

Women's Empowerment and Development: Rethinking according to Islam

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Abstract--- This paper discuss the main causes of failures in some countries not to achieve the Human Development Standers in relation to women empowerment measures, which presented in the 2014 Human Development Report. The paper argues that such countries will never meet the standards set by the Report because there is a major difference between culture in regard to women work, women employment and women freedom. The paper argues that the indicators adopted by CEDOW Convention is culturally biased, it is based on ethnocentrism in adopting Western cultures as the standard for gender equalities and women freedom. The paper describes how different cultures perceive women roles and the duties and obligation for both men and women. Many culture emphasized the complementarity of the both roles assigned to men and women. By explaining Islamic perspective and understanding of women's empowerment and development, through demonstrating the holistic approach of Islam for human and live with clarifying concepts like equality, justice and gender role in Quran and Sunnah.

Keywords --- Empowerment, human development, Justice, gender role.

I. INTRODUCTION

OPPRESSION of woman seems to be a world phenomenon pursued over her socio-economic position, and sometimes as mere aggression that threatens her physical existence. Historically women were suffering from different kinds of discrimination and abuse; although the level and the magnitude of this mistreatment vary from society to another, depending on cultural differences. The advent of the twenty first century witnessed tremendous women movements for equity, empowerment and gender equality in all aspects of life. Since then, women empowerment trend spread all over the world, taking series of dimensions in both formal and informal sectors, and not only for supporting women but also as an important indicator for human development. In 1979, the movement culminated in the adoption by the U.N. member countries of the famous convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), [1]. CEDAW consists of a preamble and 30 articles, defining what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an

agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field"[2].

By accepting the Convention, states and governments of the world commit themselves to undertake a series of measures developed by UN to end discrimination against women in all forms. Unfortunately the convention affirms that the reproductive rights of women and targeted cultures and traditions as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations which impede women empowerment efforts. Unfortunately by stating so, the standards of measurements adopted by the convention, and thus by UN, ignored the important fact of cultures diversities, a fact trigger the accusation of ethnocentrism of the western countries who dominate UN councils and organizations. In fact and according to UN surveys, several countries failed to achieve those standers set by UN to measuring gender equality and therefore such countries had been classified as low human development countries, or powerless, or uncooperative. All the efforts to impel those countries on achieving development or women empowerment goals will not succeed until we comprehend cultures diversity in our measuring.

For example one of the indicators of gender inequality Index in Human Development Reports is labor force participation rate between female and male. Based on these indicators, UN ranked the countries in the scale of the development and women empowerment, indicating that low scale countries are those unable to achieve much in gender equality and empowerment. Many countries, Islamic or not, didn't accept or agreed on these indicators since they contradict to their cultural values and traditions. Many cultures respect women and honored here by staying at home and forced the man as one of his duty to work and supply women demand, whatever she related with him, his mother or wife or daughter or sister or other relative under his responsibility. In such cultures women don't prefer working

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outside home except if there is a need for that. And in some tribal cultures getting woman out for working is indicators of the inability of man to take care of her, which is considered shameful. For that reasons one always find a gap between the genders labor force participation in this societies with no meaning of discrimination or oppressing for women.

Another example is the notion of nonpayment women works at home or in farming which classified as oppression against women, in different cultures like Islam. Connecting the work to be done with the material rewards is a basic philosophy. The concept of reward has two meanings in Islam, one is instant and after work being done, and payment either incorporeal or tangible or both. The other meaning of reward is associated with faith and postponed to the eternity live after death. Muslims always look for rewards from Allah after their death, no matter whether the other persons reward them or not. According to such beliefs, woman can do work in her home or helping her husband or family in farming in rural community or sacrifices with her property for her family without asking for immediate tangible payments, so we can find a lot of nonpayment woman work with no necessity to be kind of discrimination or oppressed towards her. With noticing that Islam didn't force women to do works at home such as cooking or cleaning or washing, obligate the man to hire a maid to help her if he can afford financially that, otherwise he has to help her in all home work. That's what *prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him*, gave us practical example for he used to help his wives at their homes. He used to cook and wash his clothes, kneading the flour, sewing his clothes and patching his shoes. Therefore woman working at home is not a kind of humiliating her as some thought and consider it as an oppress factor. Although some indicators for women empowerment insist for payment her domestic works.

II. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN ISLAM

Islam deals with women empowerment as an essential part of human developing and social development, not only for women but also for communities. Therefore Islam started with explaining the meaning of empowerment by clarifying power relations in two meanings, moral and tangible, and also serve basis for constructing power depending on well-known rights and duties for each individual and groups and community. So woman can discover her powers and develop her ability by recognizing her rights and demands, not as a general knowledge, but as worship. Establishing a holistic knowledge about inside and outside gaining power is the first step in empowerment. Moreover the first command in Islam descends with the first *Ayah* in Quran was: (اقرأ) [3] the command to read, three times to confirm the importance of reading – education-in human live and disseminating knowledge to humanity. With this fact accusing Islam as being forbidding women from educating, is not true.

