

# **The Gap between Women's Education and Empowerment: the case of Sudan**

**Dr Nagat A. M. Elmulthum and Nawal A. Adam**

## **1. Introduction**

According to the European Sudanese Public Affairs Council Report (2002), women constituted approximately 15,600,000 out of a total Sudanese population of 31,600,000 in the year 2000 census. This census also demonstrated that the ratio of gender was 102 males for every 100 females. A higher percentage of females is to be expected, according to the preliminary results of 2008 population census.

As far as education is concerned, World Bank estimates for the year 2000 set the literacy rate in Sudan at almost 58%, with females representing almost 46% of the literates. However, as an indication that the government of Sudan offers both sexes educational support, women's enrolment in formal education is increasing yearly. The percentage of female intake at the level of basic schooling increased by 22% during the period 1990-1998, whereas the percentage of males increased by 8%. The percentage increase in female enrolment in secondary schools during the period 1993-1998 was equal to 75%, whereas the percentage of male students increased by 61%. The percentage of female students enrolled in universities increased to 62% in the year 1999 compared to 47.2% in the year 1995 (World Bank 2000).

Women play a key role in the economic field, with females constituting 26.5 percent of the total labour force. This is up from 7 percent of the work force in the 1960s (European Sudanese Public Affairs Council Report, 2002). Sudan's 1998 Constitution clearly states that all Sudanese are equal before the law without discrimination as to sex or race. This is entrenched in Article 21 of the constitution. All labour legislation is based on complete equality between men and women. The 1998 Constitution reiterated and reinforced earlier equal employment opportunities clauses in the 1973 Constitution. These provisions had already been embodied in the Public Service Act, which provided equal wages for equal employment; open competition based on competence, qualifications and experience; equal pension rights and equality regarding leave and holidays, with due consideration for women being allowed extra special leaves. Given this background information on women's participation in education and equal opportunity legislation, the question needing to be raised is: are women have the same chances as men in occupying executive positions in institutions? The main objective of this paper is to provide some insights into female education and the employment opportunities available for women in Sudan. Furthermore, the paper aims at investigating the opportunities available for women's empowerment through occupying executive positions and hence participating in decision and policy making.

## **2. Methodology**

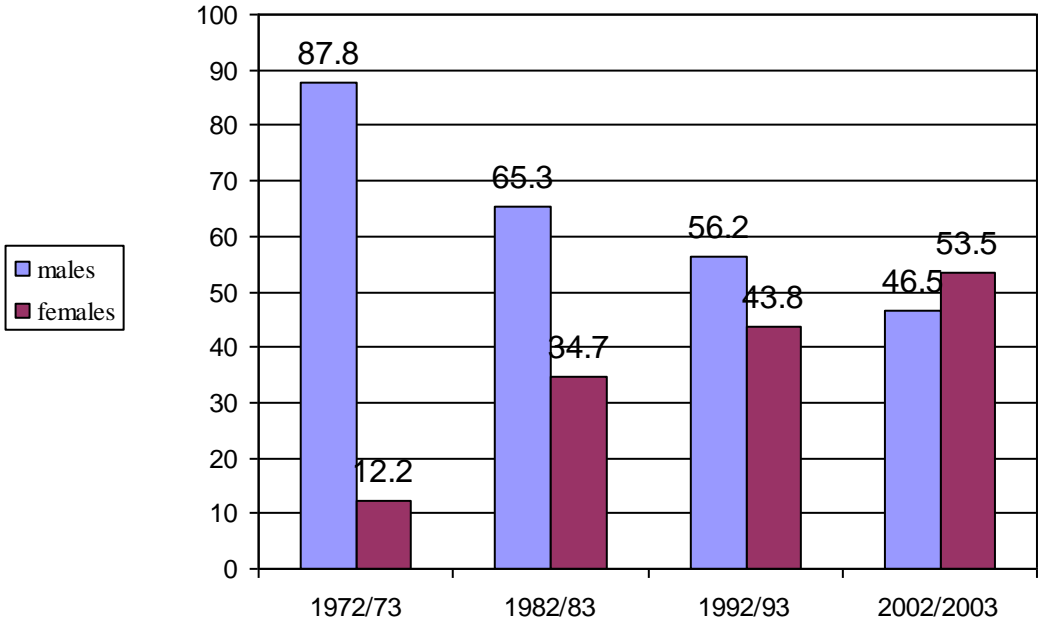
Simple descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data on women's education and employment in Sudan. In particular, data from the Ministry of Higher Education in Sudan was used for the purpose of investigating the developments in women's education in the Sudan. In addition, data from the University of Gezira (University of Gezira Bulletin 2009) on women's employment and student enrolment was used for the purpose of comparing the enrolment of women in higher education in the Sudan to the employment opportunities available for them. In addition, data on

women’s assignment to senior positions at the University of Gezira was employed to investigate the opportunities available for women to influence decisions.

