women and Gender Equality Commission, and by appointing technical gender advisors for federal ministers and within relevant government institutions.
5. Institutionalize and upgrade bodies mandated to work on gender equality and women's empowerment, by raising their awareness on gender issues and developing their technical capacities regarding gender mainstreaming in all

fields and at all levels (in particular, the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Agriculture).

6. Create and operationalize a gender-in-agriculture taskforce or working group comprised of relevant actors (ministries and authorities, UN organizations, national and international NGOs, research institutions, etc.) charged with:
  - › coordinating the gender mainstreaming efforts at both the planning and operational levels by including clear gender indicators as an integral part of the MoA's monitoring and evaluation system;
  - › sharing experiences, best practices, lessons learned, knowledge and resources on gender in agriculture in the Sudan among different states;
  - › advocating for and promoting policy dialogue and reform on gender equality and women's empowerment;
  - › recognizing and acknowledging women as farmers, with equal entitlements to resources and equal opportunities to participate in agricultural and rural associations and committees, by providing more visibility and evidence on the role of women as farmers;
  - › considering gender in agriculture as an independent pillar in future programming (rather than simply a cross-cutting issue), following the SDG model; and ensuring that the needs, interests and benefits of rural men and women are systematically taken into consideration in the design of government policies and programmes; strengthening the collection, analysis and use of sex-disaggregated data in the agriculture and rural sector (possibly building on the database of the national IDs as it includes disaggregation by region, sex and age);
  - › conducting a comprehensive gender-sensitive agricultural survey in which gender dimensions are addressed: a) as a cross-cutting issue and b) as a separate section of the survey;
  - › encouraging the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting by all key institutions (including the

MoA) to ensure sufficient allocation of resources for the implementation of gender equality and rural women's empowerment strategies and projects.

7. Reform the financial services, including microfinance services, provided to small farmers, making them more comprehensive, easy to access and more women-friendly (for instance, through the provision of technical and marketing support, financial literacy and collective lending guarantees).
8. Develop and support affirmative action initiatives that enhance business skills and competences and access to all productive resources, services, information and technologies, by establishing mechanisms to advance equal representation in key economic decision-making positions in all sectors. (For example, by creating a special fund for enhancing women's entrepreneurship within the Ministry of Finance.)
9. Support efforts to transform informal income generation into viable economic activities and broaden agro-entrepreneurship in rural and urban areas, with special consideration of the role of women in agriculture, including the use of technology.
10. Recognize the work carried out by caregivers, most of whom are women, and allocate resources and psychological support for caregivers, and promote the involvement of men in providing care work.

## 6.2. Recommendations for FAO

The recommendations for FAO are the following:

1. Strengthen the gender work at the FAO country office by creating a gender-in-agriculture unit or upgrading the position of the gender focal point to a gender officer. The gender officer would be responsible for supporting the gender mainstreaming work, in line with the corporate requirements, and for creating linkages between the FAO normative commitments, programmatic interventions and operational activities in different technical areas of work. This is in light of the wide spectrum of challenges associated with the agriculture sector in the Sudan and the vast variation in the ecosystems, sources of livelihood and sociocultural dynamics characterizing rural populations in different regions. Because of this variation, gender mainstreaming into FAO interventions is too large a task to be conducted by a gender focal point who is only expected to devote 20 percent of his or her time to gender mainstreaming.
2. Develop internal capacities to ensure systematic gender mainstreaming throughout the work of FAO in the Sudan, by (among other activities):
  - › mapping, reviewing and building on available resources (manuals, handouts, handbooks and guides) produced by FAO and other organizations, and eventually developing country-specific gender guidelines, tools, manuals and checklists;
  - › raising awareness and strengthening capacities to mainstream gender into all FAO technical work in support of the Government of the Sudan.
3. Support the Government of the Sudan to increase consideration of gender mainstreaming from an ad hoc, operational level to a more strategic and programmatic level by:
  - › adopting and advocating for joint programming with other UN organizations regarding gender-related interventions, taking into consideration that gender equality and women's empowerment can only be effectively achieved through a multisectoral approach (this is particularly important in light of the reduction of funds allocated for the Sudan and the priority given to humanitarian issues);
  - › conducting gender-sensitive, sector-specific impact assessments on previous interventions to identify best practices and lessons learned as well as interventions with the potential to be replicated and scaled-up;
  - › basing future programming on the results of the impact assessments and on gender-sensitive needs assessments;
  - › ensuring gender mainstreaming at the programme outcome level (including through gender-specific and sex-disaggregated monitoring and evaluation indicators);
  - › supporting the Gender Unit at the MoA to develop a gender strategy in line with the Ministry's national strategy and structure.
4. Additionally, to bridge the large gap in terms of data collection and documentation regarding the situation of rural women and their engagement in the Sudanese agriculture, support the establishment of a comprehensive database on gender in the agricultural and rural sector. This should be undertaken in cooperation with the women's units in the MoA and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and with the support of local expertise. Among the key activities recommended are:

