Towards a More Inclusive Economy

Understanding the Barriers Sudanese Women and Youth Face in Accessing Employment Opportunities

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Abstract

The provision and access to quality employment opportunities, especially for women and youth, is instrumental in achieving inclusive growth and more effective development outcomes. However, women and youth are particularly disadvantaged in the Sudanese labor market. Understanding gender- and youth-specific issues can help identify entry points for greater employment opportunities for women and youth in Sudan. They can also help shape actions for enhanced growth and sustainability. The objective of this study, which builds on mixed methods research, is to contribute to a better understanding of the current situation, challenges, and constraints that women and youth face in accessing employment opportunities. To identify and examine these challenges and constraints, the study applies a conceptual framework derived from the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development analytical framework. More specifically, the study examines the role of informal institutions, formal institutions, and markets as they relate to employment-related outcomes for women and youth in Sudan. The study analyzes how these aspects influence intra-household decision-making processes, especially as they relate to the participation of women and youth in the economic sphere. These decisions directly affect individual-level endowments and agency, including access to economic opportunities. The study documents that Sudanese customs and norms affect women’s roles in society, and young people are less likely to participate in the labor force and be employed compared to adults. The findings call for policy actions to improve access of women and youth to employment opportunities.

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TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE ECONOMY: UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS SUDANESE WOMEN AND YOUTH FACE IN ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The provision and access to quality employment opportunities, especially for women and youth, is instrumental in achieving inclusive growth and more effective development outcomes. Research shows that increasing female labor force participation to the levels of men could boost annual global gross domestic product (GDP) by 26 percent in 2025 compared with a business-as-usual scenario and that in Sub-Saharan Africa, 40–45 percent of the potential increase in output could come from shifting women into higher productivity sectors (McKinsey Global Institute 2015). In societies where women and men are relatively equal, the economies tend to grow faster, the poor move more quickly out of poverty, and the well-being of all—men, women and children—is enhanced. However, in Sudan, women face a range of constraints to join and stay in the labor market and to benefit fully from economic opportunities. At the same time, youth are an asset and instrumental in achieving a large share of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but they need to be equipped with the skills and opportunities required to reach their potential, support development, and contribute to peace and security. Young people today face significant challenges across the globe regarding economic inclusion. Youth unemployment is a global development challenge, especially in countries such as Sudan where around 60 percent of the population is below the age of 25 (CBS, 2020).

In Sudan the labor market is characterized by low overall labor force participation, in which women and youth are particularly disadvantaged. Unemployment seems to be a major cause of poverty in Sudan and addressing it is at the core of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP). Building on the various national plans of the Government of Sudan, the I-PRSP identifies promotion of economic growth and employment creation as one of its four pillars. Labor force participation as a share of the working-age population (15–64 years) increased from 48.3 percent in 2009 to about 53.5 percent in 2014, while the unemployment rate decreased slightly to 11.3 percent in 2014 from 12.5 percent in 2009 (World Bank 2019c). The labor force participation rate is 76 percent among men, compared to 33 percent among women (World Bank 2019b). Agriculture and services are the main sources of employment in Sudan, and employment in agriculture is more common among women. The overall unemployment rate for women is more than twice that of men (19 percent and 8 percent, respectively), and being a young woman is even more detrimental: 27 percent of young women are unemployed, compared to 20 percent of young men.

Understanding gender- and youth-specific issues can help identify entry points for greater employment opportunities for women and youth in Sudan and shape actions for enhanced growth and sustainability. The objective of this mixed methods study is to contribute to a better understanding of the current situation, challenges, and constraints that women and youth face in accessing employment opportunities. The focus is on women, with age-related data and information provided wherever possible. The study reflects the types of barriers that may prevent women and youth from capitalizing on existing economic opportunities. The study also contributes to enhancing knowledge on women- and youth-related issues in Sudan, areas in which analytical work is scarce. The findings from this study are expected to be a tool for enhancing employment opportunities for women and youth in Sudan.

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2 Agriculture accounts for 60 percent of all employment among women (and almost all employment in rural areas), compared to 39 percent among men. Women are mostly engaged in subsistence farming and their agricultural activities are key for both income generation and food security for the family.
for dialogue: they are expected to inform policy decisions and programs aimed at creating more and better-quality jobs.

The paper is organized as follows. After a brief description of the analytical framing and methodology in Section 2, Section 3 presents the history and demographics of the labor market in Sudan, focusing on indicators by gender and age across the three main sectors of employment: services, agriculture, and industry. Section 4 examines formal institutions: the institutional setting, service delivery, and laws and regulations as they relate to economic opportunities. Section 5 examines informal institutions, where the social norms and networks can be a barrier to women’s and youth’s full economic participation. Section 6 analyzes how the market is supporting or constraining economic activity, which includes a closer look at the labor market itself and access to assets. Section 7 discusses how all of these aspects are considered when it comes to the household- and individual-level decision-making that directly affects women’s and youth’s accumulation of human capital, overall agency, and—ultimately—their economic opportunities. Section 8 concludes with considerations for policy and action.

2. Analytical Framing and Methodology

To identify and examine the constraints that women and youth face in accessing employment opportunities, including employment, the study applies a conceptual framework derived from the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development analytical framework. While the framework was developed for gender equality, it is also applicable to, and highly relevant for, better understanding the societal conditions and individual-level outcomes of youth. The focus is on the economic opportunities dimension, particularly on employment, but relevant variables related to the interconnected dimensions of endowments and agency are also considered (Figure 1). The study examines the role of informal institutions (norms, stereotypes, trust, sense of security/safety, and so on); formal institutions (legal restrictions, employer policies, and so on); and markets (access to finance, transport, day care, and so on) as they affect employment-related outcomes for women and youth in Sudan. The study analyzes how these aspects influence intra-household decision-making processes, especially as they relate to the participation of women and youth in the economic sphere. These decisions directly affect individual-level endowments and agency as well as access to economic opportunities.
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Source: Authors’ adaptation of the 2012 World Development Report framework.

This study applies a mixed methods research methodology, combining existing evidence with new data to document disparities in relevant development outcomes according to sex and age. This study also identifies segments of the population that are especially affected by limited access to employment opportunities and areas in which continuing knowledge gaps are critical to understanding and addressing persistent inequalities. Drawing on information from household and perception surveys, new qualitative data, and an extensive literature review, this study investigates the determinants of women’s and youth’s labor force participation and employment while also reviewing ongoing policies and general cultural norms that can limit women and youth from capitalizing on existing economic opportunities.

In this study, ‘women’ refers to all females while ‘female youth’ refers to females aged between 15 and 24 years. There is currently no universally agreed international definition of the ‘youth’ age group. Sudan’s Ministry of Youth and Sports defines youth as persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years. For this study, youth is defined as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This definition is used for several reasons. First, the United Nations (UN) defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Second, a number of SDGs are based upon the 15–24 age range. To compare between Sudan and other countries, it makes sense to adopt the UN definition. Moreover, while the percentage of Sudan’s population that would be classified as youth would be greater (than the current 60 percent) if the age range of 18–35 was used, an analysis of the quantitative data indicates that the outcome, or overall

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3 https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/#:~:text=There%20is%20no%20universally%20agreed%20of%2015%20and%2024%20years.
message from this report, would be the same: youth are still differentially disadvantaged compared to other segments of the population.

The main sources of quantitative data for this study are the Sudan 2009 National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS) and the 2014/15 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBPS). Both surveys, conducted by Sudan’s Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), employed a two-stage stratified cluster design in which the enumeration areas were selected in the first stage based on the 2008 Census, and individual households were randomly selected in the second stage following household listing exercises in the selected enumeration areas. The sample was designed to be representative both at the national and state levels, accounting for 8,000 and 11,953 households in 2009 and 2014, respectively. These sources are complemented by additional data sources such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2014); World Development Indicators (WDI) database; Doing Business (2019); the Women, Business and the Law (WBL) database (2021); the Enterprise Survey (2014); Global Financial Inclusion (Global Findex 2011–2014); the Afrobarometer (2018); and the Arab Barometer (2018). Econometric analysis was used to examine the determinants of some outcome variables relevant for women and youth.

Additional information has been drawn from existing empirical literature and country-specific resources, including a review of the current legal and policy framework. The literature review focuses on the perspectives of anthropological, sociological, and gender studies. Given the limited literature specifically focusing on women and youth in Sudan, before conducting the literature review, the team reached out to a number of leading scholars of Sudan, including Balghis Badri, Nafisa Bedri, Janice Boddy, Ellen Gruenbaum, Sondra Hale, Shadia Mohammed, Nada Mustafa Ali, and Harry Verhoeven, who recommended particular scholars’ work. The literature review includes academic monographs, peer reviewed journal articles, and reports from the World Bank and UN organizations, in combination with descriptive survey data from the World Bank, the Arab Barometer, and others. Selected online news sites, such as Dabanga, were also referenced.

The qualitative research element of the study provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the binding constraints on women and youth from both the supply and demand side of jobs by conducting focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) in three different states of Sudan. A survey firm (Consulsat) was hired to develop and implement qualitative research instruments to improve the understanding of the constraints both women and youth face in joining and staying in the labor force, finding a job, and accessing self-employment. A total of 33 FGDs with different segments of youth and women (urban/rural, employed/unemployed, and so on) were carried out regarding issues such as access to information, decision-making power and processes, and challenges to enter and stay in the workforce. The FGDs, 12 each in Khartoum and Madani and 9 in Nyala, were conducted separately with men, women, male youth, and female youth. The focus group participants had varying levels of education—primary school to post-secondary education. In-depth interviews with employers (28) include employers’ concerns, policies, and experiences related to hiring and retaining young people and women. The KIIs and FGDs were conducted in Arabic and then translated into English. The data were coded and then compiled, according to themes, in Excel spreadsheets. In addition to shedding light on urban/rural divides, the qualitative work highlights regional differences in three different states where services, agriculture, and industries are the predominant employment sectors: Khartoum (Khartoum State), Madani (Al-Gezira
State), and Nyala (South Darfur State) (see Box 1). Due to security issues on the ground and some technical issues faced by the survey firm, the fieldwork was conducted in two parts, with the main work carried out between April and June 2019, complemented by additional data collection in February 2020. Annex 1 provides a detailed description of the methodology followed for the qualitative data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of community</th>
<th>Population projections 2020 (millions)</th>
<th>Population (women and youth, % of total)</th>
<th>Poverty rate (US$3.20 per capita per day PPP)</th>
<th>Labor force participation rate (male/female)</th>
<th>Nature of economic activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khartoum, Khartoum State</td>
<td>Urban (state)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>W: 47% Y: 16%</td>
<td>40.2% (state)</td>
<td>M: 70.3% F: 25.1% (state)</td>
<td>Has the highest concentration of industries and is the headquarters of most of the major business establishments in Sudan. Based on industrial growth, the thriving service industry is also established in the city. Services include building and construction, trade, hotel and restaurants, transport and communications, finance, insurance and real estate, and government services. Also, Khartoum is a key transit point for those migrating through Sudan, mainly to Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madani, Al-Gezira State</td>
<td>Rural (state)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>W: 51% Y: 20%</td>
<td>39.7% (state)</td>
<td>M: 75.7% F: 22.6% (state)</td>
<td>Has the second largest industrial sector after Khartoum, which accommodates several factories including oil, textile, and cigarettes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyala, South Darfur State</td>
<td>Rural (state)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>W: 48% Y: 24%</td>
<td>62.8% (state)</td>
<td>M: 79.2% F: 66.5% (state)</td>
<td>Agriculture is the main source of income for most households. Most common type is small-scale rainfed crop production. Sorghum and millet are the main crops grown here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


References. Throughout this report, male and female respondents from the FGDs are identified as ‘having a job’ or ‘working’ if they reported being engaged in any income-generating activity at the time of the research.

For more detailed information, see Annex 1.
3. **Historical and Demographic Context of the Labor Market in Sudan**

This section begins with a brief historical snapshot of the social, political, and economic transformations Sudan has undergone since achieving independence from Anglo-Egyptian co-rule in 1956, including how those transformations have influenced the present-day situation for women and young people in Sudan. This section then examines the characteristics of key development indicators related to current labor market and economic opportunities.

**A country of many transitions**

Since achieving independence from Anglo-Egyptian co-rule in 1956, Sudan has experienced recurrent social, political, and economic instability. The First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972) claimed half a million lives. The Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) claimed an additional 2 million lives while displacing upward of 4 million people. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005) between the north and the south brought decades of fighting to a close by granting the south a six-year period of semi-autonomy, following which it was mandated to hold a referendum on whether to remain a part of Sudan. In 2011 the south voted overwhelmingly for independence, and South Sudan became the world’s newest country (World Bank 2020b).

Sudan is rich in water, and agriculture was the backbone of Sudan’s economy before the government’s decision in the 1990s to focus on the development of its oil industry, to the detriment of its other industries. Sudan’s economy grew from US$12 billion in 1999 to US$65 billion in 2011, representing an average annual growth rate of 5.8 percent (World Bank 2019c) compared to an average annual growth rate of 2.9 percent between 1980 and 1998 (Patey 2010). Since the secession of South Sudan from Sudan in July 2011, however, Sudan has lost three-quarters of its oil reserves. Production levels are no longer sufficient to support domestic consumption. In 2013, then President Omar al-Bashir announced an end to fuel and other subsidies, which resulted in protests across the country. The precipitous drop in oil prices by 2015 (US$115 a barrel in mid-2014 and less than US$50 a barrel by the end of 2014) led to the devaluation of Sudan’s currency. Inflation ensued shortly thereafter.

The rising cost of living aggravated by a shortage of bread, fuel, and cash led to protests in December 2018 that culminated in the ousting of former President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. Inflation increased significantly from 35.1 percent in September 2017 to 68 percent in September 2018 and has continued to trend upward, reaching 98.8 percent in April 2020. The rising inflation trend is driven by exchange rate depreciation and monetary expansion to finance the budget deficit. Protests that started in December 2018 in Damazeen and Atbara quickly spread to Khartoum, Port Sudan, Dongola, and other major cities of Sudan, demanding a regime change. The protests were prompted by economic distress through shortages of bread, fuel, essential medicines, and cash that have sharply increased the cost of living in Sudan and affected basic livelihoods and food security. The protests resulted in the removal of former President Omar al-Bashir from power. A joint military-civilian transitional government was set up to lead the country for three years with the goal of transitioning to civilian rule through elections in 2022.
Sudanese women had already been suffering from the consequences of the country’s overdependence on its oil industry for decades. Employment in agriculture has consistently been more common among Sudan’s women than men, especially after the privatization that took place in the 1990s and the shift to a resource-based economy that followed shortly thereafter (Khalfalla and Ahmed 2015). As of 2014, the agricultural sector accounted for 47 percent of Sudan’s total employment, which included 60 percent of Sudan’s employed women and 80 percent of Sudan’s employed rural women (World Bank 2019c). Sudanese households whose primary source of income is derived from agriculture, rather than from other segments of the economy, are generally poorer, more vulnerable, and less resilient (World Bank 2019c).

Before the drop in oil prices, Sudan’s economy was already crippled by the economic sanctions the United States had imposed on the country in 1997, when it was added to the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. Comprehensive US sanctions on Sudan, levied in 1997 and expanded in 2006, were lifted in October 2017. This generated initial optimism, but foreign investors and commercial banks remained reluctant to reengage. Trade and financial transactions between Sudan and the world economy continued to be limited, most likely because Sudan continued to be designated by the US as a state sponsor of terrorism until December 2020, when it was officially removed from the list. While the change in designation is expected to herald Sudan’s re-entry to the world economy, the cumulative effect of two decades of limited interaction, including both foreign direct investment (FDI) and development assistance, puts it in a highly precarious economic position. In 2014, 46 percent of Sudan’s population was classified as poor when poverty is defined as living on less than US$3.20 per day (the international poverty line for lower-middle-income countries) (World Bank 2020b).

Forced displacement and internal migration have also affected Sudanese women’s and youth’s socioeconomic status. Sudan is host to one of the larger populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world. The vast majority of Sudan’s 1.9 million IDPs is concentrated in the Darfur region (UNHCR 2020). In addition, the country hosts 1.1 million refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from South Sudan (UNHCR 2020), though large numbers of Ethiopians from the Tigray Region of Ethiopia have begun moving into Sudan as the fighting that began in that region in November 2020 has intensified. Sudan’s IDPs in Darfur are employed at rates similar to its non-IDPs, though more female IDPs are employed than female non-IDPs because of more female-headed households among the IDP population (World Bank 2018b). Poor wages in the agricultural sector have induced some Sudanese, especially youth, to migrate to the capital, Khartoum, in search of work. The lack of education, skills, financial capital, and social networks has relegated most of the youth to jobs in the informal sector, where wages can be as poor as in the agricultural sector (Daoud, Eldeen, and Bello 2017).
The size, growth, distribution, and structure of the Sudanese population directly affect its labor force. Sudan faces rapid population growth compared to many neighboring countries, and its total population in 2019 was estimated at 42.5 million persons according to the WDI. Sudan’s population is mostly young as a result of relatively high fertility (4.4 in 2018) and lower-than-expected life expectancy (less than 62 years). More than two in five (43 percent) Sudanese are below the age of 15 and only 4 percent are older than 64 (CBS 2017; World Bank 2020b). While fertility is expected to slow down from 5.3 in 2005 to 3.4 in 2030, the population is still anticipated to double during this period. Importantly, this growth will be accompanied by profound age structure change. Children below age 15 will increase to about 21.4 million in 2035 compared to 13.8 million in 2005. The workforce aged 20 to 64 is expected to reach 32 million in 2035 in contrast to 13.9 million in 2005; one half of the workforce will be youth (Republic of Sudan: National Population Council 2018). There are roughly equal numbers of males and females in the country’s urban and rural areas. However, there are a larger share of men above 50 years of age, whereas in the population aged 25–49, there are more women (Figure 2).

**Characteristics of the labor market between 2009 and 2014**

Despite a significant increase in the number of jobs in Sudan, the labor force participation rate, at 53 percent of the working-age population, remains the lowest among the average rate of Sub-Saharan Africa, low-income and lower-middle-income countries. The Sudanese economy added 2.5 million jobs between 2009 and 2014 while the working-age population increased by around 2.8 million and the active population by 2.6 million. As a result, there were measurable improvements for the working-age population between 2009 and 2014 with a more than 5 percentage point increase in the labor force participation, from 48 to 53 percent, and a decrease in the unemployment rate from 13 to 11 percent.