**3. Results and Discussion**

Data from the Ministry of Higher Education in Sudan showed substantial increases in the percentage of female students enrolled in universities in Sudan from 12.2% in 1972-73 to 34.7% in 1982-83 to 43.8% in 1992/93 to 53.6% in 2002-03 (Figure 1 below). The number of girls entering universities is still increasing, exceeding the number of boys. On paper these figures look very good for the education of women and girls, but gaining university qualifications is not yet necessarily bringing the desired benefits to the women themselves, or to the country. The continued increase in the proportion of female students at university has unfortunately not been accompanied by a comparable increase in women's representation in different sectors of the economy. Women's comparative lack of employment opportunities may be attributed to the fact that, in Sudan as in many other countries, employers prefer men because women have many responsibilities outside their paid work and employers think that men are more efficient despite the fact the women have proved that they are able to work and advance in any career they select, as well as exercising their economic rights to own and dispose of properties (Zuhur 2003). In addition, culture and traditions have a negative impact on assignment of women to senior jobs. This situation negatively affects the social and economic returns from women's education: many women lack the opportunity to participate actively in productive activities and decision-making processes.

Figure (1) Students enrollment at Universities in Sudan 1972/73-2002/03

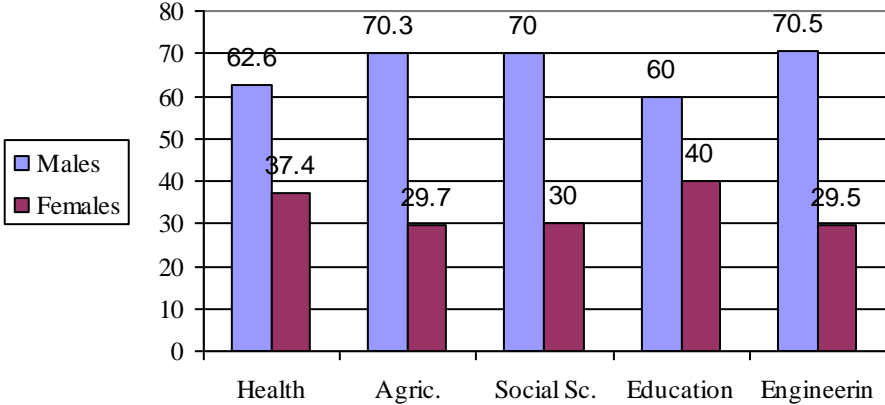


Source: authors calculations based on collected data

Figure (2) below shows the number of female and male academic staff members employed in different faculties at the University of Gezira. It may be noted that the faculties are grouped into sectors where faculties related to a specific field are grouped together. The sectors are those of health, agriculture, social sciences, education, and engineering. It is clear from the figure that around 30% of the staff members of the faculties of agriculture, social sciences and engineering are women. For the health and the educational sector around 40% are women. In contrast the comparable figures for the female students enrolled in the faculties of health, agriculture, engineering, social

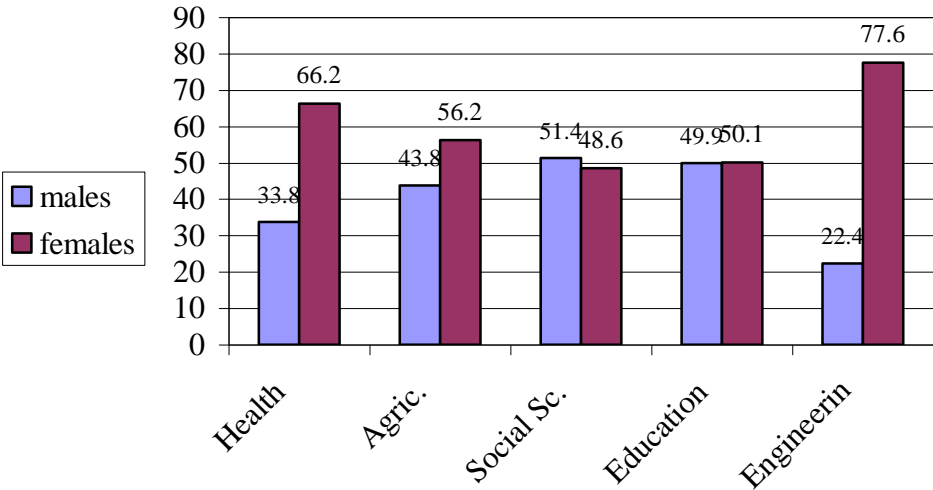
science, and education are respectively around 66.2%, 56.2%, 48.6%, 50.1, and 77.6% female students (figure 3). It is clear from figures (2) and (3) that the percentage of female students enrolled in faculties belonging to different sectors exceeded the percentage of male students. However, the comparable figures for the staff members indicated that women are in a disadvantageous position regarding employment opportunities. Compared to other sectors, the enrolment in the engineering sector is the lowest, with female students obtaining better results as compared to male students. However, when it comes to working, some of the female students quit working. This might be attributed to the fact that many services that could encourage women to continue working are not easily available, for instance nurseries and kindergartens. The employment rate of females at lower grades is higher as compared to academic staff members, but the analysis done was confined to academic staff members.

