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Migrant women in the informal sector: The case of Khartoum, Sudan

(Abstract)

Rural-urban or internal migration is the main source of urbanization, which indicates increase in the population of cities in proportion to those in the rural areas. Researchers argued about the causes of migrants movements ,most of them have attributed such causes to economic reasons. Khartoum as the major city of Sudan, being a target for rural- urban migration that was pushed by economic factor to search work since early, as in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Partten, 1996). As the city absorbs most of industries, government departments, commercial institutions, with some basic utilities and infrastructure.

But during the 1980s the natural disaster of drought and famine was the main reason to push people from Kordofan and Darfur regions towards the city. While armed conflicts in South and Darfur areas add new factor for migration, besides the macroeconomic policies that end into withdrawal the state from Rural Development under the economic reform and privatization policies.

Migrant women are used to sell food in the capital market. Researchers (Assal 2004; Abusharaf 2004, Abdala 2008) argue that migrant women who get difficulty to access the market have no choice other than to make local wine, which is strictly forbidden under Shariah law that applies in Khartoum. Such aspect shows how it is important for the migrant women to augment some skills to port , even in the informal sector, to other legal occupations.

The informal economy or sector is a phenomenon dominates the socio-economic life in developing countries. In Sudan such, as other developing countries, a sector extends to cover well-established, organized and licensed enterprises, besides petty hawkers and venders, shoeshine boys, carwash boys and similar jobs as well as self-employment and family business This paper argues that segmentation or dualistic labour market theory captures status of the migrant women in the informal sector or economy in Khartoum.. The traditional interpretation divides labour market into primary sector with high earnings and good characteristics , and into secondary sector with various hazardous characteristics.

In Khartoum informal sector migrant women, as part of the other women in this sector, are allocated to specific crowded occupation that largely related to home economy such as food preparation and selling and domestic house services, where women are crowded in a competed job.

It is noticed that migrant women earnings less ,even in the informal economy, than their Khartoum resident women and they have low educational level in comparison (Pitamber, 1999). Moreover migrant women , as the others, work in unprotected labour market, which has any social security as they lost such a security that was provided to them through the extended family at their home in the rural areas.

As well they have any health care insured permanent earnings and maternity privileges that secured to their women colleagues in the formal sector ,as they can not port the barriers to enter the formal sector and need a time to enhance their skills in the informal sector.