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4 Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population aged 15–64 that is economically active: all people who supply labor for the production of goods and services during a specified period.
Despite these improvements, Sudan’s labor force participation rate lags behind many neighboring and post-conflict African countries such as Chad (71 percent), Eritrea (81 percent), and Ethiopia (82 percent). The employment-to-population ratio in Sudan is the lowest (41 percent) among the average share of Sub-Saharan Africa and low-income countries (63 and 68 percent, respectively) (WDI 2020, data for 2019).

**Labor market indicators by gender and age**

Women’s economic activity lags substantially behind that of men, even though their increased participation in the workforce is a key driver behind the overall increase in the labor force participation rate in Sudan. The country’s increase in the labor force participation rate between 2009 and 2014 (from 48 to 53 percent) was mainly due to the substantial increase in female participation rate from 24 percent in 2009 to 33 percent in 2014. This positive change took place in both urban and rural areas. However, while the female labor force participation rate increased by nearly 10 percentage points (compared to only 2 percentage points among men), it remains less than half the male rate: the labor force participation rate is 76 percent among men compared to 33 percent among women (World Bank 2019b). In addition, among the third of women who are economically active, few women actually work: they are more than twice as likely as men to be unemployed (19 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

**Figure 3. Labor force participation rates and unemployment rate by sex, quintile, locality, and year**

![Diagram showing labor force participation rates and unemployment rates by gender, quintile, locality, and year for 2009 and 2014.](source: World Bank 2019c.)

Despite the increase in all regions, female labor force participation rates were below 20 percent in the Northern, Eastern, and Central regions. In contrast, more than half of all working-age women in Darfur

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5 There are differences in the design of the labor modules between the two surveys: the recall period changed from 7 days in 2009 to 10 days in 2014, and the order in which questions were asked changed, with implications for skipping patterns.
and Kordufan were economically active in 2014. Compared to those living in Khartoum, women who live in Kordufan and Darfur are more likely than men to participate in the labor force. Living in rural areas increases the odds for women to be in the labor market and to be employed by 42 percent and 87 percent, respectively. Yet despite the much lower participation rates, working-age women were about as likely as men to be unemployed. Conversely, youth labor force participation rates increased by varying degrees in all regions and in both urban and rural areas. For youth in rural areas, the odds to be employed and to be in the labor force increased by nearly 80 percent and by 32 percent, respectively. The labor force participation rate increased by 12 percentage points in the Northern region and only by 1.3 percentage points in Kordufan (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Labor force participation rate by locality and region**

Many women do not even enter the labor force: women generally, and female youth in particular, represent the highest share of the population out of the labor force. For men it is more common to be out of the labor force before the age of 24, while women are likely to be out of the labor force across all age cohorts. Three in every four young women (75 percent) are not in the labor market, compared to just over half (54 percent) of young men. The percentage out of the labor force varies significantly across working-age men and women: only 3 to 13 percent for men aged 25 to 64 compared to 58 to 66 percent for women (Figure 5).

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6 The pattern is the same for other categories (men and adults); compared to urban areas, living in rural areas increases the chances for men and adults to be employed by 35 percent and 41 percent, respectively. Data based on logistic regression model using the NHBPS 2014/15.
Being a housewife and full-time student are the main reasons why women and youth are out of the labor force, respectively. More than two-thirds (70 percent) of women reported being out of the labor force because they were either a housewife or homemaker, compared to only 2 percent for men. Among youth, 64 percent reported the reason as being full-time students. Nearly half of the household heads were in the labor force, but only 52 percent were employed (Figure 6).

The overall unemployment rate declined from 13 percent in 2009 to 11 percent in 2014, with variation by gender and location. The decrease in unemployment among the poorest quintile and rural areas
contributed substantially to the overall decline in the unemployment rate. Among the bottom 20 percent of the population, unemployment fell from 18 percent in 2009 to only 10 percent in 2014. In rural areas, the unemployment rate decreased from 14 percent in 2009 to 8 percent in 2014, which is lower than urban areas (17 percent in 2014). The unemployment rate decreased by 4 percentage points for women but only by 1 percentage point among men between 2009 and 2014.

There is considerable variation in unemployment among the states, with higher unemployment among women in better-off states. Compared to 2009, unemployment increased primarily in Sudan’s Northern, Khartoum, and Central regions and decreased markedly in Kordufan and Darfur regions. Unemployment is above the national average for almost all states with the lowest poverty incidence in 2014: Al-Gezira (23 percent), River Nile (17 percent), Khartoum (17 percent), and Northern (15 percent). The states with the lowest unemployment rates were Blue Nile (5 percent); South Kordufan, Sennar, and Kassala (6 percent each); and North Kordufan (7 percent). Women were more likely to be unemployed in the richest states: Al-Gezira (58 percent), River Nile (45 percent), Northern (40 percent), Khartoum (30 percent), Kassala (19 percent), and Sinnar (17 percent). In those states, adult female unemployment rates were two to five times the unemployment rates of males (Figure 7). The fact that unemployment is less prevalent among women in poorer states, that are also mainly rural, reflects that most of the women in those states are engaged in agriculture. It is relatively easy to find work in the agriculture sector compared to other sectors. Overall, people in the poorer states are more likely to be working compared to those in the richer states, which are mainly concentrated in the urban areas, where there are limited opportunities to engage in agricultural activities.

**Figure 7. Unemployment rate by state and gender**

![Unemployment rate by state and gender](image)

*Source: World Bank staff calculations based on NHBPS 2014/15.*

Youth unemployment increased between 2009 and 2014, especially in urban areas. Unemployment among the population between 15 and 24 years increased by 2 percentage points from 20 percent in 2009
to 22 percent in 2014, with a sharp increase in urban areas reaching nearly 40 percent in 2014. Female youth unemployment decreased by 2 percentage points during the same period but remained higher than male youth unemployment (Figure 8). The gender gap is also pronounced across many states with lower poverty incidence, a pattern similar to all working-age adults, as explained earlier.

**Figure 8. Youth unemployment rate by gender, quintile, locality, and year**

![Graph showing youth unemployment rate by gender, quintile, locality, and year](image)


**Employment sectors and type of work**

Women are overrepresented in non-paid jobs, while men constitute most of the employers, paid workers, and own account workers. Employment types are categorized as paid employee, employer, own account worker, unpaid family worker, and unpaid working for others. This categorization is important as it sheds light on why there may be differences in incomes and access to social benefits across different groups. For example, non-paid jobs correlate with low incomes and less likelihood of having health insurance coverage—benefits that are relatively common among paid employees. Among the non-paid workers, 64 percent are women. Only one-fifth (21 percent) of paid employees are women, and even less are employers (18 percent). Youth represent only 20 percent of the working population, yet constitute more than 40 percent of the unpaid workers, and only represent 18 percent of the paid employees, 13 percent of own account workers, and 10 percent of employers (Figure 9). Unpaid work within the family is the most common type of employment for women, particularly for younger women in rural areas.
Before the separation from South Sudan in July 2011, Sudan was the largest country in Africa in terms of land mass. Sudan is now the third largest country in Africa behind Algeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since the late 1990s, Sudan’s economy has been driven by oil. That said, the mainstay for the greater share of the population has always been agriculture. According to a UN World Food Programme (WFP) study that was conducted in 2006, Sudan was estimated to have 84 million ha of arable land. However, only 17 million ha, or 20 percent, of that land was being cultivated (Karrar, Abbadi, and Adam 2006). Some of Sudan’s agricultural land is irrigated. However, the vast majority of it—upward of 90 percent according to a 2003 governmental study—is dependent solely on rainfall (Ibnouf 2011).

Employment in agriculture is more common among women, among the poor, and in rural areas. Nearly 70 percent of Sudanese occupations are focused on elementary occupations and skilled agriculture. Both elementary occupations and skilled agriculture represent more than one-third of the working-age population, which is consistent with the trend in the sector in which they are mainly involved. In fact, out of the 2.5 million additional jobs created between 2009 and 2014, 1.9 million, more than three-quarters, were added in agriculture. As a result, the share of agricultural workers increased by more than 10 percentage points. About 8 percent of all employment in Sudan is in industries while 47 and 44 percent of employment is in agriculture and services, respectively (Figure 10). Agriculture accounts for 60 percent of employment among women but only 39 percent among men. It is also more common among the poor, with a share of 58 percent among the bottom 40 percent and a share of 27 percent among the top 20 percent. Jobs in industries are heavily male dominated, while employment among women is largely

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7 The effect of climate change on agriculture is relevant to Sudan, as Sudan is highly dependent on agriculture, and climate change can lead to increased drought and desertification, which can lead to decreased agricultural output. For this study, however, the effect of climate change on agriculture is not discussed, because the objective of this study is not to address climate change but to address the inequity in economic opportunities for women and youth.

8 Elementary occupations consist of simple and routine tasks that mainly require the use of hand-held tools and often some physical effort. Tasks performed by workers in elementary occupations usually include selling goods in streets and public places or from door to door; providing various street services; cleaning, washing, pressing; taking care of apartment houses.

9 Wholesale and retail trade and education accounted for significant shares—about 730,000 and 475,000 jobs, respectively. All other categories account for fewer than 500,000 jobs each, with construction (425,000), transport and storage (372,000), and public administration and defense (344,000) the most important. Only around 140,000 Sudanese are employed in manufacturing, a sector that is often seen as having ample potential for growth in labor productivity.
restricted to the agricultural sector in rural areas and to the service sector in urban areas. Less than 4 percent of women are service or market sales workers and even fewer are technicians or senior officials—job categories that require certain level of higher education. Young people represent nearly 45 percent of the workers in skilled agriculture and fishing, with female youth representing 60 percent. Male youth are more likely to be in elementary occupations. An employer interviewed as a part of the qualitative research for this report suggests that agricultural workers are essential: a manager of a medium-size private agricultural operation in Nyala said, “In the last period, it is the opposite there is a lot of problems because of the war that was during the past thirteen years, so the agriculture you can say that the half of the farmers aren’t farmers anymore. Yes, it has deteriorated too much because of the conditions.”

Figure 10. Employment shares by sector, gender, quintile, and locality, 2014

Low educational attainment has far-reaching impacts across domains, including on people’s earnings and standards of living (Wodon et al. 2018). A recent study confirms that educational gaps between boys and girls in Sudan are still striking, and they perpetuate gender inequality, with child labor also contributing to keeping future generations uneducated (Berenger and Verdier-Chouchane 2015). Enrollment rates in Sudan have increased across the board in the last few decades, but especially noticeable is the 20 percentage point increase in girls’ enrollment in primary school and 16 percentage point increase in secondary school between 2001 and 2017 (compared to 15 and 8 percentage point increases for boys in primary and secondary school, respectively) (Figure 11). The primary enrollment increase was mainly driven by an increase in girls’ attendance in the poorest quintiles in urban areas. The difference in enrollment between the poorest and richest quintiles was 9 percentage points at the primary level and 11 percentage points at the secondary level. Although enrollment rates have increased, Sudan is still below the average of Sub-Saharan Africa countries at the primary and secondary levels. Sudanese boys have 7.9 expected years of schooling and girls 7.3 (WDI 2020, data for 2015). Access to school is affected


Education and economic opportunities

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by multiple factors, and the intersection of poverty, rurality, and gender decreases the likelihood of children attending school: a poor girl living in a rural area is 25 percent less likely to attend school than a boy living in an urban area (World Bank 2012a).

Figure 11. School enrollment rates, %, gross

![School enrollment rates, %, gross](source)


*Note:* Latest available year is 2017 for primary and secondary enrollment and 2015 for tertiary enrollment rates.

Early marriage is one of the main reasons girls (4–24 years) drop out of school. According to MICS 2014, early marriage was the third most common reason for girls' dropout but was not a factor for boys, echoing broader analysis from the region showing that child marriage is one of the main reasons that girls leave school early (Wodon et al. 2017). MICS 2014 data indicate that 21 percent of girls in Sudan were married by the age of 15, but this rate rises to 26 percent if only girls in rural areas are considered. Though national child protection legislation was introduced in 2010, it does not cover protection for girls against early or forced marriage. Early marriage has negative effects on educational attainment for girls and is strongly correlated with poverty and low education of the mother (World Bank 2018a). Early marriage can also have cyclical effects, as it often leads to early pregnancies that prevent a girl from going to school. In line with this trend, MICS 2014 data show that fertility rates are nearly twice as high for adolescent girls who live in rural areas than for those in urban areas, where marriage rates are lower (World Bank 2018a). It should be noted that the Government of Sudan’s decision in November 2020 to fully adopt the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), including the prohibition against child marriage, has the potential to have a positive impact on girls' educational attainment moving forward. However, the implementation of the legislation would need to be coupled with a change in cultural norms, a topic that is discussed in subsequent sections of this report.

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10 More about the legal framework and the reasons behind early marriage can be found in the sections related to informal and formal institutions below (specifically in ‘Customs and norms impact women’s roles in society’ and ‘A legal and institutional framework with direct implications for women’s economic participation’).
While educational attainment is generally low in Sudan, young women and men who reach the level of tertiary education choose different areas of study. As noted below, occupational segregation has direct implications for the gender wage gap, and for skilled labor this is correlated with the areas of study. In Sudan, there are no significant gender disparities in the graduate programs across the different fields of study (Figure 12). However, a couple of things stand out. Women are not only disproportionately represented in the agricultural sector in the labor force, but they also represent the majority of tertiary education graduates from agriculture programs. This suggests that women’s role in the sector can go far beyond low-skilled labor and they could play an important role in developing the sector. At the same time, while less than a third (28 percent) of the graduates from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs are female, women dominate the share of graduates in information and communication technology (ICT). However, several focus group participants from the qualitative work for this report indicated that certain areas of studies are seen as more—or less—appropriate for women. A female youth from Khartoum who was not working outside the home said, “I am a girl and I want to study art and theater, but my family is fanatical so they don’t accept that a girl study something like that, and they don’t accept to have a girl who can perform anything on the TV.” A working woman, also from Khartoum, said, “Civil engineering is hard on girls, a boy can be better at this specialty.”

Figure 12. Graduates in tertiary education fields of study, by gender, %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Study</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Male %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Arts</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Welfare</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science, Business and Law</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, Administration and Law</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics...</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This educational context translates into the current Sudanese labor force in which close to half (45 percent) of those out of the labor force are individuals with no education. This group represents the majority (52 percent) of the employed group. This probably explains why most of those engaged in agriculture have no education. Given that individuals with secondary and above secondary education represent only 26 percent of the labor force, of which 45 percent are unemployed while only 23 are percent employed, it suggests that the market demand is focused on low-skilled and low-paid work (Figure 13). There are stark gender differences: most women who are out of the labor force also appear to have no education (41 percent). The corresponding number for males is only 4 percent. But for all levels of educational attainment, the share of women out of the labor force is consistently higher than for men,
although the gender gap is smallest for those with post-secondary education. Conversely, for any level of educational attainment, the share of women who are employed is always lower than that for men. This may be explained in part by the fact that some women leave the labor force to be a full-time housewife.

**Figure 13. Labor force indicators by sex and educational attainment**

![Labor force indicators by sex and educational attainment](image)

*Source: World Bank staff calculations based on NHBPS 2014/15.*

The labor market seems to demand low-skilled labor as there is a general pattern where there are better job opportunities for people without education than those with any education. Women and youth with some or completed primary education have 38 and 65 percent lower chances to be in the labor force and employed, respectively, compared to those with no education (Annex 2). Men with some or completed primary education have a 58 and 52 percent lower probability to be a labor force participant and employed, respectively, compared to men with no education. On the other hand, women and adults with higher education attainment (post-secondary and above) are better-off than those with no education, with greater chances of being employed and participating in the labor force. A plausible explanation for this observed pattern is that people with no education are more likely to be employed in the agriculture sector in rural areas. On the other hand, educated persons are more likely to be living in urban areas and looking for better-paid jobs. If they do not find high-skilled jobs, they will remain unemployed, with little opportunity to fall back on agriculture-related work, which is relatively hard to find in urban settings.

Among the working-age population, only 3 percent attended vocational training with women and youth being particularly disadvantaged (CBS 2017). In the context of an educational system that has weakened over the last few decades, there is often a mismatch between the skills acquired in school and those required by employers. For example, from KILs that were conducted for this report, a human resources manager of a large pharmaceutical services company in Khartoum said, “Actually, in Sudan in general, I think there is a problem in service state, I mean as a sector […] the service concept in Sudan doesn’t work, even in the private sector, you find that there is a governmental part so you don’t feel that it’s working in
the professional way.” A human resources manager of a medium-size industry in Madani said, “No, it needs more, it’s advanced but slow, it needs more concentration, more training for the employee and more experience.” In this case, vocational training could fill some of the skills gaps that might improve employment possibilities. At present, only 36 percent of the attendees are women (compared to 64 percent men) and 27 percent are youth (compared to 73 percent adults). The low attendance of women and youth is in part due to their limited access to training centers, which eventually results in a mismatch between the areas of employment in which women and youth are interested and the skilled labor demanded by the labor market. Case in point, a 2018 International Labour Organization (ILO) study conducted in White Nile State found that women and youth were highly interested in taking part in vocational and/or skills training opportunities that might improve their chances of getting a job. However, the lack of training centers in their communities forced them to travel more than two hours to find one, which was costly, timewise and monetary-wise, and many could not afford (ILO 2018, 18).

**Gender wage gap**

Globally, the more education women have, the higher the economic return on education. While women with some primary education earn 14 to 19 percent more than those with no education at all, women with secondary education make almost twice as much and women with tertiary education earn almost three times as much as women with no education (Wodon et al. 2018). Women who have secondary and tertiary education tend to have higher labor force participation and more often full-time work. Studies point to several factors contributing to women’s lower earnings than men, including the fact that fewer women are economically active than men and often work fewer hours (for example, Wodon et al. 2020). However, there is also a tendency for women to be paid less than men when working. In addition, social norms affect the occupational segregation across sectors and types of employment as well as between the paid and unpaid work as household and care responsibilities are considered women’s work, while men are considered providers. (This is discussed in greater detail in the section on informal institutions).