- › supporting capacity-building among relevant authorities and research institutions, particularly the two units proposed for working on creating a gender-in-agriculture database, to enable them to play an effective role in this partnership, and training those tasked with data gathering on the concepts and indicators of observing gender and on gender-based monitoring;
  - › integrating the databases and studies on gender that are distributed among governmental institutions, international organizations, NGOs and research institutions, or at least creating a comprehensive list of them;
  - › coordinating among relevant parties involved in data gathering on gender issues in agriculture to unify concepts, definitions, time periods and data collection methods to facilitate the use of the data and the integration of outputs into a unified database that is as comprehensive as possible (preventing wasted efforts in repeated or overlapping work), and assigning a statistical expert as a consultant to undertake this role for a sufficiently long period.
5. Contribute to achieving SDG 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", by:
- › encouraging partners and the Government to develop interventions based on gender analysis considering the practical needs and strategic interests of women and girls, and by undertaking special measures to ensure the inclusion of people with special needs (such as the elderly and people with disabilities) who are not necessarily counted within a typical household;
  - › encouraging the development of research and technology tailored to rural women's specific needs, including to facilitate the dissemination and uptake of labour-saving technologies, which can increase efficiency while alleviating women's excessive workloads;
  - › supporting implementing partners to conduct systemic participatory consultations with affected communities, including regular gender-sensitive rapid needs assessments, and ensuring female participation in assessments as respondents and as assessment team members;
  - › promoting the dissemination of productivity-enhancing agricultural technologies and practices, including machines and tools, improved plant varieties and animal breeds, fertilizers, pest control measures and management techniques that address women's productive needs and capacities;
  - › promoting women's training on farming adaptation techniques, such as rainwater harvesting and agroforestry, and on agricultural diversification in order to increase their resilience;
  - › promoting extension services that operate in a more gender-responsive manner, that is, that consider women as legitimate clients and provide support tailored to their specific roles and needs;
  - › addressing harmful traditional practices, including gender-based violence, that add to women's vulnerability and negatively impact their education, health, participation and access to resources;
  - › supporting and strengthening coordinated action on mainstreaming of gender-responsive programming and advocacy, especially between the UN and I/NGOs as well as Government bodies;
  - › advocating for gender-responsive policies and laws that enhance women's access to land, credit and other productive resources, providing technical support for the reformation of laws on tenure, land distribution, land reform and family law, including marital and inheritance laws;
  - › highlighting the added value of linking gender to food security and its impact on the sustainability of production systems;
  - › developing gender-sensitive indicators on sustainability aspects, including resilience and emergency response;
  - › avoiding generalization when referring to small-scale producers as a homogeneous group, since rural livelihood improvement efforts, such as training and extension services, will not increase productivity if the gender lens is absent; and conduct analyses that shed light on women's roles along agricultural value chains to inform the development of gender-responsive interventions;
  - › supporting awareness-raising and access to information among women regarding land rights, including information about mechanisms for filing complaints.

### 6.3. Recommendations for other partners/stakeholders

Other partners and stakeholders have a key role to play in supporting and mediating social and institutional changes that promote gender equality by focusing on women's inclusion and recognizing that cultural sensitivity does not equate to accepting discriminating norms and traditions. It is important that such norms and traditions be strategically addressed through development interventions, as a breakthrough in gender equality can only be reached in the framework of social change. The recommendations toward these ends are the following:

1. Begin with gender-sensitive analyses to understand the power dynamics and power holders before engaging in the design of interventions.
2. Address local leaders and institutions before initiating projects, ideally at the point of conception, to pave the way for more women's inclusion.
3. Identify and apply the appropriate gender-transformative approaches and tools to challenge discriminatory social norms, attitudes and behaviours. and support women's groups and organizations.
4. Make development interventions more gender-sensitive by:
  - › not depending on national, regional or even state data and information when planning interventions, but instead conducting in-depth, area-specific, gender-sensitive baseline studies;
  - › hiring more female project staff and local agents;
  - › focusing on creating and promoting farmers' organizations, particularly for women farmers;
  - › applying an area-based and multi-dimensional approach in interventions targeting rural women;
  - › supporting and strengthening coordinated action on mainstreaming gender-responsive programming and advocacy, especially between FAO and I/NGOs, as well as government bodies;
  - › supporting partners to conduct systemic participatory consultations with affected communities, including regular gender-sensitive rapid needs assessments, and ensuring female participation in assessments as respondents and as assessment team members;
  - › supporting the establishment of gender units in state agriculture bodies;
  - › promoting and supporting academic and research institutions to conduct gender-focused research in agricultural value chains and food security.







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# COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT

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