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## **Weaving the Social Networks of Women Migrants in the Gezira Scheme: Getting Work Opportunities**

(Abstract)

The Gezira Scheme is one of the largest irrigated systems of the world. Dating back to 1926, the Gezira Scheme was established by the British colonial rule in the Sudan. The scheme over the years saw substantial influx of migrants of different African origins, due to internal and external migration. This paper is an excerpt of my book<sup>1</sup> "Weaving the Social Networks of Women Migrants in Sudan". Social networks have not featured in discussion and analysis of the Gezira Scheme, neither officially nor unofficially, and certainly not with attention to gender. This book takes an entirely different approach from the ones that are used by the body of research and publications that exists in the Gezira Scheme. It explores concepts and notions that guide research and perception of social reality. It looks at the social interactions, the diversity of social processes and the functions and functioning of social networks of women migrants of different regions and generations who are involved in the agricultural labour force of the Gezira scheme.

This paper in particular, attempts to discuss the procurement of work opportunities of women migrants. It focuses on the methods and strategies women apply by means of their social networks to acquire information about work opportunities, actually find work opportunities and undertake work negotiations. In particular, it offers an empirical analysis on the ways in which women get hold of information about work opportunities in the Gezira area before migration from their place of origin and also how the process of information transfer operates after the women's migration. It lays special emphasis on the different ways of undertaking women's work negotiations through social networks. The analysis also highlights the work negotiations in the frame of gender relations and the gender order. The importance of these areas of network research is to explore the insights of women's social networks and the role that these networks play in finding work opportunities and in the work negotiations.

A combination of social network theory with an actor-oriented approach, both framed in constructivist terms, guided the analysis. In addition, a discussion of conventional concepts reveals the need to broaden and differentiate given concepts, to add and to develop new ones in order to actually capture the rich texture of gender-differentiated and gendered social realities. The paper argues that women are actors in their societies and acquire agency. They defy superficial assumptions of submission and passive acceptance of social gender attributions. While settling in their new work atmosphere they actively construct social networks to find work opportunities and solve problems arising within the work sphere through finding creative compromises concerning ethnicity-based differences. On the level of theory construction, the analysis points to the limits of conventional social networks theory and in enriching it. It postulates additions and new contributions to the social networks theory and analysis as well as to the actor-oriented perspective.