In Sudan, earnings have gone down, and the decrease in real wages has been more pronounced among women and the better-off. More people in urban areas earned less than US$1.90 a day in 2014, compared to 2009, a pattern followed by a decline in the median (from 6.1 in 2009 to 3.8 in 2014) and average daily wages (from 8.4 in 2009 to 6.1 in 2014). While men’s average wages declined by 11 percent, women’s wages declined by more than one-third. This is expected as the increase in labor force participation and employment among women has been concentrated in low-productivity activities such as agriculture (Figure 14).
Figure 14. Daily average and median wages among the employed and share of employed earning wages below the US$1.90-poverty line by gender, quintile, locality, and year

Differences in characteristics between male and female wage workers in terms of education, employment sector, location, and age explain about 96 percent of the gender gap in monthly earnings. The Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition splits the wage gap between men and women into three effects: (a) endowment effect (reflecting the mean increase in women’s wages if they had the same characteristics as men), (b) coefficient effect (reflecting the change in women’s wages when applying the men’s coefficients to the women’s characteristics), and (c) interaction effect (measures the simultaneous effect of differences in endowments and coefficients). Determinants of monthly earnings used in the analysis are education, sector of employment, location, and age. The results show that the mean log wage is 6.75 for men and 6.20 for women, yielding a wage gap of 0.55. The endowment effect explains about 5.4 percent of this difference, while 95.5 percent is explained by the coefficient effect and negative 0.9 percent by the interaction effect. The large coefficient effect is mainly captured in the regression intercept, indicating possible gender-based discrimination in the labor market. In other words, men generally benefit from more favorable return to characteristics. In addition, male wage workers are more advantaged due to their overrepresentation in industries which are linked with higher wage premiums (that is, endowment effect). Women’s overrepresentation in agriculture and other low productivity jobs contributes to the gender wage gap. Annex 2 provides detailed results of the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition.

These findings are consistent with the FGDs where wages were a frequent topic of conversation, especially among women. A female youth from Khartoum who was working said, “My friend dropped out her work because her salary was too low in return of the efforts she was making.” A female youth from Madani who was not working concurred, “The salary maybe not enough. They prefer to exert effort in house rather than exerting efforts at work in return of low salary.” Some of the focus group participants took the conversation to the next level, noting that some managers used women’s wages as a bargaining chip.
to get them to do what they wanted. A male youth from Madani who did not have a job said, “Yes sometimes the owners or managers use women needs against them they make them work extra hours for instance if their working hours are for eight hours they make them work for ten hours, or they might cut their pay because they think that their work don’t require so much money. And sometimes they cut out their income because they are late.” A man from Nyala who had a job added, “They can delay her salary.”
4. Formal Institutions: Setting the Tone for Labor Force Participation

The preceding section of this report presented a brief overview of the historical and demographic context, and the key labor market characteristics, of Sudan, especially for women and youth. In this section, Sudan’s legal and institutional framework is discussed. Particular attention is paid to formal institutions and the mechanisms that encourage, or discourage, women and youth from accumulating human capital and participating equally in the economy of Sudan. The section begins with a discussion of three laws that have been passed over the past 20 years that have had a lasting impact on women’s, and to a lesser extent youth’s, agency: the 1991 Muslim Personal Status Law (MPSL), the 1997 Labor Code, and the 2008 National Elections Act. Next, there is a discussion about land and property rights, as access to these types of assets can have a direct impact on the ability to access financing. Finally, there is a discussion about national machineries and strategies to improve women’s and youth’s economic opportunities as well as grassroots initiatives that women and youth have pursued on their own.

A legal and institutional framework with direct implications for women’s economic participation

Sudan is one of the few countries that is not party to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The convention, known as the international bill of rights for women, provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women’s equal access to, for example, education, health care, and employment. The country has also not developed a National Action Plan for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which calls for the greater involvement of women in all peace and security efforts.

Women in Sudan enjoy less than a third of the rights men do related to their economic opportunities, according to the World Bank’s WBL 2021 report. The report explores the legal differences in men’s and women’s access to economic opportunities, measured through a series of indicators across eight dimensions: mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pension. Data from 190 countries are examined going back nearly 50 years. Each country is provided an overall score that is an average of their individual score for each dimension, ranging from 0 to 100, with 100 representing the highest score (that is, there are no legal differences in men’s and women’s access to economic opportunities in the indicators measured). Sudan has an overall score of 29.4, and the only three countries that score lower than Sudan are Kuwait, with an overall score of 28.8; Yemen, with an overall score of 26.9, and the West Bank and Gaza, with an overall score of 26.3 (World Bank 2020d; World Bank 2021).

Over the last decade, Sudan has not seen any improvements in the dimensions measured, and it scores 0 on the dimensions of mobility, workplace, pay, and marriage. For example, the legal restrictions the 1997

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11 The other countries that have not signed are the Holy See, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia, and Tonga. The United States and Palau have signed but not ratified the treaty. Recent media coverage in Sudan suggests that Sudan may change its position with respect to the treaty.
Labor Code differentially imposes on men and women affect the score of the pay dimension in particular, which measures laws and regulations concerning job restrictions and the gender wage gap.

**Box 1. Sudan’s legal system and Constitution**

**English common law, Islamic law, and Sudanese customary law form the basis of Sudan’s legal system.** Sudan was subject to Anglo-Egyptian co-rule from 1899 until 1956. During the 1960s and early 1970s, there were several attempts by interim Sudanese governments to replace British legal precedents with, for example, Egyptian legal precedents that were based on the French civil code. However, these changes did not take hold. Beginning in the late 1970s, Sudan’s leaders began drafting legislation to bring Sudan’s legal system in line with Islamic law. In 1983, Islamic law, specifically Sharia law, was adopted, a change that was not embraced by everyone, especially those in the south.

**Sharia law was reaffirmed following the 1989 coup that brought Omar al-Bashir to power.** Article 65 of the 1998 Constitution, which replaced the 1973 Constitution, independent Sudan’s first Constitution, stated that: “Sources of legislation [are] Islamic law and the consensus of the nation, by referendum, Constitution and custom shall be the sources of legislation; and no legislation in contravention with these fundamentals shall be made; however, the legislation shall be guided by the nation’s public opinion, the learned opinion of scholars and thinkers, and then by the decision of those in charge of public affairs.” Following the conclusion of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005), the 1998 Constitution was superseded by the 2005 Interim Constitution. ‘Sources of legislation’ are discussed in Article 5 of the 2005 Interim Constitution which addresses north and south separately. Article 5 begins: “Nationally enacted legislation having effect only in respect of the Northern states of the Sudan shall have as its sources of legislation Islamic Shari’a and the consensus of the people.”

**The 2005 Interim Constitution was amended in 2017.** Then, in April 2019, President Omar al-Bashir, who had been in power for 30 years, was deposed in a coup. In August 2019, the transitional government drafted a ‘constitutional declaration’ which is intended to guide the country through a three-year transition period during which a new Constitution, and various pieces of legislation, are intended to be produced.

*Sources: An-Na'im 2017; Metz 1991; 1998 Sudan Constitution; 2005 Sudan Interim Constitution; UNDP 2018.*

Married women are required by law to obey their husbands, but they can still obtain a national ID card in the same way as married men. There is no legal provision that prohibits or invalidates child or early marriage nor are married women legally protected from domestic violence or marital rape. Annex 3 provides an overview of how Sudan fairs across all indicators measured.

There is a mutually reinforcing nature between a society’s formal legal framework and its norms and customs. Two pieces of legislation passed in the 1990s that have arguably had a greater impact on Sudanese women’s, and to a lesser extent Sudanese youth’s, economic potential than any other pieces of legislation are the 1991 MPSL and the 1997 Labor Code. In addition, the 2008 National Elections Act introduced a quota for women’s representation in the Parliament.

**Family roles defined in the Muslim Personal Status Law**

Islamic family law governs Muslims’ behaviors in different family roles, for example, husband, wife, father, mother. Muslim personal status laws stipulate how family members are supposed to act in, for example, matters of marriage and divorce. Sudan’s 1991 MPSL is primarily concerned with matters of guardianship, marriage, including polygamy and divorce, custody, and inheritance. According to the 1991 MPSL, a wife is obliged to obey her husband, which means that a husband can, among other things, deny his wife the opportunity to seek employment outside the home. If a wife disobeys her husband by seeking
employment outside the home, the husband can cease fulfilling his marital obligation to provide for his wife (Biro 1994). This could leave the wife destitute if she has no other means to support herself. Sudanese women may, and in many if not most cases do, receive inheritance from their fathers. That said, a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) confirms that, in practice, daughters generally receive half as much as sons (UNDP 2018). Public perception seems to be in favor of gender-differentiated inheritance rights. According to the Arab Barometer (2018), the vast majority of respondents, 87 percent, do not believe that women should have the right to the same share of inheritance as men. However, when it comes to divorce, a considerably larger share of women (54 percent) than men (37 percent) believe that women should have the same right to decide to divorce as men (Arab Barometer 2018).

The 1991 MPSL was significant—and remains significant—not just for the abovementioned reasons but because it transferred authority over family matters from Islamic religious leaders to the country’s political leaders. Nada Mustafa Ali, a leading academic authority on Sudan, notes how, in the wake of the passage of the 1991 MPSL, the country’s political leaders took advantage of the opportunity to interpret the 1991 MPSL in a way that allowed them to easily dismiss women from their professional positions. “In accordance with this legal discourse, the early days of the regime saw systematic dismissal of women from public service. This was not government policy, but was concealed during mass purges, or representing it as part of the country’s economic measures in the attorney general’s office, out of 60 employees dismissed almost 60 percent were women, a number of whom had been in senior positions for several years. The justification put forward for that act was that ‘married women were often absent from work’.” (Ali 2016, 12). Ali goes on to say that it was not just women in the formal economy who were targeted but women in the informal economy too, many of whom had been displaced to the capital, Khartoum, because of war or drought.

Based on the KIIs and FGDs that were conducted in Khartoum, Madani (Al-Gezira State), and Nyala (South Darfur State), the way women’s employment opportunities are shaped is aligned with these legal provisions. A woman from Madani who was not working reported that, “My brother’s wife is an engineer. She is graduated from Khartoum University and they offer her many jobs and she succeeded in all interviews, but my brother refuses to [let] her work. He believes that her job is to take care of her home.” According to a human resources manager of a medium-size commercial services operation in Khartoum, “Overall when I hire a female I check if she have kids and if she could work and leave their kids and her house because it’s hard for any female to leave her kids alone, and I ask them specific questions when I make any interview, for example I have two candidates male and female, and the female have kids so I ask her what will you do in some situations, and if she have solution for these cases she could be hired.”

**Protections and restrictions in the Labor Code**

Overall, the 1997 Labor Code includes more restrictions on women’s ability to work than it does protections. That said, the 1997 Labor Code does include a few provisions that serve to protect women.

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12 While women and younger cohorts seem to be slightly more open to equal inheritance rights, there is not a large difference between men’s and women’s attitudes toward this, with 90 and 85 percent, respectively, disagreeing with equal inheritance rights. Similarly, both younger and older respondents (87 percent of people between 18 and 29 years old and 92 percent of respondents 50 years or older, respectively) were largely in disagreement with equal inheritance rights (Arab Barometer 2018).
For example, it protects pregnant women from being dismissed from their positions (for being pregnant). Part Two of Paragraph 46, which is titled ‘Maternity Leave’, includes the clause, “it shall be forbidden to rescind the contract of employment of a female worker during her pregnancy or confinement period.” Part One of Paragraph 46 stipulates the amount of paid maternity leave a woman is due. It is based on the number of years a woman has worked and whether or not she has received any special written instructions from her doctor. As mentioned above, however, the 1997 Labor Code includes more restrictions than protections. For example, Paragraph 19 prohibits the employment of women in occupations that are deemed to be “hazardous, arduous or harmful to their health.” Women are specifically prohibited from working “underground or under water or [in] jobs which may expose them to poisonous material or to temperatures exceeding the normal limits borne by women.” Paragraph 20 limits women’s working hours from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., unless they are performing an administrative job, or a technical job, or a job in health care or social services that necessitates them working other hours. Women who are working at night “for purposes related to the public interest” are also exempted.

The KIIs and FGDs shed some light on the impact that the restrictions on women’s working hours have on women’s ability to find jobs, especially in regions where shift work is common. According to an employer of a large industry in Madani, “Yes for sure, I always ask women if they are married or not as you know sometimes a woman work without telling her husband and he may cause problems also I ask about the place where they live because they shouldn’t be far away from the factory as they need to come early at 6:30 am unlike men that doesn’t matter.” According to a woman from Khartoum who did not have a job, “[Men] don’t care about the working hours. They don’t care about working at night or at morning. It is hard for females to work at night.”

The overwhelming focus of the 1997 Labor Code Chapter IV titled ‘Employment of Women and Young Persons’ is on youth and on protecting them. For example, Paragraph 21 prohibits youth from “carrying heavy loads” or doing work that puts them in direct contact with, for example, “lead or lead compounds” or “x-rays and other harmful radiation.” Paragraph 21 also limits youth’s working hours from 6 a.m. until 8 p.m. Children 15 to 16 years old may be exempted from these limits under certain circumstances. There are several provisions for youth that are focused specifically on preserving their health, broadly defined. Paragraph 22 states that all youth must undergo a “full medical examination” that is administered by “government hospital doctors” before the start of their employment and at regular intervals throughout their employment. Paragraph 21 prohibits the employment of youth in occupations that are “harmful to their morals.”

In general, youth under the age of 12 are not allowed to work. However, there is a clause in Paragraph 21 that outlines several exceptions which include employment in “(a) the State’s training schools; (b) non-profitable training workshops; (c) jobs supervised by his [sic] family members in establishments which do not employ other persons; (e) [sic] jobs performed under apprenticeship contracts.” One could interpret these exceptions to be opportunities that serve to strengthen youth’s position in the labor market down the road. However, one could also interpret these exceptions in a more negative light based on globally adopted UN and ILO conventions on child labor. In 1990, Sudan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2003, it ratified the ILO 1973 Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) as well as the ILO 1999 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182).
The 2008 National Elections Act mandated that 25 percent of the seats in both State and National Parliamentary Assemblies should be held by women. This act follows article 32.2 of the Constitution which reads: “The State shall promote women rights through positive discrimination actions” (UNDP 2018, 11). One of the rationales for setting various quotas for Parliaments is that the inclusion of a diversity of groups, for example, gender, ethnic, religious, will not only benefit the members of those groups but will also benefit society as a whole. In Sudan, this quota system led to changes in the share of women in Parliament: while in 1980, only 5 percent of the seats in Parliament were held by women, by 2010, that figure rose to 28 percent (UNDP 2018). At present, 133 of the 426 seats in Sudan’s National Assembly, or 31 percent, are held by women (International IDEA, International Parliamentary Union, and Stockholm University 2020).

However, there is an ongoing discussion about the quota system and whether it really paved the way for increased female participation in decision-making positions. According to the 2018 Arab Barometer, while 79 percent of respondents are supportive of quotas to increase women’s political representation, 83 percent believe that men make better political leaders than women. The Afrobarometer (2018) provides additional telling insights related to the rights to be elected: 61 percent of female respondents agree that women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office, compared to 36 percent of men. Despite the comparatively high percentage of women in Sudan’s National Assembly (as a comparator, only 23 percent of the seats in the US House of Representatives are held by women), there has been little discussion on reforming the aspects of the 1991 MPSL that subordinate women to men. Tonnessen and El Nagar (2013) posit several reasons for this. Namely, the 2008 National Elections Act was passed because women who represented a diversity of geographic regions, socioeconomic strata, and political leanings came together to form one broad coalition. Since the passing of the 2008 National Elections Act, however, the great majority of the seats in the National Assembly have been filled by women who represent a narrow spectrum of that coalition. Tonnessen and El Nagar classify these women as the ‘gender equity’ bloc. This bloc supports the existing 1991 MPSL. Disagreeing with these women are women who are not in the government but in civil society who Tonnessen and El Nagar classify as the ‘gender equality’ movement. This movement’s platform is synonymous with Western human rights platforms that oppose gender differentiation and the gender subordination that the 1991 MPSL condones (Tonnessen and El Nagar 2013). In a recent article about the role that international law might play in removing gender disparities in Sudanese law, Halim (2019, 41) suggests that, “The state may give token recognition to gender equality by placing some women in governmental offices and appointing some to the legislative body. Lip service may be paid to the important role of women in the development of the country, but women are only permitted to perform the role designed for them by the ruling patriarch.”

Land and property rights

Despite Sudan’s significant landmass, communal access to and legal ownership of land have become sources of conflict in recent decades, as customary rights have clashed with the state’s rights over, among other things, foreign companies’ rights to drill and mine (Calkins et al. 2015). According to a UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Gender and Land Rights Database, there are two different systems of
property rights in Sudan: one based on a statutory legal system and one based on a customary system. People who own land under the statutory legal system generally have title to their land, while people who hold land under the customary system generally do not. If a woman is married to a man who has title to his land, and if her husband dies, it is difficult for the widow to acquire title to her late husband’s land in her own name. This has been especially difficult for many female IDP heads of households. Conversely, land that is communal under the customary system is no easier for women to access. It is generally managed by a high-status adult male member of the community, and women can generally only obtain access through a male relative. As mentioned earlier in this report, data from the Arab Barometer (2018) show that there is not a lot of support for equal inheritance rights. The overwhelming majority of respondents, 87 percent, disagree with the statement that “Women’s share of inheritance should be equal to that of men” (Arab Barometer 2018). Having a land title has several advantages, including the ability to use it as collateral to access financing. Limiting women’s ability to obtain land titles limits their ability to access financing opportunities that may help them start a business or finance other productive activities that have the potential to benefit not only their families but also the economy in general. Women and agriculture are discussed in greater detail in Section 6.

National strategies and grassroots initiatives

There are currently two Sudanese ministries that specifically address women’s and youth’s affairs: the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Under the transitional government, each ministry is headed by a woman. As mentioned earlier, the transitional government is planning to draft a new Constitution, as well as various pieces of legislation, which may inform the development of new or revised national strategies. For example, shortly after the passage of the 2005 Interim Constitution, the then Ministry of Social Welfare for Women and Child Affairs prepared a 2007 Women Empowerment Policy document which identified six ‘areas of concern’ followed by “institutional mechanisms to operationalize the policy for women empowerment” (Republic of Sudan: Ministry of Social Welfare for Women and Child Affairs 2007). The latter included institutions ranging from the General Directorate for Women and Family, at the national level, to the General Union of Sudanese Women, the largest grassroots organization in Sudan focusing on women’s issues.