Figure (2) Percentages of male and female staff members at the University of Gezira in 2006



Source: authors calculations based on collected data.

Figure (3) Percentages of male and female students enrolled at the University of Gezira in 2006

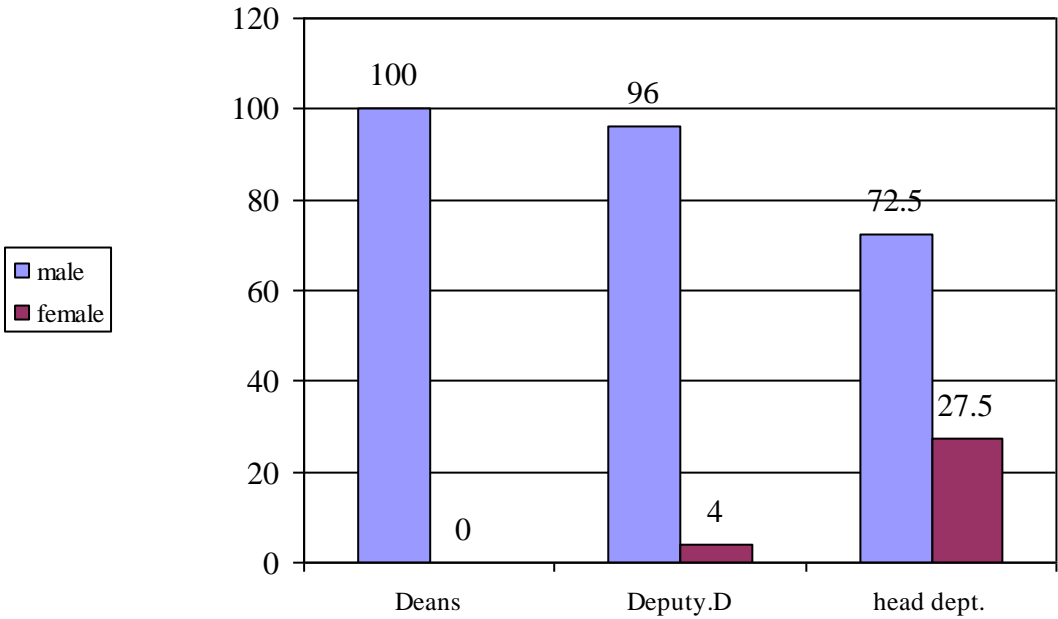


Source: authors calculations based on collected data.

Results obtained from data from the University of Gezira in central Sudan showed that on average the percentage of female students enrolled at the University of Gezira in 2005/2006 was equal to 63.61% compared to 36.39 male students (Fig. 3 above). The comparable figures for the staff at the same University were 34.33% female staff members to 65.67% male staff members. This situation, which reflects the employment opportunities available for women, weakened the position of women in decision making process and provided them with very few chances to be in senior positions. The above analysis was confined to for academic staff members; however, similar results are expected in the working labor force at other levels

Figure (4) below depicts the percentages related to women in senior positions in 2006. It is clear from the figure that the representation of women in senior positions is very weak. Deans of the 24 faculties belonging to the University of Gezira are men and only one deputy dean is a women. For heads of departments, women represent 27.5% across all departments belonging to the University of Gezira.

Figure (4) Percentages of males and females in senior positions at the University of Gezira (2006)



Source: authors calculations based on collected data

The top positions, which include the vice chancellor, his deputy, and the principal of the University of Gezira, are held by men. The percentage of female members at the Senate Board, which is the highest committee in the University, was equal to 17%. The above results confirmed that women’s representation in senior positions is very weak. This situation puts women in a disadvantageous position: very little opportunities are available to them to influence decisions, even if the decisions are of vital importance to them.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Aiming at investigating the employment opportunities and hence empowerment situation of Sudanese women, this paper employed descriptive statistics, using data from the Ministry of Higher Education in Sudan and the University of Gezira. Results obtained confirmed that women education's is following an upward trend since 1972/73. However, available employment opportunities do not keep pace with increased educational chances. Furthermore, women have only very rare chances to decide upon vital issues related to them, their families or policy making in Sudan because of limited opportunities of assignment to senior positions. To achieve empowerment of women this paper recommends that women continue to empower themselves through attaining higher educational levels and more training and development. In addition, however, women should establish women's organizations in different working institutions to make their voice heard and bring about the desired benefits of education for themselves, their children and their communities.

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**About the Authors:** Nagat A. M. Elmuluthum, PhD, an independent member of IFUW, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics, and Head of the Scientific Research Department at the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, University of Gezira, Sudan. Contact her at: [nagathamt@yahoo.com](mailto:nagathamt@yahoo.com)

Nawal A. Adam is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Business Administration, Faculty of Economics and Rural Development , University of Gezira.