While the direction that the transitional government’s laws and policies will take with respect to women and youth is not yet known, there has been a growing movement in urban Sudanese society of educated and motivated women and youth pressing the government through their work on behalf of local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Some women and youth have worked with these NGOs for ‘watchdog’ reasons while others have worked with them for social service-oriented reasons, for example, the ability to provide social welfare services that the government does not provide. Regardless of individuals’ motivations, Kadoda’s and Hale’s post-2011 research on this subject shows that “women-oriented NGOs” in Sudan are “very active and make up the bulk of civil society” (2015, 221). Accurate numbers of active NGOs are notoriously difficult to obtain. Kadoda and Hale report familiarity with ‘dozens’ of NGOs that are formally registered with the government and that are actively working in and around the capital, Khartoum. The leader of a prominent NGO whom Kadoda and Hale interviewed

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believes the numbers are much higher: there are “thousands of NGOs in Sudan and hundreds in Greater Khartoum” (Kadoda and Hale 2015). Youth, especially female youth, were active in the protests—both live and on social media—that led to the toppling of former President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.
5. INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS: THE ROLE OF NORMS AND NETWORKS

Sudan’s formal institutions do not operate independently of its informal institutions, which include, but are not limited to, beliefs about gender roles and relations, social norms, and social networks. This section begins with an examination of the impact of Sudan’s patriarchal customs on female youth’s and women’s ability to pursue education and employment outside the home. It then goes on to discuss the role that wasṭa plays in enabling or inhibiting Sudanese women’s and youth’s access to the labor market, especially in the context of low levels of social capital and trust throughout society.

Customs and norms affect women’s roles in society

Sudanese women are subordinated to men by patriarchal customs and prevailing norms, in addition to existing legal provisions. The 1991 MPSL includes several provisions that subordinate women to men, paramount among them provisions regarding male guardianship. However, academic experts on Sudan are generally in agreement that Sharia law is not the sole source of women’s subordination or restricted agency. Citing a report by a governmental task force composed of Sudanese women’s studies scholars, academic Sondra Hale writes: “[The members of the task force] make a clear attempt to exempt religion as a cause of women’s subordination: ‘the emphasis on the reproductive capacity of women in Sudan is largely a by-product of multidimensional constraints created by customs and traditions – more than by religion – on women’” (Hale 1997, 123) (italics in original). Writing 20 years later, academic Liv Tonnessen (2019) reaffirms the role that ‘customs and traditions’ play in subordinating Sudanese women to men. Specifically, she discusses how the ‘male breadwinner-female caregiver’ model, and by extension the belief that the public sphere is the male domain while the private sphere is the female domain, are used to uphold three areas of Sudanese law, the first two of which were discussed in the preceding section: Muslim family law (or the 1991 MPSL), labor law, and public order laws.

The male breadwinner-female caregiver model is based on the belief that women are first and foremost wives and mothers whose duty is to care for their husbands, and their husbands’ family members, while bearing and raising children. By contrast, men are seen as economic providers. They are responsible for ensuring that their wives and children are properly housed, fed, clothed, and otherwise provided for. Paradoxically, in the 2018 Afrobarometer, more female respondents (48 percent) than male respondents (32 percent) thought that when jobs are scarce men should have more right to a job than women. In various societies, the male breadwinner-female caregiver model may be supported either by custom or by law. In Sudan, it is upheld by both. For example, while not necessarily applied de facto, according to the 1991 MPSL, women who wish to work outside the home must first seek permission from their husbands. The Arab Barometer’s 2018 survey sheds light on the way different countries’ populations conceive of gender roles and relations at both an individual and a societal level. For example, 74 percent of Sudanese agree with the statement “husbands should have final say in all decisions concerning the family,” placing Sudan ahead of every other country in the region. In response to the statement “women and men should have equal rights in making the decision to divorce,” 45 percent of Sudanese agree, placing Sudan behind every other country in the region. Building on the earlier Arab Barometer data shared with respect to opinions regarding inheritance rights and leadership opportunities, Sudan’s
population appears to be the least willing, among the populations of the 12 countries surveyed, to accept the idea that women’s rights and roles in society should be equal to that of men’s.

Sudan’s patriarchal customs tend to be stronger in the country’s poorer rural areas. Consequently, they tend to start shaping the life courses of the females living in these areas at a younger age. Early marriage is an important determinant of women’s role in society. In patrilocal societies, once a girl is married, she moves to live with her husband and, frequently, his family members. At that point, the girl (who is now deemed to be a woman) ceases to be the economic responsibility of her parents, primarily her father, and instead becomes the economic responsibility of her husband—in exchange for the domestic labor she provides. Poor families with large numbers of unmarried daughters will often see early marriage as the only viable economic option for the family. As of 2014, 38 percent of Sudanese women aged 15 to 49 had been married before the age of 18, and 12 percent had been married before the age of 15.\(^\text{14}\) In some rural areas, the numbers are even higher; 45 percent of the girls in Kassala State are estimated to be married before the age of 15 (Tonnessen and El Nagar 2018).

Child marriage occurs for a number of reasons, and while poverty is often cited as one of the principal reasons driving early marriage, the role of customs seems to be a more important driver behind this practice in Sudan. According to a study on the relationship between cultural norms and child marriage in Algadaref State, poverty was one of the five reasons cited for child marriage, but it was not the most common response and in a similar study in neighboring Red Sea State, poverty was not mentioned at all.\(^\text{15}\) Four of the five reasons respondents in the Algadaref State study cited had to do with patriarchal customs: control of girls, fertility, protection of girls from immorality, and protection of girls from the stigma of being unmarried. Protection from immorality, which was the most common response, can mean any number of things. In a review of the three related studies conducted in Red Sea State, Kassala State, and Algadaref State, protection from immorality included discouraging, if not outright forbidding, girls from attending school since school uniforms, public transportation, and mixed-gender classrooms challenge patriarchal customs regarding female modesty—the subject of the public order laws—and the idea that the public sphere is the male domain. In some parts of Red Sea State, an estimated 70 percent of girls stopped going to school by the sixth grade (Tonnessen and El Nagar 2018).

The stigmas of being unmarried and not being able to have children, perhaps because one waited too long to get married, also motivate the choice of early marriage over education. That said, the Algadaref State study revealed that this patriarchal custom appears to be weakening. When respondents were asked, “What are the consequences to families of delaying the marriage of their daughters?” 57 percent of the female respondents said, “There is no stigma, as their daughters are educated and can work to support the family.” That view was shared by 50 percent of the male respondents (El Nagar, Eljack, and Tonnessen 2017, 31).

Both Sudanese women and men have internalized Sudan’s patriarchal customs and norms. Kathleen Fincham, who has conducted research on youth, gender, and school dropout across several states in Sudan, notes that, “Particularly important in determining whether girls would continue their education

\(^\text{15}\) UNICEF database on child marriage; El Nagar, Eljack, and Tonnessen 2017.
were family attitudes relating to gender roles and responsibilities. For example, parents (both mothers and fathers) who believed in girls’ intellectual ability to achieve academically tended to support their daughters’ continued attendance in school. Moreover, parents who believed in the possibility of women working outside of the home tended to support their daughters’ education” (Fincham 2017, 369). If education is needed to acquire the knowledge and skills to access the labor market, and if higher education is needed to climb within the labor market, Sudan’s patriarchal customs are inhibiting many girls and women, though by no means all, from both accessing and rising within the labor market, irrespective of, for example, the number and quality of the schools and universities in their areas.

**Importance of wasta for access to economic opportunities**

**Box 2. A context of low levels of social capital and trust in Sudan**

Social capital is a term that political theorists, sociologists, and social workers, among others, have been using for over a century to describe the nature, strength, and utility of the bonds that members of a society form. According to Francis Fukuyama, “[s]ocial capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. They must be instantiated in an actual human relationship: the norm of reciprocity exists in potentia in my dealings with all people, but is actualised only in my dealings with my friends. By this definition, trust, networks, civil society, and the like, which have been associated with social capital, are all epiphenomenal, arising as a result of social capital but not constituting social capital itself.” The last sentence of Fukuyama’s definition is especially important, because it underscores the relationship between social capital, on the one hand, and trust, networks, and civil society, on the other.

**Trust and networks uphold institutions and formal economies in many liberal democracies.** They have been similarly demonstrated to uphold informal economies in many African countries. According to the Arab Barometer (2018), interpersonal trust is low in Sudan; only 14 percent of the Sudanese surveyed believe “most people can be trusted.” About 84 percent felt “I must be very careful in dealing with people.” The Sudanese who were surveyed were equally wary of their country’s institutions. For example, when asked about their trust in the Parliament, 68 percent reported “not very much trust” or “no trust at all,” and for civil service, this figure was 64 percent. The trust in local governments is equally low with 63 percent reporting no trust at all. When it comes to the private sector, the situation is similar with 65 percent of respondents claiming to have not much or no trust at all in domestic business people and 61 percent for private banks. Of the 16 institutions that the Sudanese who were surveyed were asked to assess, people had by far the greatest trust in the army: 31 percent reported “a great deal of trust,” while 33 percent reported “quite a lot of trust.”

*Sources: Fukuyama 2001, 7; Odera 2013.*

An important informal institution that affects women’s and youth’s ability to access the labor market in Sudan is *wasta*. *Wasta* is an Arabic term that means having a connection to someone who can ‘get things done’. Whereas patriarchal customs appear to exert more constraints on the acquisition of human capital, *wasta* appears to exert more constraints on the acquisition of social capital and, by extension, individuals’ ability to access networks for economic and other gain. According to academic Laura Mann, “[*Wasta*] signifies both the possession of ties (a person can ‘have *wasta*’) and the person who intermediates on behalf of someone (a person can be ‘one’s *wasta*’).” Simply put, *wasta* is, “loyalty plus access to power” (Mann 2014, 563) (italics in original). *Wasta* is widely acknowledged to play a role in the functioning of many Middle Eastern and North African countries’ bureaucracies. “[*W*]asta is not perceived as corruption across MENA [Middle Eastern and North African] societies and is not criminalized in the same way as in
Western countries” (Buttorff and Welborne 2015, 1). That said, there seems to be some gender differences in the use of *wasta* depending on the country context. In a study comparing several Arab countries, men and women appeared to use roughly comparable amounts of *wasta* in Algeria, Morocco, and Lebanon, while men were using considerably more *wasta* than women in Jordan, Palestine, and Yemen (Buttorff and Welborne 2015).

In Sudan, the use of *wasta* to shape current institutions can be traced back to colonial times. Mann explains how the British colonial administration used the *wasta* of Sudan’s sectarian and tribal leaders to develop Sudanese institutions modelled after British institutions. For example, following independence, Gordon Memorial College became the University of Khartoum, and the children of the sectarian and tribal leaders, and their trusted circles, had an easier time securing positions in Gordon Memorial College and then posts in the government. Similarly, Sudan’s post-1983 leaders used the *wasta* of regional leaders in Islamic banking to Islamize Sudan’s banking system. Those whose personal connections brought them into the fold of these banks, like the youth of the Colonial era who were educated in Gordon Memorial College, became the country’s future leaders in business and politics.

*Wasta* continues to play an important role in both accessing and rising within the Sudanese labor market. More than half, 56 percent, of the Arab Barometer (2018) respondents believe that it is often impossible to get a job without *wasta*. According to Mann’s fieldwork in Sudan, *wasta* plays a greater role among the current generation than it did among previous generations. Mann writes, “[Wasta] has become so important in securing livelihoods that young people refer to it as ‘Vitamin Waw’” (Mann 2014, 21). For example, more than 80 percent of Mann’s survey respondents who were between the ages of 20 and 24 learned about their current jobs through ‘personal contacts’ (as opposed to ‘direct application’, ‘newspaper/internet’, or ‘combination’). For respondents aged 30 to 34, the figure was 50 percent; for respondents aged 40 to 44, it was close to 60 percent; and for respondents aged 50 and older, it was less than 30 percent (Mann 2014). The KIIs and FGDs conducted for this report confirmed the abovementioned studies’ findings. Indeed, one of the focus group participants, a woman from Madani who was not working, made a comment identical to that of one of the participants in Mann’s study: “Young people call it [wasta] vitamin ‘W’.”

The usefulness of *wasta* appears to be region specific. For those who were raised in the capital, Khartoum, and its environs, *wasta* is about useful ties to those who are in power in the government and/or the private sector, for example, the oil industry. Mann’s research offers several examples of Khartoum youth who became involved in clubs that were organized and funded by prominent politicians or business leaders. Through their affiliations with these clubs—rather than through school or university—these youth were able to make connections that led to jobs. This is such a well-established practice that a fifth of the respondents in the Arab Barometer survey (2018) do not consider it corruption when government officials provide *wasta* for relatives. Mann’s study shows that for those who are from outside Khartoum,

16 The study by Buttorff and Welborne primarily used data from the Arab Barometer’s 2006–2007 survey.
17 Mann’s research draws on, “…18 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted on university campuses and recruitment centres between 2008 and 2010, 159 interviews with civil servants, managers and job seekers and a 400-person survey conducted in 14 different organisations (three banks, two engineering consultancies, one large private family business, four hospitals and four NGOs) and on public busses” (Mann 2014, 562).
however, *wasta* is more about geographic or tribal ties. These ties will serve people well if they stay within their geographic region or tribal group and they are not otherwise marginalized. For example, single women who are heads of households in poorer rural areas have limited social capital because of the stigma their conational ascribe to their social status (Daoud, Gindeel, and Ahmed 2020). Geographic and tribal ties may also help people if they move to greater Khartoum and settle in a neighborhood where individuals from their geographic region or tribe live. More specifically, these ties may help people find jobs in the informal sector or lower-wage jobs in the formal sector (Bello and Daoud 2014). However, these ties are unlikely to help someone ‘break into’ Khartoum’s labor market, specifically higher wage jobs in the formal sector, because, in these cases, a person does not have the ‘right’ *wasta*. This observation was confirmed by the qualitative work that was conducted for this report. Although Sudanese seeking employment in Nyala and Madani need *wasta* as much as Sudanese seeking employment in Khartoum, the FGDs underscored the fact that *wasta* from one region was not equivalent to *wasta* from another—in other words, one’s ‘Nyala *wasta*’ does not have the same currency in Khartoum. For example, a working woman from Madani said, “I applied for a job and I had *wasta*, but they only accepted three people. Our *wasta* wasn’t useful.” A man from Nyala who had a job said, “According to *wasta* nepotism they bring their relatives only. For example, if I read in Nyala newspaper, someone else will read it in Khartoum. When we both apply our papers, they will prefer men from Khartoum. It is a big city. If I am an employee and I have a brother or a graduated son, they will hire him. While there are other people who have graduated from university and they can’t find any job or work in other fields.”

While *wasta* may be ‘worth more’ in the region where a person is from, it plays as important a role in the professional lives of individuals from Nyala and Madani as it does in the professional lives of individuals from Khartoum. According to a woman from Nyala who had a university degree but did not have a job, “Yes, also itinerant work, I can work anything and mostly *wasta* plays an effective role here, also to work in nursery if I have no *wasta* I can’t get this job even who doesn’t have a degree and we are too many.” A woman from Madani who had a university degree and was a general supervisor of a large cigarette manufacturer said, “These challenges and obstacle found while searching for a job are common except if you have a high recommendation acquaintance. The first one to be hired is the one who has recommendation letter, whether to be hired in governmental or non-governmental sectors. And if you don’t have you may not move a step forward.” A female youth from Khartoum who had a university degree but was not working said, “Here in Sudan everything works through intermediaries like if you have a strong intermediary then you can go anywhere you want even if I have a higher certificate than you but what distinguishes you is your intermediary even if I deserve the job better than you and I have the requirements they ask for. Yes, even if my qualifications are better the person who has the intermediary would get the job.”

There are some similarities and some differences across gender divides, and *wasta* may be more important for women to obtain employment. Both male and female focus group discussants concurred that both males and females need *wasta* to get a job. According to a man from Nyala who had a job, “*Wasta* is number one in work.” According to a woman from Madani who was working, “If you are illiterate and have *wasta*, you’ll get a job.” However, some of the focus group participants believed that *wasta* was either more often invoked by, or more critical for, females than males in seeking and obtaining
employment. For example, a woman from Khartoum who did not have a job said, “For example, I can easily ask one of my friends to find work for me, and if she recommended a job, I can easily negotiate to have this job, but for men they have an ego to ask anybody to get them a job. As the male even if has certificate or not, he doesn’t accept to ask anyone for getting him a job. But it is common between females, as she may find a good job in a shop, she will recommend it for her friend if it is with suitable working hours and she knows the owner of the job. But it is not the same among males, as they don’t accept something like that.” According to a female youth from Khartoum who was not working, “No, it’s not the same, it helps girls more, for example if a girl doesn’t have a certificate she can work normally in a bank.” According to a female youth from Nyala who did have a job, “Wasta is more important. It helps women more.”
6. MARKETS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The preceding two sections of this report examined the extent to which Sudan’s formal and informal institutions enable women and youth to access the labor market. This section breaks down the labor market into several sectors to better understand how changes at both the macro and the micro levels have been both positively and negatively affecting women’s and youth’s economic opportunities. The goal is to offer a more in-depth look at the characteristics of the labor market that were presented earlier. After a brief discussion about privatization and the oil industry, this section discusses women’s and youth’s efforts to seek, obtain, and maintain employment in the public sector and engage in the private sector. The role of access to banking and finance for entrepreneurial activity is also discussed. The agricultural and the informal sectors are then examined, before concluding with a brief discussion about gender-differentiated access to, and use of, digital technologies.

Privatization and the rise of the oil industry: a labor market transformation

The characteristics of Sudanese women’s employment changed with the transformation of the labor market. During the 1990s, for reasons that were part economic and part political, Sudan pursued a policy of rapid privatization (Verhoeven 2015). Between 1992 and 1998, Sudan halved its public spending as a share of its GDP (UNDP 2006). Many Sudanese women who worked in the public sector lost their jobs (Ali 2016; Khalfalla and Ahmed 2015). The 1991 MPSL, discussed in earlier sections of this report, contributed to women’s redundancy. As a consequence of the neoliberal policies that were pursued, and the laws that were passed codifying women’s subservience to men, academics Khalfalla and Ahmed (2015, 119–120) contend that Sudanese women’s employment assumed four key characteristics: (a) women became more likely to be employed in rural areas, especially in the agricultural sector; (b) women became more likely to be concentrated in gender-specific, that is, women’s, jobs; (c) women became more likely to be concentrated in lower-skilled and lower-paying jobs; and (d) vulnerable women became more likely to pursue employment in the informal sector, even though it magnified their vulnerabilities. As discussed in the remainder of this section, many of these characteristics of Sudanese women’s employment continue to hold to the present day.

Indirectly, the rise of the oil industry played an important role in economically marginalizing Sudanese women (Khalfalla and Ahmed 2015). Ross (2008) accepts the data that show that there are comparatively fewer women in the workforce in the Middle East than in other world regions but disagrees with the widely held conception that the discrepancy is due to Islam. Instead, he believes it is due to ‘oil’, an industry where the greater share of the positions are dominated by men. Moghadam (2004, 30) agrees with Ross, though she takes his argument a step further. She believes that it is not just the gendered nature of the oil industry’s positions but the higher wages that accompany them which “[keep] women locked into a patriarchal family structure” because of the “male breadwinner-female caregiver” model that was discussed in the preceding sections of this report.
Private sector engagement preferred over public sector employment

Public sector jobs used to be preferred by women. As mentioned above, as well as earlier in this report, many women who had been working in the public sector in the early 1990s had lost their jobs by the late 1990s. While public sector jobs were lower paying than private sector jobs, with women generally earning less than men, women tended to prefer public sector jobs to private sector jobs for their hours and their benefits. The KIIs and FGDs revealed that women still primarily seek jobs in the public sector. However, when given the choice of a public sector or a private sector job, many women—and youth—would prefer a private sector job and a major reason for this is the higher wages. Public sector salaries in Sudan have been decreasing for years. Between 2009 and 2014, wages in administrative and support service activities as well as in education declined 10 percent per year; in human health and social activities, the decline was 9 percent per year; and in public administration and social services and defense, the decline was 7 percent per year (World Bank 2019c). This, coupled with rising inflation, has really eroded the value of salaries. Note that the transitional government increased civil servants’ salaries in May 2020.

Higher wages is not the only motivating factor in seeking a job in the private sector. Workers’ rights, opportunities for professional advancement, travel, and networking opportunities also play a role. For example, a woman from Khartoum who had a university degree but was not working said that between public and private sector employment she would prefer the private sector, “Because they give their employees their complete rights. If I was able to work in the private sector, they will deal with me in a good way, they will offer me a good salary and even the benefits they will provide will be comfortable. They provide benefits, money and even the moral and psychological way of dealing is better in private sectors.” A male youth from Khartoum who had a university degree but did not have a job said, “Private sector for sure. Private sectors are definitely better financially that is the first thing, plus you can transfer and move from one company to another more easily than in public sectors.” A woman from Madani who had a university degree but did not have a job said, “Because the private sector is somehow affording you the specifications you are seeking nowadays. If you are seeking promotions and retirement pension and so on, you may find it at a governmental job. Yet the private sector nowadays provides you what you wish for. Most of the people are aiming at travelling abroad ... So, the private sector is more comforting in that regard if I’d say so.” While a female youth from Madani who had a university degree but was not working said, “I prefer the private sector. First of all, because of the salary, it’s better. Also, in the private you can increase your relations but the government the field is kind of limited.”

Low access to banking and finance limits entrepreneurial activity

One of the main obstacles to improving Sudanese women’s economic empowerment is that assets and credit are difficult for Sudanese women to obtain. This was noted in the 2007 Women Empowerment Policy document, which identified six “areas of concern,” one of which was “economic empowerment,” and where it was specifically noted that investment policies favor large-scale projects over medium- and small-scale projects in which women are more likely to become engaged. A 2016 study based on a cross-sectional survey of 250 women from Sinnar State reaffirms this observation, showing that 79 percent of the women who did not possess any assets were classified as poor (Elsheikh and Elamin 2016, 198). The study concludes by suggesting that, “In order to enable women to develop their full economic potential
there is a need to improving women access to private business, and access to and control over financial services including banking, and business development. It is very important to establish small and medium enterprises and moving into product development” (Elsheikh and Elamin 2016).

Unlike Sudan’s two different systems of property rights, each of which legally precludes women’s participation, Sudan’s banking system does not legally preclude women’s participation. Rather, as Kevane and Stiansen (2006) note, “The mechanisms of exclusion are subtle or implied since they are not the result of specific legislation. Examples of cultural practices that prevent women from gaining access to formal financial institutions are the predominant role of males in the household, inheritance rules that favor male family members, and the gendering of economic spheres.” This is reflected in the data.

While the share of women and youth with bank accounts increased from 2011 to 2014, men are still twice as likely to have an account compared to women. A lower share of the Sudanese population has an account at a financial institution, compared to the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (15 and 34 percent, respectively) (Global Findex 2014). Both women and youth shares for having an account at a bank or a financial institution or for using a mobile money service increased by 6 percentage points from 2011 to 2014. Men, adults, individuals in the labor force, and the better-off shares have increased significantly compared to other categories. Nearly half of those who reported having an account borrowed to start, operate, or expand a farm or business. Only one in three women who reported having an account borrowed to start a business, compared to half of the men. About 40 percent of the young people who have accounts borrowed to expand or start a business, compared to 47 percent for adults (Figure 15).

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18 The first modern bank established in Sudan was Barclays, a British bank, in 1913. For the remainder of Sudan’s colonial period, that is, until 1956, Sudan’s banking system was a ‘branch’ of Egypt’s banking system. Following independence, Sudan’s Egyptian National Bank first became the Bank of Sudan and then subsequently became the Central Bank of Sudan. The newly independent country also established commercial banks as well as some specialty banks, such as the Agricultural Bank of Sudan. Sudan briefly nationalized its banks in the early 1970s. Then, it introduced its first Islamic bank, Faisal Islamic Bank, in 1978. As mentioned earlier, in 1983, Sudan adopted Sharia law. The following year, all Sudanese banks were obliged to adopt Islamic banking practices (Kevane and Stiansen 2006; Ismail 2019).
Women rely to a larger extent than men on informal institutions for access to money and finance. For example, women have a harder time coming up with emergency funds according to Global Findex 2014 data. While almost half of the women surveyed (48 percent) reported not being able to come up with emergency funds, only 39 percent of the men reported the same. There is also a noticeable difference in the source of these emergency funds, with 64 percent of women relying on family and friends, compared to 42 percent of men. There are a number of informal financial institutions in Sudan, and Kevane and Stiansen highlight three: sandug, dayn, and shayl. Of these, sandug are the only viable credit option for most women. Sandug are monthly gatherings of small groups of women at which each woman contributes something from her savings to the group’s pool of savings enabling one woman—based on a rotating system—to borrow from the group’s savings for consumption or investment. Microfinance is another option for some Sudanese women, and according to a study of microfinance’s role in supporting women entrepreneurs in urban Sudan, there are a variety of institutions that offer microfinance.

The lack of access to finance contributes to low levels of entrepreneurial activity among women. Data from the Enterprise Survey conducted in Sudan in 2014 show that only 3 percent of firms have a woman

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19 Dayn is a form of informal credit utilized by those who trade in the markets; for example, traders may maintain a ‘line of credit’ with a small shopkeeper who agrees to provide them with the staple items they need to prepare the food they sell. Shayl is a form of ‘futures contract’ for those who engage in smallholder agriculture.

20 For example, the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has helped women in Kordofan State who rely on khatas, which are similar to sandugs, channel their groups’ savings into the Agricultural Bank of Sudan’s microfinance program. This microfinance program had, as of 2017, worked with 1,800 women’s groups which comprised 30,000 members (IFAD 2019).

21 (Siddig, Siddig, and Hegazi 2014) The study highlights, for example, the Savings and Social Development Bank and the Youth Foundation for Microfinance.
as the top manager, compared to the average of 15 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Female participation in firm ownership in Sudan is 8 percent, which is substantially lower than the Sub-Saharan Africa average of 36 percent. Access to finance is cited as the biggest obstacle to firm growth for 10 percent of female-led firms compared to 6 percent of male-led firms.22 A study of 142 female business owners in Sudan, who represent a diversity of geographic locations, industries, and sizes, confirms that one of the greater obstacles to starting or expanding their businesses was their inability to rely on banks for credit (Musa 2012). Many of the businesswomen were asked to provide guarantees in the form of real estate or other assets which they did not have, and the cost of loans was often greater than 10 percent of the amount loaned. As mentioned earlier, having a land title might help one access credit from a bank, as the land title could serve as collateral, but women face difficulties obtaining land titles. Some of the businesswomen also reported that the banks were reluctant to lend to those with whom they did not have personal connections, or wastā, which was discussed in the preceding sections of this report. Consequently, 66 percent of the businesswomen used their own savings to start their businesses and 17 percent borrowed from family or friends, while only 17 percent sought financing from a bank. Similarly, 63 percent used their own savings or earnings for working capital, and only 37 percent sought financing from a bank for such purposes. It is noteworthy that the businesses these women started were impressive on multiple fronts, not least of which was the fact that 84 percent reported positive net profit margins (Musa 2012).

Access to finance is not the only hurdle that women encounter when starting and growing a business. Campos et al. (2019) identify a number of constraints that female entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa face in the realm of endowments as well as at the household level. These include differences in skills, capital, networks, occupational opportunities, and safety. These underlying constraints shape women’s strategic decisions, resulting in them being more likely than men to end up with smaller firms in lower productivity sectors. Regulatory constraints are among some of the more prominent contextual-level hurdles that women face. For example, the 2020 Doing Business assessment shows that additional steps are often required for women to start a business compared to men and that it takes on average 35 days for a woman to start a business compared to 34 days for men. This is considerably longer than the 22-day average for the Sub-Saharan Africa region (World Bank 2020c). The previously referenced study highlights the personal characteristics of the businesswomen that appear to have helped them succeed as well as some of the structural factors that, according to them, have inhibited them from achieving greater success in starting and managing their businesses. In general, the women were younger when they started their businesses (50 percent were between the ages of 36 and 45), 62 percent came from families who had experience of owning and managing businesses, the women were highly educated (62 percent had a university or a post-graduate degree), and 67 percent had professional experience in the formal sector (Musa 2012). Also of interest is the fact that, in contrast to a number of the larger businesses in Sudan

22 (World Bank 2014b) It is noteworthy that while women identified access to finance as a major obstacle, more female-led firms had a bank loan/line of credit than male-led firms (13 and 4 percent, respectively). Other differences in the characteristics of firms with a woman versus a man as the top manager include female-led firms outperforming male-led firms on having an internationally recognized quality certification (17 and 7 percent, respectively) and on having an annual financial statement reviewed by external auditors (77 and 55 percent, respectively).
that are owned and managed by men, none of the businesses these women had started relied on foreign investors for start-up capital.\textsuperscript{23}

The challenges that aspiring and successful businesswomen encounter are further illustrated by the qualitative work that was undertaken for this report. A female youth from Khartoum who had a university degree and was the owner of a small pastry shop said, “Because my capital wasn’t enough, so I took things from home and my mother helped me ... because I have no experience in this field my big brother did everything related to taxes and rent fees and everything, he is responsible about the legal papers ... they were supporting me, my mother, brother and my father were very supporting, and my father supported me financially too, thanks God for having them and their support.” The KIIIs and FGDs revealed that youth face many of the same struggles as women. For example, a male youth from Nyala who had a university degree and was the owner of a medium-size agricultural business said, “Sometimes you don’t have possibilities, you can take loans from banks and sometimes when you need money you don’t find loan in the suitable time for you.”

**Women in agriculture tend to earn less than men and face similar challenges as female entrepreneurs**

Sudan is rich in arable land and water, with two-thirds of the population living in rural areas and a large share of the population engaged in agricultural activities. Before the separation of South Sudan from Sudan in July 2011, Sudan had “7% of [Africa’s] cropland, 13% of its pastureland and 10% of its livestock” (Ibouf 2011, 216). The idea of turning Sudan into the Middle East’s or Africa’s ‘breadbasket’ has been repeatedly proposed by Sudanese leaders, regional leaders, and development organizations for the last 50 years. However, since Sudan experienced rapid nationalization followed by rapid privatization and has been subject to repeated droughts, desertification, famines, and conflict, the dream of turning Sudan into the region’s breadbasket has yet to be achieved (Calkins et al. 2015; Verhoeven 2015). In contrast to many of its African neighbors which have transitioned, to one degree or another, from agriculture to industry and services, much of Sudan’s labor force continues to be engaged in agriculture. As mentioned earlier in this report, the share of the employed population working in agriculture increased between 2011 and 2014, with almost half of the labor force employed in agriculture in 2014. The data also show a significant gender dimension, with 60 percent of female labor force participation being in agriculture, compared to 39 percent of male labor force participation. This is even more pronounced in rural areas where four out of every five women working outside the home are engaged in agriculture (World Bank 2019c).

Despite the large share of women in Sudan’s agricultural labor force, female farmers generally earn less than male farmers for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, the smaller size of their plots. A multicountry study in Africa found that women farmers not only face individual-level obstacles that limit their access to inputs and impede their productivity, but they also face a complex set of restrictive social norms, market failures, and regulatory or institutional constraints that affect policies and programs intended to support women farmers (O’Sullivan et al. 2014). In 1992, the Government of Sudan launched a Ten Year Comprehensive National Strategy that aimed, among other things, to increase the country’s

\textsuperscript{23} (Musa 2012) This is aligned with the findings from the 2014 Enterprise Survey, where 54 percent of female-led firms had majority private domestic ownership compared to 35 percent of male-led firms.
agricultural output, particularly the agricultural sector’s share of GDP. The Ten Year Comprehensive National Strategy (1992–2002) and the initiatives that followed, such as the Economic Salvation Program and the National Five-Year Strategic Development Plan (2007–2011), focused on supporting “large-scale mechanized agriculture projects” over “smallholder rain-fed traditional agriculture” (Ibnouf 2011, 219). This was to the detriment of female farmers who generally farmed smaller, rain-fed plots. At the same time, females engaged in agricultural activities tend to be overrepresented in unpaid jobs. According to NHBPS 2014/15, more than half of the women working in agriculture were doing this as unpaid workers (53 percent). Only 28 percent worked as own account workers, 16 percent as paid employees, and 3 percent as employers. Male farmers are more likely to be engaged in agriculture as an own account worker (42 percent), followed by paid employee (35 percent), then unpaid worker (15 percent) and then employer (9 percent).

Many of the constraints that female farmers face are similar to the constraints faced by Sudanese women entrepreneurs. A study of the role that female farmers in the western Sudan region play in food security highlights this: “[Female farmers] have limited access to credit and inputs because of gender discrimination and lack [of] collateral. Formal regulations prohibit married women to access credit without the signature of their husband” (Ibnouf 2011, 222–223). Agricultural land that is owned by potential borrowers can be used as collateral for credit. As mentioned earlier in this report, however, Sudan has two different systems of property rights—one based on a statutory legal system and one based on a customary system not regulated by the legal system—both of which include discriminatory measures against women.24

**Informality is high, linked to poverty, migration, and low education**

Those who work in the agricultural sector are more likely to be poor than those who work in other sectors. In 2014, 47 percent of those employed in agriculture were deemed to be moderately poor (using a poverty line of US$3.20 per day) compared to 36 percent employed in industry and 34 percent employed in services (World Bank 2019c). Given the ongoing economic uncertainty with which many rural Sudanese live, some choose to migrate to Khartoum in the hopes of finding more stable employment there. However, these individuals’ education levels and skill sets are generally a poor match for Khartoum’s labor market. About 37 percent of Sudan’s population has no formal education, 41 percent has at most a primary school education, 15 percent has at most a secondary school education, and 7 percent has some post-secondary education (World Bank 2019c). Among those engaged in agriculture, two out of three have no formal education while only one in fifty has some post-secondary education (World Bank 2019c). As a consequence, many of the rural Sudanese who migrate to Khartoum, often for the sole purpose of finding income-generating opportunities, end up working in Khartoum’s informal sector.

Sudan’s population is young and many of the individuals migrating to Khartoum are youth who fit the above-described profile—that is, they are poor, have little to no education, and have few skills that are marketable in an urban area. For example, a study of youth who migrated to Khartoum from Al-Gezira State (44 percent), White Nile State (40 percent), and the Darfur region (16 percent) found that 46 percent

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24 FAO Country Profile: Sudan.
of their sample were motivated to migrate to find work and escape poverty, 58 percent had no formal education, and 58 percent were previously engaged in agriculture, that is, only had agricultural skills (Daoud, Eldeen, and Bello 2017). As a consequence, 60 percent of the respondents in the study ended up working as ‘mobile sellers’ and 24 percent as ‘food vendors’, 68 percent frequently changed jobs, and 50 percent worked for more than 15 hours per day. When asked what challenges they faced trying to secure more predictable, reliable employment, 96 percent said “lack of capital” and “low access to credit” (Daoud, Eldeen, and Bello 2017).

IDPs represent another population that has migrated to Khartoum in the hopes of escaping poverty and finding work. There are estimated to be between 1.2 and 1.5 million IDPs living in and around Khartoum (Bello, Daoud, and Baig 2014, 169). Like many of the youth who migrate to Khartoum, however, it is not uncommon for the IDPs who do so to lack educations and skills and to only be able to find work in the informal sector. For example, a study of female IDPs living on the outskirts of Khartoum found that 71 percent had no formal education, 71 percent had only agricultural skills, and 26 percent could only secure work as ‘street vendors’ (Bello, Daoud, and Baig 2014, 171).

Despite the many challenges, some Sudanese are able to improve their socioeconomic circumstances through employment in Sudan’s informal sector. Among businesswomen in Khartoum State who prepared and sold food either in a market or out of their homes, 74 percent had no formal education and “90% of them lack[ed] the basic knowledge for managing a business properly” (El Zein et al. 2008, 42).25 That said, most of these women’s businesses had lasted for at least five years, if not more, and most of these women’s businesses made a profit during that time. As a result, they were able to “meet expenses of children’s education, health and medical care” and “[enhance] their ability to save” (El Zein et al. 2008, 54).

The informal sector has been a mainstay of not just Sudan’s economy but also Africa’s economy for decades. As of the mid-1990s, the informal sector was estimated to be employing 60–70 percent of Africa’s workforce, accounting for over 20 percent of its GDP (Odera 2013). Based on the above-cited studies, the informal sector is a large and growing sector in Sudan, particularly among the country’s more vulnerable populations. According to the FGDs, however, there is little meaningful support for those who are employed in this sector. For example, a female youth from Khartoum who was not working said, “It would be good if there is [support].” A male youth from Khartoum who did not have a job said, “Yes, they need. They need to accompany people working this job and learn skills from them till they became able to do the job alone.” A working woman from Madani said, “There is only crafts schools. It is for young people, but old people don’t have any trainings.” A male youth from Madani who did not have a job said, “No, I think he gets the job training only by practicing the work.”

**Digital technology also transforms interactions in the economic sphere**

Access to digital technologies and social media has transformed the way youth interact and exercise their agency in social, political, and other arenas. In late 2013, demonstrations took place in greater Khartoum

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25 (El Zein et al. 2008, 42) Study included 50 businesswomen who prepared and sold food in one of thirteen markets cafeteria style or operating from their homes take-out style.
following then President Omar al-Bashir’s decision to end fuel and other subsidies. Many of the leaders of these protests, like many of the leaders of the earlier post-Arab Spring protests, were youth who had access to smartphones and social media. Kadoda and Hale (2015, 223) argue that “social media not only facilitated civil society’s mobilization and greater visibility, but they (the media) raised consciousness and drew in greater numbers.” Their research demonstrates that the youth activism that took place in 2013 on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube succeeded in cross-cutting socioeconomic and other divides in ways that the ‘traditional’ protest movements in the mid-1960s and mid-1980s could not. Building on that, access to social media in 2013 allowed many women who might not otherwise have been able to participate—due to the patriarchal norms discussed earlier—to actually participate, because social media enabled them to mask their identities. As mentioned earlier in this report, youth, including female youth, were active in the protests that led to the toppling of President Omar al-Bashir mid-2019, and they typically relied on social media to organize their protests.

The expansion of digital technologies and social media has the potential to contribute to expanding women’s and youth’s economic opportunities. Household possession of assets such as a computer and a phone has been shown to have a positive influence on labor force participation. Women living in households with access to a computer improve their chances of being in the labor force and employed by 33 percent and 77 percent, respectively, while phone availability is linked to a 34 percent better chance of employment for youth. Based on the FGDs, a number of Sudanese are already relying on social media—in some cases exclusively so—to help them learn about job opportunities. For example, when asked about sources of job information, a female youth from Khartoum who was not working said, “Facebook.” A male youth from Madani who did not have a job said, “Through some social networking applications, such as Facebook, for example.” While a working female youth from Nyala said, “Via social media for example.”

There is a gender digital divide in Sudan with respect to the access and use of digital technologies. The International Telecommunications Union (2016) reports that 17 percent of men and 11 percent of women use the internet. That said, the penetration of the internet as a tool for economic transactions is low in Sudan, with only 1.3 percent of men and 0.7 percent of women having used the internet to pay bills or buy something online in the past year (Global Findex 2014). In addition, men are twice as likely as women to make or receive digital payments; 16 percent of men and 8 percent of women made or received a digital payment in the past year (Global Findex 2014). Some focus group discussants raised the issue of not having the same access to technology and social media as others. For example, a female youth from Madani who was not working said, “Some people don’t know about job opportunities because they can’t use the internet.” A man from Nyala who had a job said, “For example, the one who called us, and asked us to come, if he didn’t call us, we wouldn’t know about this. But if he announced through [social] media, we may not know about it, even if there are people with experience for the job offered.”

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26 Kadoda and Hale (2015) are careful to note that meaningful social and other divides have existed and continue to exist among the youth who live in greater Khartoum, such as the divide between Riverain youth, or youth who are native to Khartoum, and Darfuri youth who migrated to Khartoum to escape conflict and unemployment.
27 World Bank Staff calculations based on NHBPS 2014/15.
7. **Household Decisions Shape Development Outcomes**

While Sudan’s formal institutions, informal institutions, and markets exert a great deal of influence over women’s and youth’s ability to accumulate human capital endowments and seek, obtain, and maintain employment, individuals’ positions in their households, for example, wife versus husband, their relations with their immediate and extended family members, and, critically, their ‘perceptions’ of these positions and relations may be equally important in shaping their economic opportunities. In this section, women’s and youth’s voices and bargaining power are discussed in the context of their ability or inability to engage in income-generating activities. This section draws heavily on the qualitative research that was conducted in Sudan between May 2019 and March 2020 employing KIIIs and FGDs in Khartoum, Madani, and Nyala (details are provided in Annex 1).

**Stifled personal and professional aspirations**

Decisions made at the household level are informed by the external context and household-level needs and preferences, and they have an impact on individual-level human capital accumulation, agency, and economic opportunities (World Bank 2012b). While the latest data show that a similar share of young women and young men enroll in tertiary education, the prevailing norm is that this is more important for men: more than a third (36 percent) of male Arab Barometer respondents believe that university education is more important for males than females, compared to almost a fourth (24 percent) of female respondents (Arab Barometer 2018). The decision as to whether a girl or a boy should drop out of school is generally decided at the household level. In other words, it is not just rural Sudanese girls and boys who are making decisions about their futures, but their families, especially their fathers. It is not just rural Sudanese girls whose personal and professional aspirations may go unrealized but those of many Sudanese youth as well.

When asked what they wanted to achieve in their adult lives (in the case of youth) or had wanted to achieve (in the case of adults), focus group participants spent more time mentioning professional rather than personal goals. For example, a female youth from Khartoum who had a job said, “I want to complete my studies and work by the certificate/degree I will take, in a good company, and to achieve good position in this company, like to be a manager for example.” Another female youth from Khartoum who was also working said, “Yes, but something related to women, like beauty center for example, this is my dream.” A man from Khartoum who had a job said, “I wished to be an engineer.” Another working man from Khartoum said, “Yes of course it was everybody’s wish to go to military school in a certain period of time. All the Sudanese guys wished to be officers.”

Even though most focus group participants had professional aspirations, whether now or in the past, it was clear that most of them had not been able to realize them. Two sets of reasons were primarily mentioned for this: (a) country-level reasons, that is, Sudan’s interwoven political crises and economic crises, and (b) family or household reasons. With respect to country-level reasons, a working woman from Khartoum said, “Yes, it is good to have dreams, and each one wants to be better in the future, but the conditions of the country are not helping any to achieve their dreams.” A male youth from Nyala who did not have a job said, “I have many ambitions and great, but hands are limited, because here we will not be
able to achieve your dream easily because the conditions here and the problems that have eliminated all our dreams in the recent period, the conditions of our country have changed dramatically.” A male youth from Madani who did not have a job said, “I will tell you why, because of the circumstances that we’re facing nowadays in addition to that, our parents force us in certain directions and the second thing is that everyone wants their children to follow their lead and work in the same field for example the doctor wants his son to be a doctor as well.” The last example partly addresses country-level reasons and partly addresses family or household reasons.

Many of the focus group participants, irrespective of their circumstances, said that their families played a leading role in determining their life courses. For example, a female youth from Khartoum who was not working said, “Sometimes the parents take the decision for you.” Another woman from Khartoum who was working said, “My father made me leave school, he told me now that you know how to write and read so you shouldn’t go to school anyway.” A male youth from Khartoum who did not have a job said, “Yes, the majority affected by the choice of their family.” At the same time, many of the decisions that families make with respect to their daughters and sons are gendered. While poverty was not reported to play a pronounced role in studies concerning early marriage and school dropout, families’ financial situations does appear to affect daughters’—and sons’—ability to study. For example, a male unemployed youth from Madani said, “I [know] a man who has five daughters at the beginning who made them learn, but after a while he brought them all out of education because of his financial circumstances.” A female working youth from Khartoum said, “Maybe because she sees her family suffering in paying the education expenses, so she feels it is better to stop education in order to help her family.” A male youth from Madani who had a job said, “I know a person who was the only man in the house and he had like five sisters, so he left school for financial reasons.” Another male youth from Madani who did not work said, “...I drop out my study because of substantial reasons because of my situation, I entered the university but I dropped [out] because the expenses to register were 1500. And this amount wasn’t available, I have elder sisters who go to the college and there are younger sisters who go to the school, so I drop out my study and I help my father so the rest of my sisters can continue their study.”

The FGDs also revealed it was common for a combination of financial constraints and patriarchal customs to affect daughters’ ability to study as well as work outside the home after they were married. As mentioned in preceding sections of this report, poor families with large numbers of unmarried daughters will often choose to discontinue their daughters’ educations so that they can get married, since marriage transfers the economic responsibility for the daughters to their husbands’ families while also generating some wealth for the daughters’ families in the form of ‘bride price’ and other gifts from the husband (Papps et al. 1983). A female youth from Madani who was not working said, “Girls stop their education depending on their families’ decisions, but it is different for boys. If boys want to continue their education, no one will influence them.” This comment was followed by a direct comment from another female youth from Madani who was not working either: “For girls, it is their family’s decision.” Once married, it can be difficult for women to join the labor force. A woman from Khartoum who was not working said, “For me I left school, to work to help my family, then I got married and left the work.” A female working youth from Khartoum said, “I stopped my studies because of its expenses, and then I got married and I didn’t have the chance to return back and complete my studies.”
Boys and men face pressures to be the provider, which may lead to them dropping out of school to engage in income-generating activities to a larger extent than girls. According to some of the focus group participants who were male, life was not without its obstacles for them. Indeed, poor families with sons may choose to discontinue their sons’ educations so that they can seek employment that offers needed income. A male youth from Madani who had a job said, “Sometimes it does not happen because there are circumstances that control you.” A male youth from Nyala who did not work said, “Sometimes you have to give up this in exchange for work at a young age to provide additional income for your home.”

The gender-based division of roles and labor starts at home

For a woman in Sudan, two events are particularly important in shaping her future: getting married and having children. Some Sudanese girls will complete their secondary level education, or beyond, either before or after getting married. Some will also get jobs. However, the challenges of marriage followed by childbearing and child-rearing will lead many to drop out of the labor market. Since women often have limited bargaining power within the household, this affects their access to different types of economic opportunities, including financial capital and other resources that could facilitate entrepreneurial activities. In sum, marital status contributes to defining the decision to enter the labor market. Compared to individuals who have never been married, married, divorced, and widowed men are more likely to be in the labor force and employed (World Bank 2018a). On the other hand, women, youth, and adults are less likely to be active when married, compared to those who have never been married. Results of the determinants of labor force participation show that the odds ratio of married women and men being in the labor force is 0.609 and 2.077, respectively, meaning that married women are about 40 percent less likely and married men are over 100 percent more likely to be in the labor force compared to their unmarried counterparts. In 2014, one in five girls in Sudan aged 15–19 was already married, and thus they are more likely to be poor, uneducated, and nonusers of contraception (World Bank 2018a). About 60 percent of the married adolescents in 2014 were pregnant or had at least one child. High rates of early marriage and childbearing lead to unnecessary health risks for mothers and babies, higher rates of secondary school drops outs, and associated lower educational and labor opportunities for young women.

The likelihood of women being in the labor force is higher when they are the household heads as well as when they live in households with fewer dependents. The average household size in Sudan is six, and the larger the household, the less chances of individuals being active in general. However, in households with many dependents, women are less likely and men are more likely to be employed and participate in the labor force. Overall, the share of households that are headed by women in Sudan represents less than 15 percent of all households. Women and youth living in female-headed households are less likely to be involved in employment and the labor force: the odds of such women being in the labor force are 42 percent lower compared to women living in male-headed households. For household heads, having

28 Campos et al. (2019) discuss the household-level constraints to female entrepreneurship in Africa, which are similar to the ones brought up in this report, namely: household allocation of productive resources and time constraints and care.
29 World Bank staff calculations based on NHBPS 2014/15.
children increases the odds by 91 percent for male household heads and 145 percent for female household heads to be part of the labor force.

“You need to take care of your kids. Sometimes after you get married, your husband tells you to quit.”
- Female youth, Khartoum, not working outside the home

Household chores

In patriarchal societies that subscribe to the male breadwinner-female caregiver model, women are first and foremost wives and mothers (or, until they come of age, daughters and sisters) whose duty is to care for their male relatives. This means assuming responsibility for all household chores. As discussed in preceding sections of this report, in patrilocal societies, marriage results in women moving from their homes to their husbands’ homes. In Sudan, both women (67 percent) and men (81 percent) think the husband should have the final say in all decisions concerning the family (Afrobarometer 2019). In addition, 57 percent of both women and men agree that “in general, it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children rather than a man” (Afrobarometer 2019). This was strongly confirmed by the focus group discussants from the qualitative research that was conducted for this report. When asked if it would be possible for a woman to ask for help with her household chores so that she could pursue employment outside the home—or because she had already assumed employment outside the home—the response from the focus group participants, irrespective of their gender, age, geographic locale, or employment status (working versus not working), was an overwhelming “no.” There was slightly more receptivity to the idea among the focus group participants in Khartoum, though most of their statements were couched in the conditional.

There are few exceptions that would make it possible and acceptable for a man to help a woman with household chores. For example, one woman from Khartoum who was not working said, “Yes, it depends on your conditions, he may help you in feeding the children. If you are busy.” The one exception to the overwhelmingly negative response was if the woman was ill. Then, it was acceptable for her husband to help her with “spreading bed sheets” or “bathing kids.” That said, one woman from Madani who did not have a job said, “If I told him that I am sick, he will tell me that I am pretending.” The reasons the focus group participants gave as to why men could not, or should not, be asked to help women with household chores fell, for the most part, into one of two categories: (a) that is not done here, that is, in Sudan, and (b) he would not agree to this arrangement. These are conditioned responses that stem from Sudan’s patriarchal customs that are discussed in Section 5. For example, with respect to the first category, a male youth from Khartoum who did not have a job said, “I don’t think you do this. No one do this in our country.” A male youth from Madani who did not work said, “Yes, here in Sudan we have beliefs that do not allow men to work at home.” However, a female youth from Nyala who was working said, “Yes, there are women who ask their men to help them in household responsibilities. But it’s rare.” With respect to the second category, that is, the husband would not agree to this arrangement, a woman from Khartoum who was not working said, “He will never accept, impossible.” A man from Madani who had a job said, “No, she doesn’t dare to ask for something like this.” Overall, the most extreme responses, meaning those that offered the least flexibility with respect to household chores, were offered not by adult men, as one
might expect, but by young males who had jobs. For example, a male youth from Madani who had a job said, “If my wife said that she can’t do the households, I’ll tell her that I am going to marry to bring another woman to help her. If she is impolite, I’ll send her to her family.”

**Box 3. Additional illustrations of men’s roles and responsibilities related to household chores**

“My brother lives with us, he, his wife and his children, he doesn’t stay with his family the whole week, he only stays on Friday even though he doesn’t stand staying with his children. So, I don’t think there is a man could stay at home and share with us the house chores.” - Female youth, Khartoum, working outside the home

“No, it depends on his mood, if he does the thing when he isn’t in the mood, so he ruins it, he said he is [tired] from the job and he said that he says that he is a man, he shouldn’t do anything.” - Woman, Khartoum, working outside the home

“I will not help [her] because of the social vision for such thing is not good.” - Male youth, Madani, not working

“I help her by going to my work, but I can’t help her at home.” - Male youth, Madani, working

*Source: Qualitative work conducted for this report. See Annex 1 for methodology.*

Given the strongly held beliefs and expectations among the greater share of Sudanese society with respect to women’s primary roles—if not sole role—as caregivers, it is not surprising that one of the factors motivating recently married women to drop out of the labor force is the burden of household chores. According to a woman from Madani who worked outside the home, “She has a lot of duties and responsibilities so she can’t make a balance between them, so she decides to leave her job for the sake of her home.” According to a female youth from Khartoum who worked outside the home, “Yes, the same example I know a girl dropped out her work because she got married and she couldn’t stand working and handling her house and her children needs.” The weight of the ‘double burden’ that Sudanese women who pursue income-generating opportunities face was raised by female youth and women in each of the FGDs (Khartoum, Madani, and Nyala), irrespective of whether or not they currently had a job.

**Childcare**

It is not just household chores that impede women from working outside the home, but women’s responsibilities as the primary caregiver, combined with the lack of alternative childcare options, also pose an obstacle. Once a Sudanese woman is married, she is expected to start having children. Sudan’s fertility rate (births per woman) was estimated to be 4.4 in 2018 (World Bank 2020a), and large families are the norm, especially in the country’s rural areas. When employers across a range of industries were asked about their companies’ maternity leave policies and childcare facilities, most said they had one or the other if not both. For example, according to the director of a large agricultural business in Nyala, “Actually we do provide childcare related to the ministry and there is one hour for breastfeeding, so we give women all their rights.” Only one employer of a large company in Madani indirectly acknowledged that his business did not offer any childcare options. He said, “[T]he problem is the baby as she can’t work if she brought him with her, usually after marriage responsibilities increase especially if children are ill or at hospital, we can be tolerant for simple things but we won’t accept ten days’ vacation without excuse.”

According to the focus group participants, childcare options are not readily available, which greatly limits women’s ability to work outside the home. Given the fact that most employers who were interviewed
said that maternity leave policies and childcare facilities exist, it is not clear what, exactly, the impediment is. It could be that some employers have policies on paper, but not in practice, or not fully in practice. It could also be that there are direct and indirect costs for childcare that families either choose not to assume or are unable to afford. It is also possible that the childcare available is not up to parents’ expectations regarding affordability, accessibility, and quality or that there is a mistrust of childcare, that is, the idea of placing one’s child in the care of a nonrelative. Based on the focus group participants’ responses, it seems clear that one issue is a lack of people who can offer childcare, whether those people are provided by an employer or are relatives. For example, a woman from Madani who was not working said, “She [must] leave her job because she doesn’t have someone to look after her kids.” While a man from Nyala who had a job said, “I think they don’t find someone to take care of the kids. Her husband may be outside Sudan. Kids need attention and care. So, their husbands ask them to leave their jobs. Women in this case prefer to stay at home and take care of their kids.”

Mothers are supposed to provide childcare, and families have the right to expect them to provide it. This is one of the foundational beliefs upon which the male breadwinner-female caregiver model is based and the most frequently cited impediment facing women who wish to work outside the home. As mentioned in Section 4 and Section 5, aspects of this cultural model are codified in Muslim family law, which gives husbands the right to limit their wives’ ability to work outside the home. A number of the focus group participants’ responses addressed this issue, from a husband not wanting his wife to work, to a husband telling his wife she could not work, to the family, for example, the mother-in-law, saying the woman should not work. For example, a female youth from Nyala who had a job said, “Because of household responsibilities, for example her husband doesn’t want her to work and he wants her to take care of the kids and he will provide everything for her.” While a woman from Khartoum who was working said, “Maybe their family forces them to do so, their marriage for example, the kids, the family, taking care of kids and sometimes their family get sick so they stay to take care of same, responsibility at home.” In sum, at present, Sudanese women’s domestic duties, which are simultaneously defined and upheld by cultural norms and legal codes, pose a significant obstacle to working outside the home for a great many Sudanese women, irrespective of the childcare options that government or industry might offer.

**Additional constraints: Low wages and lack of adequate transportation**

Wages are another factor that are assessed in household decision-making. Low wages affect Sudanese women’s and youth’s ability to pursue income-generating activities. Paradoxically, while employers who were interviewed for this study reported adequately compensating all of their employees, that is, they do not engage in gender, age, or wage discrimination, employees who were interviewed reported unhappiness with their wages. Both the former and the latter are widespread phenomena. For example, a male youth from Madani who was not working said, “I think the salary is the first thing anyone who wants to find a job can think of.” A male youth from Nyala who did not have a job said, “I can work anywhere, but there are basic things that I look to at work anywhere the salary first, then experience.” A working woman from Madani said, “My sister works in Khartoum and she lives in stay-in house for girls. Her salary wasn’t enough.”
One of the things that stood out from the FGDs was the lack of adequate transportation, the need to spend one’s wages on transportation, and, in some cases, one’s wages not being high enough to justify one’s transportation costs. According to the NHBPS 2014/15, the average transportation cost per person per year is SDG 71 and increases with household income. For example, a female youth from Khartoum who was working said, “The working time is related to the transportation, as if I finished my work late, I will not find any transportation to get back home.” A woman from Khartoum who did not have a job said, “Yes, exactly, because of the transportation. The transportation is hard and costly.” A working woman from Khartoum said, “Yes, maybe, you can finish your working hours at 5 p.m. and you can’t find a transportation or you can find a means of transport but it will cost you a fortune and at the end of the month you wouldn’t have any salary left.”
8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This section summarizes the main findings of the study. Areas that are believed to be critical to improving women’s and youth’s economic opportunities in both the nearer and the longer term are highlighted. It is recommended that these areas be discussed with a broad range of stakeholders to further identify and prioritize specific policy and programmatic actions.

When examining the determinants of labor market outcomes for women and youth across geographic regions, educational levels, and socioeconomic strata, a few factors stand out as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Women who work face many constraints including, but not limited to, the legal framework, patriarchal customs, land and property rights, and access to finance. Three-quarters of men are in the labor force compared to a third of women. Unemployment is twice as high for women as it is for men. Female youth are 55 percent less likely to be employed compared to female adults. Women who work earn less than men, and they have been disproportionately affected by the decline in real daily wages. Women who want to pursue more entrepreneurial forms of income-generating activity, whether in the private sector, the agricultural sector, or the informal sector, are likely to face challenges getting credit from a bank because of their lack of assets and personal connections, or wasṭa, the latter of which are essential for accessing and navigating the male-dominated banking system. Few women hold decision-making positions. Only 3 percent of firms are led by women. Women are gaining ground in various social and political arenas as demonstrated by, for example, their increased representation in Parliament. At present, however, these advances do not appear to be having a meaningful impact on the above-described labor market outcomes.

Patriarchal customs and norms, combined with a legal framework that reinforces discriminatory practices, restrict women’s access to economic opportunities. According to prevailing cultural beliefs and practices, men are supposed to be providers, while women are supposed to be caregivers. These, and other, customs and norms are reflected and reinforced in the 1991 MPSL and other legal instruments’ regulations that explicitly discriminate against women, placing Sudan near the bottom of the global WBL index. For example, many women need to ask their husbands for permission to seek employment outside of the home. For those who succeed in getting jobs, fulfilling their (unpaid) care and household responsibilities while working often presents an insurmountable challenge, leading many to drop out of the labor force before they rise within it.

Young people are less likely to participate in the labor force and be employed, compared to adults. Sudan’s population is young with 60 percent below the age of 25. Male youth have 77 and 73 percent odds of participating in the labor force and being employed, respectively, compared to male adults. Youth are struggling with high unemployment, especially in urban areas, where it increased from 20 percent in 2009 to 40 percent in 2014. This trend seems to be associated with increased migration to urban centers, such as Khartoum, where rural youth who were engaged in agriculture and rural IDPs are competing with urban youth—and their wasṭa—for income-generating opportunities.
Agriculture and services are the main sources of employment in Sudan, with the agricultural sector largely dominated by women, according to some measures. In 2014, the agricultural sector accounted for almost half of Sudan’s total employment, which included 60 percent of Sudan’s employed women and 80 percent of Sudan’s employed rural women. Sudanese households whose primary source of income is derived from agriculture, rather than from other segments of the economy, are generally poorer, more vulnerable, and less resilient.

Having *wasta*—a connection to someone who can “get things done”—plays a key role in enabling, or inhibiting, Sudanese women’s and youth’s access to the labor market. *Wasta* helps members of all demographic groups access employment opportunities so long as they stay within their geographic, socioeconomic, and so on context. If, however, as implied earlier, a male youth from Nyala tries to “use” his “Nyala *wasta*” in Khartoum, he is probably not going to be successful, unless he is solely interested in seeking employment in a “Nyala enclave.”

**Potential areas for policy and programmatic action**

This study has brought to light several areas in which targeted policies and programs have the potential to help Sudan’s women and youth improve their economic circumstances. The following five areas are briefly explored with the idea that discussions with a broad range of stakeholders will serve to further refine them:

- Expand the opportunities for women to access finance.
- Improve the access to and quality of agricultural jobs.
- Combine efforts to build human capital with activities aimed at strengthening agency.
- Identify and develop marketable skills that increase opportunities for service sector employment and for entrepreneurial activities.
- Create an enabling environment that lifts gender-specific constraints.

The five areas are intentionally broad though by no means arbitrary. They draw on international best practices from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa and from a variety of sectoral initiatives (World Bank, 2008, 2017). The goal is to appeal to as wide an array of potential stakeholders as possible. The policy actions include short-, medium-, and long-term options. The analysis in this report suggests that the greater share of the policies and programs that will serve to improve Sudanese women’s and youth’s economic circumstances for the better will necessitate outlooks that focus on the longer term. However, there are some low-hanging fruits that can be achieved in the short term and have the potential to make significant impact. The reason the actions are not separated into these three groups is to avoid possible misinterpretation that medium- and long-term goals can be set aside for now. Rather, work on achieving some medium- and long-term goals also needs to start now while working to achieve short-term objectives. The policy action areas are summarized in a matrix (Table 2).
**Expand the opportunities for women to access finance**

Women working in agriculture face similar constraints as women entrepreneurs in both the private sector and the informal sector. First, access to credit often requires the support of a male guardian. Offering a range of lending opportunities that include, but are not limited to, traditional banks, nonprofit organizations that support microfinance, and informal lending institutions would serve to meet different women’s different needs. For example, the sandug model (an informal lending institution) that, in some regions, has become affiliated with the Agricultural Bank of Sudan’s microfinance program works well for women in more rural areas who aspire to start one-person businesses, but the sandug model would not be appropriate for women in central Khartoum who desire to grow their small-to-medium-size businesses—these women need to be able to take out loans, and possibly more than one, from traditional banks. This is aligned with international evidence which shows that to improve the supply side behind the gender gap in access to finance, offering different services (including microfinance) and introducing operational changes such as the following have proven successful: (a) account opening without a minimum deposit requirement; (b) flexible loan terms, such as smaller amounts with longer-terms and lower-interest rates; (c) banking hours outside of normal business hours; (d) women staff available to assist women borrowers; and (e) services available at closer locations (IFC/GPF 2011). Encouraging the use of movable collateral can benefit women in particular, empowering them to overcome their lack of titled land, or the limitations on their power to transfer property, enabling them to use the assets they have to gain access to formal credit markets. Ensuring that women have government-issued identification documents is also critical to being able to access formal finance. To address challenges related to the demand side, a study from four North African countries indicates that female firm managers tend to underestimate their creditworthiness based primarily on perceived discriminatory lending practices by banks which ultimately deters them from applying for credit (Morsy, El-Shal, and Woldemichael 2019). While this would not be the only challenge that would need to be addressed on the demand side—other issues include the willingness to take risks and other preferences—investing in women’s financial literacy knowledge and skills would be an effective step toward women’s financial inclusion.

Second, women are much less likely than men to have land titles due to a property rights system that formally excludes them. Female farmers who do not have title to the land they farm are not likely to be able to expand beyond the smaller, rain-fed plots which, as this report has shown, are not nearly as lucrative as the larger agricultural firms. Formalizing land ownership with stronger land rights have shown the potential to increase productivity (World Bank 2020g). At the same time, and as mentioned above, since land titles can be used as collateral for loans, enabling women to acquire land titles would simultaneously make it easier for them to access credit. Where women may not have access to their own titles, small nudges have proven effective in encouraging joint land titling (World Bank 2020g). In sum, different finance models need to be explored to identify what works well—and what does not work well—in different contexts. Rigorous evidence from more than one study in Africa shows the positive effects of savings mechanisms on business investment and performance of female-owned firms (Campos et al. 2013).

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31 See, for example, World Bank (2019d) for specific, actionable suggestions on expanding the use of moveable assets and its benefits for women.
There is no reason to believe that the same would not hold in the Sudanese context. Interventions simply need to be tailored to ensure that they are embraced and adopted by the relevant target groups such as female farmers in the Darfur region or female entrepreneurs in the private sector in Khartoum.

**Improve the access to and quality of agricultural jobs**

In contrast to some of its neighbors in Africa, agriculture has been and is likely to continue to be one of the main sources of employment for women and youth in Sudan. Therefore, focusing on sustained agriculture growth is vital for job creation and poverty reduction. Between 2011 and 2014, the share of the employed population working in agriculture increased, with almost half of the labor force employed in agriculture in 2014. In rural areas, four out of every five women working outside of the home are engaged in agriculture. In addition to the women working as agricultural laborers, there are female youth graduating from universities with the training to develop the sector. Indeed, female youth presently represent the majority of tertiary education graduates from agriculture programs. However, as the KIs and FGDs showed, few women are rising to positions of management in the larger, more profitable agricultural firms. Programs should not only benefit women but also harness their capacity and include them from program design to implementation in capacities beyond consultations. Ample evidence shows that increasing women’s control over productive resources by providing inputs directly to women or lowering costs for obtaining these resources, facilitating access to credit and information, sometimes in combination with technical training and support, will help women shift into higher-value activities and increase overall agricultural productivity (Anderson et al. 2020; World Bank 2020f).

It will be critical to develop and implement labor market policies that aim to build a skilled agricultural labor force consistent with the demands of the labor market. This will necessitate a multipronged approach. On the one hand, there is a need to develop vocational training programs for male and female adults and youth who desire to work as agricultural laborers. These individuals may not necessarily aspire to rise to positions of management in agricultural firms, but they nonetheless want to be trained—and if necessary retrained—as the agricultural labor market changes due to, for example, natural disasters or economic crises. Targeting extension services to women by, for example, having more female extension agents and better trained agents overall related to gender mainstreaming, or targeting the training to both spouses, will increase female farmers’ knowledge and help improve their outcomes (World Bank 2014a, 2020g). At the same time, there is a need to ensure that higher educated women in agriculture are able to benefit from this training. Potential measures include ensuring that women and youth are aware of the economic opportunities provided along the agricultural value chain, the overall improvement of the legal framework (nondiscrimination in hiring and promotion), introduction of workplace flexibilities and support that cater to women’s household and care responsibilities, and the organization of women agriculturists in professional associations that advocate for women in agriculture (Karl 1997; World Bank 2009). In addition, ‘feeder programs’ for youth, especially female youth, graduating from universities’ agricultural programs could be considered. These individuals should be placed in agricultural firms immediately upon graduation so that they can hone the skills they acquired, and share the ideas they developed, in their university programs, as well as begin to learn the management skills and continuous in-service training necessary to advance to leadership positions. In sum, a whole-of-sector approach is needed to make sure that adults and youth, males and females, the tertiary educated, and the vocationally
trained are able to collectively engage in, and productively contribute to, one of Sudan’s leading industries. Focusing on improving the quality of and access to agricultural jobs in Sudan’s rural areas should also reduce the strain on Sudan’s urban labor markets, which have not been able to absorb the influx of rural women and youth seeking employment, resulting in an increase in urban poverty. In addition to creating jobs and reducing poverty, the above-described approach would also provide a productive link between social protection and women’s and youth’s economic empowerment.

**Combine efforts to build human capital with activities aimed at strengthening agency**

It is important to promote gender equality from a young age, tracking disparities in human capital accumulation by ensuring that, among other things, girls and young women complete their education. As presented in this report, enrollment rates have increased in Sudan for both boys and girls and, in fact, reached gender parity in primary and secondary education in 2017 (World Bank Gender Statistics). However, these are still below the average of Sub-Saharan Africa countries at the primary and secondary levels and girls in rural areas are less likely to be enrolled especially in primary school.

This report has identified early marriage as an important reason that girls drop out of school and there are various interventions that could be considered to delay marriage and support girls who marry early. Based on a review of what works to end child marriage, such interventions could include (a) empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks; (b) educating and mobilizing parents and community members; (c) enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls; (d) offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families; and (e) fostering an enabling legal and policy framework (Wodon et al. 2017). Programs to educate girls and their parents about the negative impacts of this would be useful. Curbing early marriage and pregnancy will also help reduce the fertility rate, and subsequently the dependency ratio, with a positive impact on poverty.

Given that social norms related to the caregiver versus provider role seem to be strongly internalized, it will be important to identify ways to address girls’ limited agency in determining their future—education and marriage—and to strengthen their bargaining power within their households and the larger community. Behavioral science-informed community-level interventions to address social norms that restrict women’s agency related to education and economic activity can be explored, with activities that target husbands, parents, and/or other community members (World Bank 2018a). For example, this report noted that, while recent data suggest that roughly comparable numbers of young women and young men are enrolling in tertiary education, the prevailing perception is that higher education is more important for men. Until this perception is changed, Sudan is unlikely to see the ‘return on investment’ of its female university graduates, which negatively affects not only those graduates but also the country’s GDP. In the nearer term, actions could be taken to (a) reduce school dropouts for girls at all levels, and provide dropouts with opportunities to complete their educations to some degree of certification through alternative mechanisms such as traditional correspondence programs or contemporary online programs; (b) improve girls’ enrollment at the secondary level; and (c) target young women for school-to-work transition programs that take into account their individual realities such as rural versus urban, married versus unmarried, some primary school education versus higher education, and so on. Evidence shows that a multipronged approach related to life-skills and livelihood training may be most effective in
increasing adolescent girls’ human development outcomes and likelihood to engage in income-generating activities (World Bank 2013).

**Identify and develop marketable skills that increase opportunities for service sector employment and for entrepreneurial activities**

There is a need to identify and develop marketable skills, especially for women and youth who migrate to cities from rural areas, since many of them only have agricultural skills. As long as Sudan continues to experience droughts and desertification and have large numbers of IDPs, people will continue to migrate out of those circumstances (primarily, though not exclusively, from the Darfur region) to urban areas that are believed to offer a diversity of employment opportunities. Despite the large number of working-age youth in Sudan, however, many are unemployed, especially in the country’s urban areas. Few working-age Sudanese attend vocational training programs (3 percent). Of those who do, about a third are women, and about a third are youth. The KIIIs with employers and employees revealed an education and skills mismatch in the labor market. Vocational training programs, coupled with basic business programs, should be established and/or strengthened based on the specific demands of the labor market in the areas in which they are being offered, as well as the interests of the youth and the women who live there, with access to funding available to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit. Additionally, vocational training programs tailored to specific geographic regions should not only help people obtain the skills necessary to become employed in needed vocations but also emphasize job search skills, so that those who do not have access to the internet or to wasata can still succeed. In a related vein, research has shown that, to increase women’s economic activity, rather than focusing on general managerial training, programs are more effective in numerous contexts in Africa when addressing socio-emotional skills and gender-specific content (Campos et al. 2019).

The service sector employs 46 percent of the labor force and is a key sector for the employment of women and youth. However, a number of factors are deterring service sector growth. These include, but are not limited to, weak economic growth, flagging infrastructure, poor management, and the inability to attract and retain a strong workforce, both skilled and unskilled. Similar to the above-described recommendation with respect to the agricultural sector, women and youth can be instrumental in supporting the growth of the service sector. To ensure that women and youth can both contribute to this growth and benefit from a growing sector, vocational programs should be designed and offered to those with less education and training and ‘young professional programs’ to those who have recently graduated from higher education programs. To facilitate women’s access to these kinds of programs, evidence suggests that it is important to improve outreach and introduce flexibility in hours; create a safe, gender-sensitive training environment and transport to and from training opportunities; and use mentoring and ensure equal participation in training and in management of skills development institutions (ILO 2014; World Bank 2020e).

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32 World Bank (2020e) identifies among the top lessons learned for increasing employment particularly among young women the need to not only empower adolescent girls and develop marketable skills but also stress the importance of increasing efficiency in job searches.
There is an opportunity to close the remaining gender digital divide and harness the skills developed by women and youth to develop the ICT sector. While comparatively few Sudanese have access to the internet at present (17 percent men and 11 percent women), this is likely to change with time. While less than a third of the graduates from STEM programs are female youth, female youth dominate the share of graduates in ICT—they are thus well placed to help Sudan’s service sector industry develop its IT services and its marketing services. These female and male youth should be employed in a variety of sectors with the objective of getting these sectors’ IT services up to speed. At the same time, women whose domestic responsibilities inhibit them from seeking employment outside of the home, and who nonetheless desire to engage in some form of income-generating activity, should be taught—as connectively increases—how to use the internet to make basic economic transactions so that they can more easily complete those transactions from their homes. In sum, it has been found that “lower earnings for women in adulthood due to low educational attainment lead to losses in human capital wealth defined as the present value of the future earnings of the labor force” (Wodon et al. 2018).

Recognition by the Government of Sudan, particularly local authorities, of the important role entrepreneurial activities play is essential and—if done right—should benefit workers by providing additional opportunities and protections. As mentioned in different places throughout this report, many women find it difficult to work after they get married due to the caregiver role, and the accompanying household responsibilities, they are expected to assume. At the same time, this report cited several studies that showed that women with no more than modest formal educations and/or vocational trainings could, under the right circumstances, open and operate successful small businesses out of their homes while still fulfilling their caregiver roles. The FGDs with male and female adults and youth in all three regions noted a desire for increased vocational trainings and basic business trainings so that more people could operate small businesses like the women mentioned above. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which the government is currently preparing, offers an opportunity to address the constraints to employment in the agricultural sector, the service sector, and the informal sector.

Create an enabling environment that lifts gender-specific constraints

The main obstacle to improving women’s, and to a lesser extent youth’s, economic opportunities, irrespective of their geographic locale, their educational level, or their socioeconomic circumstances, is a combination of certain laws and certain cultural norms. Since laws are more tangible than cultural norms, it is recommended that attempts to amend aspects of the law be tackled first.

Lifting regulatory constraints to women’s economic participation is key. Discriminatory laws limit equal opportunities and constitute a threat to women’s economic security, position in society, and overall well-being. The WBL 2021 report finds that better performance in the areas measured by the index presented is associated with more women in the labor force and with higher incomes and improved development outcomes. Of the 190 countries that are covered in this report, Sudan is fourth from the bottom, with Sudanese women having less than a third of the rights that Sudanese men have in the measured areas.

Amending aspects of the 1997 Labor Code would be a significant first step in improving women’s economic opportunities. For example, the 1997 Labor Code prohibits women from having the ability to
work the same hours as men. This limits the number of jobs for which women can apply. It also limits their ability to seek promotions, since promotions are generally awarded to those who demonstrate a desire and a willingness to work longer hours. The 1997 Labor Code prohibits women from performing jobs deemed “hazardous, arduous, or harmful to their health” without explaining what “hazardous”, “arduous”, or “harmful” means. In other words, these terms are open to the interpretation of employers. Their interpretations could be as broad or as narrow as they choose without giving women—or, for that matter, anyone—the legal recourse to challenge them. There are no legal provisions on equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value or for nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring. Furthermore, pregnant women are not protected; mothers are not guaranteed an equivalent position after maternity leave. In sum, Sudanese women are legally restricted in a way that circumscribes their economic mobility and their economic decision-making.

Easing regulations to start businesses would benefit both male and female entrepreneurs, but maybe even more so for women, since they tend to have less capital for reasons that were highlighted throughout this report. Business is clearly a viable economic option for some Sudanese women. At present, however, it appears to be limited to the small minority who have high levels of human capital, financial capital, and social capital and social networks, which enable them to circumvent the structural factors that are impeding, rather than facilitating, their success.

Other legal measures could be enacted to address some of the societal issues that affect girls’ and women’s human capital accumulation and overall well-being. Mandating and enforcing an increase in the minimum age for marriage is one example. Child marriage and early childbearing are common in certain parts of Sudan, and studies show that girls who marry during their adolescent years are more likely to be—and to remain—poor and uneducated. Given the recent (April 2020) landmark decision outlawing female genital mutilation in Sudan, now may be an opportune time for the public and the elected representatives to address a number of other societal issues that differentially affect girls’ and women’s personal and professional potential.
Table 2: Summary of potential areas for policy and programmatic action

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<tr>
<th>Barriers/obstacles</th>
<th>General policy recommendation</th>
<th>Policy &amp; programmatic action</th>
<th>Individual level outcomes</th>
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| - opening bank accounts  
- obtaining land titles and other assets that can be used as collateral  
- accessing credit | #1 Expand opportunities for women to access finance | **FORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** enable women to obtain own or joint land titles; create an enabling environment for a range of lending opportunities  
**INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** expand & learn from informal lending institutions; include risk management in financial literacy training for women  
**MARKETS:** offer different types of lending opportunities; introduce operational changes in banking services to address women’s needs | Enhanced uptake of financial services among women; more entrepreneurial activity |
| - obtaining land titles  
- controlling productive resources  
- benefiting from vocational training, extension services  
- leveraging higher education | #2 Improve access to and quality of agricultural jobs | **FORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** enable women to obtain land titles, and to access & make decisions on productive resources; support organization of female agriculture workers  
**INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** facilitate access to information  
**MARKETS:** target extension services; develop placement programs for female youth graduating from university agricultural programs; diversify market entry points | Women’s increased ownership & control over assets; increased productivity for women & youth in rural areas |
| - completing education (rural)  
- having a voice, exercising agency  
- working outside the home  
- balancing paid work & unpaid household responsibilities | #3 Build human capital & strengthen agency | **FORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** enable school drop-outs to complete education via alternative mechanisms; provide economic incentives to families for school completion; target school-to-work programs; address obedience provisions in Personal Status Law  
**INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** support behavioral science-informed community-level interventions to address patriarchal customs; ensure that vocational training programs combine life-skills & livelihood training; facilitate access to information & networks | Women & girls have more human capital and bargaining power within household & in society |
| - obtaining relevant vocational training; acquiring basic business knowledge & skills  
- networking, job search  
- leveraging higher education, ICT  
- unfriendly work environment | #4 Identify & develop marketable skills | **FORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** bolster the ICT sector & ensure women and youth participation; support geographically targeted vocational training, school-to-work programs; introduce flexible work policies  
**INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** socio-emotional skills, gender-specific content in trainings  
**MARKETS:** develop placement programs for university ICT graduates; facilitate digital networking and job searching; establish targeted mentoring programs | For women & youth, increased employment & entrepreneurship; higher return-on-education/skills-investment |
| - having a voice, exercising agency  
- working outside the home, pursuing entrepreneurial activities  
- balancing paid work & unpaid household responsibilities | #5 Create enabling environment that lifts gender-specific constraints | **FORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** lift gender-specific restrictions in Labor Code (sector, hour restrictions, etc.); introduce childcare, safe transport measures; address obedience provisions in Personal Status Law  
**INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS:** invest in women’s civil & political literacy; support behavioral science-informed interventions to address gendered norms around roles & responsibilities  
**MARKETS:** ease regulations and processes for doing business; workplace policies on non-discrimination, harassment, flexible work; support childcare, safe transport | Women have increased voice and agency. Over time → increased economic, social, and political capital |
REFERENCES


ANNEX 1. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This section describes the methods used for data collection, data cleaning, and analysis.

Research approach

To meet the research objectives, a qualitative study was carried out to better understand the constraints women and youth face in accessing economic opportunities. The following research methods were used to collect data from the areas/people related to the subject under the study:

- **FGDs** were chosen for in-depth discussions about unemployment, to explore collective views and the underlying meanings. They targeted the affected community within a limited time frame.

- **In-depth interviews**: These use a KII methodology to gather more information from a limited set of knowledgeable employers/experts about a particular subject (for example, policies, hiring of women and youth).

Research geographical areas

The study was carried out in three different states covering three main income-generating activities to develop a broader understanding of the different conditions and drivers of employment for Sudanese women and youth. The selected states are Khartoum (services), South Darfur (agriculture), and Al-Gezira (industries).

Research instruments

First, key research questions about the research objective were broadly identified. Based on these, FGD guides were developed with customized sections for each target group (for example, perceptions about life, education, getting a job, self-employment, and dropping out). Similarly, customized semi-structured in-depth interview guides were developed.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed since there was clarity on the respondent profiles who fit the research. While homogenous sampling (a type of purposive sampling) was used for the FGDs to look at the unemployment issues in depth, maximum variation sampling (a type of purposive sampling that ensures diversity as well)—covering a broader range of samples (for example, employers in various industries, range of employer size)—was used for KIIs to discover central themes, core elements, and/or shared dimensions.

- **Focus group sampling.** A total of 33 FGDs were conducted in three states: 12 FGDs each in Khartoum and Al-Gezira, and 9 FGDs in South Darfur (of which 3 groups had to be canceled due to COVID-19). The respondents (women-men-youth) were selected to represent both employed and unemployed community with different levels of education. The Khartoum and Al-Gezira groups were from urban areas, while the South Darfur group represented a rural area. Each FGD had six participants.
• **KII.** A total of 28 KIs were conducted: 18 were conducted with employees representing working, not working, self-employed participants, while 10 KIs were conducted with employers representing the three sectors (services, agriculture, industries).

**Focus group sample.** A total of 15 FGDs were conducted.

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<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Education*</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khartoum</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>25–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training and completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training and completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training and completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>South Darfur</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>25–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional FGDs were conducted in all the three regions to cover a range of uneducated (never attended schools or completed only primary education) and less educated (not graduated but completed secondary or vocational education) backgrounds. The sample size is 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Education*</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khartoum</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>25–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>South Darfur</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>18–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>25–45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>18–24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 28 KIs were conducted.

Category: Individual employees and persons not working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Education*</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Al-Gezira</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>25–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>18–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed primary education and completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>18–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>25–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>18–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa and completed primary education</td>
<td>25–45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 28 KIs were conducted.

Category: Individual employees and persons not working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Organization type (and size)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>Woman</td>
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<td>Completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Pastry shop (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Administrative employee (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Marketing and sales manager (large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed primary education</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>South Darfur</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Flower plantation (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
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<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Woman</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Employer/owner (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Employer/owner (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Never attended school/Khalwa</td>
<td>Supervisor (large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female youth</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed primary education</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male youth</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Completed university and above</td>
<td>Employer/owner (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>Completed secondary or vocational training</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Locality</td>
<td>Gender of Respondent</td>
<td>Designation</td>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Size of the organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khartoum</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>Commercial services</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical services</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Director of administration</td>
<td>Government service</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Director of agriculture department</td>
<td>Government service</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Darfur</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Private agriculture</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Al-Gezira</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>HR manager</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Executive director</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection

- **Facilitator training.** A three-day intensive classroom and field training was conducted before the commencement of the fieldwork. Female moderators handled focus groups and KIIs with women respondents while male moderators handled focus groups and KIIs with male respondents. The field team which consisted of 12 experienced field women recruiters responsible for recruiting the FGD respondents were briefed on the screener questionnaire as well.

- **Pilot phase.** The pilot had one focus group and one KII employee. It was conducted in Khartoum with the ‘not working young male’ category to check the validity of the discussion duration, discussion guide, and the number of respondents for FGD which seemed to be appropriate between 6 and 8.

- **Field work.** A screener questionnaire was developed and used to identify suitable respondents for the FGDs. A mix of the door-to-door approach and snowballing was used to recruit the respondents. All the interviews with the study participants were conducted only after obtaining free informed consent from them. They were conducted in the local language (Arabic). The qualitative interviews were digitally recorded on a portable audio recorder only after obtaining informed consent from the study participants. The focus group duration was around 2 hours and the KII lasted for 45 minutes to 1 hour.

- **Transcripts, data entry, and data organization.** All discussions were transcribed verbatim in Arabic from the audio recordings and translated into English.

Data analysis

Based on the research questions, analysis matrices were developed for all interviews (including KII employees, KII employers, and all FGDs), and the data were coded and summarized into various themes using these matrices.
The data are analyzed inductively to ensure no misconceptions are formed before the analysis. When reporting findings from the inductive analysis, the summary or top-level categories were used as main headings in the findings, with specific categories as subheadings. Necessary quotes were provided as well.

**Shortcomings of the qualitative research**

The objective of the qualitative research was to produce in-depth and illustrative information to understand the various dimensions of the problem under analysis (Almeida, Faria, and Queirós 2017). While the qualitative work does not aim for full representativeness nor does it allow for broad generalizations, the FGDs allowed to collect detailed information about individual participants and the group, providing a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the issues being discussed. However, qualitative studies have their own limitations. This study is not an exception. First, it covered only 3 out of Sudan’s 18 states. Second, fieldwork was entirely dependent on the moderator’s and notetakers’ impartiality, particularly given that documenting observations is a challenging process. The World Bank team held discussions with the consulting firm to discuss how to minimize potential bias from the moderator and notetakers. The World Bank team was unable to observe some of the fieldwork because of travel restrictions for World Bank staff due to security concerns. The World Bank team compared transcripts and recorded audio files as part of data quality checks. Some mistakes were identified and later rectified by the consulting firm.
ANNEX 2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Logistic regression model explained

The logistic regression model is estimated to explore the determinants of an individual’s labor force participation and employment while controlling for some individual and household characteristics. The analysis aims to understand and identify the most effective factors for participation in labor force or for being employed. The regression will be separated by gender (male versus female) and by age (youth versus adults).

The logistic regression model can be written as

\[ E(y_i) = \frac{\exp(x_i^T \beta)}{1 + \exp(x_i^T \beta)} \text{ or } g(\pi_i) = \log(\frac{\pi_i}{1 - \pi_i}) \]

\[ \log \left(\frac{\pi_i}{1 - \pi_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Locality}_i + \beta_2 \text{Region}_i + \beta_3 \text{Age}_i + \beta_4 \text{Education Attainment}_i \]

+ \beta_5 \text{Marital Status} + \beta_6 \text{Gender of the head}_i + \beta_7 \log(\text{HH size}) + \beta_8 \text{HH Dependency ratio} + \beta_9 \text{Have children}_i + \beta_{10} \text{Poor}_i + \beta_{11} \text{Phone availability}_i + \beta_{12} \text{Computer availability}_i + \beta_{13} \text{Access to Finance}_i,

where \( y_i \) is a binary variable represents labor force participation and employment.

Table A.1. Determinants of labor market participation among working-age population (odd ratios results from logistic regression model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1.186***</td>
<td>1.420***</td>
<td>1.315***</td>
<td>1.297***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>1.542***</td>
<td>0.652***</td>
<td>1.456**</td>
<td>0.782**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>1.545***</td>
<td>0.762**</td>
<td>1.233</td>
<td>0.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>1.711***</td>
<td>0.819*</td>
<td>1.325**</td>
<td>0.998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kordufan</td>
<td>2.076***</td>
<td>4.545***</td>
<td>3.060***</td>
<td>3.201***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(0.41)</td>
<td>(0.34)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darfur</td>
<td>1.822***</td>
<td>8.274***</td>
<td>3.340***</td>
<td>6.797***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td>(0.37)</td>
<td>(0.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>0.232***</td>
<td>0.487***</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some/completed primary</td>
<td>0.422***</td>
<td>0.730***</td>
<td>0.350***</td>
<td>1.300***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>0.495***</td>
<td>1.137</td>
<td>0.456***</td>
<td>1.639***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary and above</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>4.744***</td>
<td>1.357*</td>
<td>3.326***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.48)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/married before</td>
<td>2.077***</td>
<td>0.609***</td>
<td>0.371***</td>
<td>0.189***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female headed</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.584***</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>2.668***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log household size</td>
<td>0.553***</td>
<td>0.911</td>
<td>0.781**</td>
<td>0.629***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency ratio</td>
<td>1.235***</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have children = 1</td>
<td>1.917***</td>
<td>2.449***</td>
<td>14.81***</td>
<td>28.06***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.31)</td>
<td>(0.32)</td>
<td>(4.99)</td>
<td>(1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.273***</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.344***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone availability</td>
<td>1.505***</td>
<td>0.998</td>
<td>1.280**</td>
<td>1.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer availability</td>
<td>0.818</td>
<td>1.332*</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>1.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to finance</td>
<td>1.028</td>
<td>1.073</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>1.259*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>13,571</td>
<td>14,740</td>
<td>8,598</td>
<td>19,713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** World Bank staff calculations based on NHBS 2009 and NHBPS 2014/15.  
**Note:** *, **, and *** denote statistical significance at the 10, 5, and 1 percent level. Exponentiated coefficients are reported in parentheses.

**Table A.2. Determinants of employment among working-age population** (odd ratios results from logistic regression model)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differential</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>% of total difference</th>
<th>Linearized standard error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P &gt; t</th>
<th>(95% confidence interval)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prediction_1</td>
<td>6.750818</td>
<td>0.010065</td>
<td>670.70</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>6.731089</td>
<td>6.770547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction_2</td>
<td>6.200205</td>
<td>0.01934</td>
<td>320.59</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>6.162296</td>
<td>6.238114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>0.5506126</td>
<td>0.021803</td>
<td>25.25</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.5078774</td>
<td>0.593479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowments</td>
<td>0.0296419</td>
<td>0.009777</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.0104774</td>
<td>0.0488064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coefficients</td>
<td>0.5257046</td>
<td>0.020489</td>
<td>25.66</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.4855451</td>
<td>0.5658641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>−0.0047339</td>
<td>−0.005818</td>
<td>−0.81</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>−0.0161384</td>
<td>0.0066706</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Endowments**

| Education    | 0.0014214   | 0.005497              | 0.26                      | 0.796 | −0.0093525 | 0.0121952 |
| Industry     | 0.0146243   | 0.004038              | 3.62                      | 0.000 | 0.0067096 | 0.022539 |
| Location     | −0.0045575  | 0.002374              | −1.92                     | 0.055 | −0.0092115 | 0.0009665 |
| Age          | 0.0181538   | 0.004134              | 4.39                      | 0.000 | 0.0100516 | 0.026256 |

**Coefficients**

| Education    | −0.1370417  | 0.038552              | −3.55                     | 0.000 | −0.2126074 | −0.061476 |
| Industry     | −0.0498547  | 0.053389              | −0.93                     | 0.35  | −0.1545024 | 0.054793 |
| Location     | 0.0634583   | 0.076606              | 0.83                      | 0.407 | −0.0866975 | 0.2136141 |
| Age          | −0.0373285  | 0.066865              | −0.56                     | 0.577 | −0.1683902 | 0.0937331 |
| Constant     | 0.6864713   | 0.136454              | 5.03                      | 0.000 | 0.4190099 | 0.9539336 |

**Interaction**

| Education    | −0.0005567  | 0.002158              | −0.26                     | 0.796 | −0.004786 | 0.0036727 |
| Industry     | −0.0032839  | 0.003563              | −0.92                     | 0.357 | −0.0102677 | 0.0036999 |
| Location     | 0.0010529   | 0.00136               | 0.77                      | 0.439 | −0.0016134 | 0.0037192 |
| Age          | −0.0019462  | 0.003498              | −0.56                     | 0.578 | −0.0088035 | 0.004911 |


Table A.3. Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition of gender gaps in monthly earnings
ANNEX 3. SUDAN’S PERFORMANCE IN THE 2021 WBL INDEX

The WBL 2021 report explores the legal differences in men’s and women’s access to economic opportunities, measured through indicators across eight dimensions. The overall score is an average of their individual score for each dimension, ranging from 0 to 100 with 100 representing the highest score. Sudan has an overall score of 29.4, and the table below shows the breakdown across dimensions and indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Can a woman apply for a passport in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can a woman travel outside the country in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can a woman travel outside her home in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can a woman choose where to live in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are there criminal penalties or civil remedies for sexual harassment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Does the law mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can women work the same night hours as men?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can women work in jobs deemed dangerous in the same way as men?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are women able to work in the same industries as men?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Is there no legal provision that requires a married woman to obey her husband?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can a woman be ‘head of household’ or ‘head of family’ in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthood</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Is paid leave of at least 14 weeks available to mothers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does the government administer 100% of maternity leave benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is paid leave available to fathers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there paid parental leave?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Can a woman sign a contract in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can a woman register a business in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can a woman open a bank account in the same way as a man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does the law prohibit discrimination in access to credit based on gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Do men and women have equal ownership rights to immovable property?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit assets from their parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do female and male surviving spouses have equal rights to inherit assets?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does the law grant spouses equal administrative authority over assets during marriage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does the law provide for the valuation of nonmonetary contributions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Are the ages at which men and women can retire with full pension benefits equal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are the ages at which men and women can retire with partial pension benefits equal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is the mandatory retirement age for men and women equal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Are periods of absence from work due to childcare accounted for in pension benefits?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>