Preserving each women and men their rights and duties is the second step for development in Islam. Although empowering started with individual awareness, Islam didn't leave it as individual responsibility, it progresses by steps beginning with individual and ending with community and government. *Prophet Mohamed*, May Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: "All of you are guardians and each of you is responsible for his subjects. The ruler is a guardian of his subjects, the man is guardian of his family, the woman is a guardian and she is responsible for her husband's house and his offspring, and so all of you are guardians and are responsible for your subjects" This *Hadith* ordains every individual in society, whether he is a ruler or ruled citizen to perform his duties within his own sphere. Not only that, every person has been made responsible to reform the state of affairs in his control and establish equity and justice because he will be held accountable for any negligence on his part in his respect [4].

Islam concept of women empowerment related to self empowering and social position and gender role, which is not only women responsibility, but it's also a society and governmental responsibility. It's not enough to establish awareness inside woman about her ability and power without supporting her through the society and providing her with facilities to empowerment.

Islam made revolution in women rights by adherence the right of live for women and prohibited her paring alive as Quran said: (وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ * بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ) [5] (And when the baby girl who is buried alive will be questioned about ; for what offence was she killed?) [6]

Then Islam honored the woman as a greatest creatures, and sublimating her position some times more than the man (with parent charity the priority for the mother three times than the father, and if you raise two or three girls you will guarantee heaven as a reward, this what prophet said to cheer fathers to love girls and not discriminate them by gender). More over Islam ordered men to well treat and respect women, as an example the *prophet MOHAMED*, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: "The believers who show the most perfect faith are those who have the best behavior, and the best of you are those who are the best of their wives" [5] So he joined the perfect faith with good behavior towards wife, and that leads to heighten women position and respecting her .

The Islam empowerment perspective depend on observing the different functions and roles in live between woman and men due to the difference in biology, morphology, physiology and psychology formation. Islam clearly Admit the difference between woman and men, and declare that in Quran when said: (...وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَى...) [7]. But that doesn't means preference man to woman. No, it means understand the

differences between genders as integration and complementary in roles and functions.

Therefore the concept of equality has a wider meaning, it means that each woman and man should be treated the same way in their rights and duties, without any discrimination by race or state or faith...etc. With recognition that the differences between genders is a kind of blessing, to complete each other roles and to keep life continuing.

Islam sanctifies family life, and gives the family high importance not only in empowerment and developed the persons but also in the developing and stability of the society. Most of the Quran and *Sunah* (prophet saying or acting) explaining the relation between wife and husband, in Pasific equality and justice, with intimacy dealing of mercy and compassion, Islam parents and children, sisters and brothers, relatives by mentioning how to deal this relations and how to keep it and strength it, with clarifying the roles of every partner in a very specific details, and also the rights of each partner which include emotional and material rights.

As we realize in reality one of the major problems in most societies is the collapsing of family structures and functions, either by abstain from establishing it, as we see the increase in spinsters and unmarried percentage. Or the disintegration in relation inside married, increasing of divorce rate, domestic violent, infidelity, dissociations...etc. As result even some countries achieve high level in development and empowerment, they facing increase in crimes, violence, homosexuality, suicide, mental illnesses. There for Islam dedicates the gender roles to take care of family, with equal rights and duty to perform its functions that lead to self security and stability.

Islam also to achieve that gives both men and women the freedom to act and the freedom to choose with one condition "no harm". So if the freedom causes disorder or leads to chaos it will be unacceptable. For that reason Islam refused or unaccepted topics like freedom in sexual live out married, portion, numerous husbands at the same time, homosexual, because it leads to harm even for the person himself or for others and society. As result of that Islamic countries decline the issues that legalize this kind of values or rights in women empowerment or human development, Such as the last decline from African groups to the commission on population and development (CPD) draft in April 2015, when Ambassador Usman Sarki mentioned this disagreement in his speech:" ...to a text that was replete with controversial issues that have in past, not only proved difficult to deal with but also extremely divisive in nature"[8].

Women empowerment concept in Islam assess in justice as a Main value and standard. Hence it's an Umbrella under which all the rights and duties for women and men towards themselves or towards others. Justice allows considering the

different circumstances of woman in job when she is pregnant or having baby or in period or she is week or coming old, but equality force her no matter what she is different from man to do the same job to have the same rights or salary. Empowerment forces her to become similar copy from men in the name of equality.

Women emotional nature consolidates her mother instinct, the desire of having children and raises them by serve them and taking care of them is one of main prop of her psychological constancy. Islamic roles apprehend this kind of needs and appreciate it with encouraging. But some global concepts of women empowerment consider these efforts as disempowering. This leads the woman in some community disputing between her natures, needs and between empowerment standers, and the result was not good according to the family life or psychological health or self-satisfactions or development levels.

III. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN SUDAN

Women empowerment in Sudan contained most of Islamic pivot as a culture system. It started with woman education as an important issue in building her awareness about her rights and roles in live. The beginning of girls' education was provided by *Alkhalwa*, where the Quranic studies and basic science thought without any disunites like what happened latter in the regular education at colonialism command, that give the opportunity to the early generations to understand the concepts of power and empowering as part of rights and development systems.

Woman elementary schools started by *Shaykh Babiker Badri* efforts in *Rofuaa* by establishing first elementary school for girls in 1903, then the government had provided five elementary schools for girls by 1920. By 1960, 245 elementary schools for girls had been established, but only 25 junior secondary or general schools and 2 upper- secondary schools. [9]

At independence in 1956 there were 1778 primary schools (enrollment 208688), 108 intermediate schools (enrollment 14632) and 49 government secondary (enrollment 5423). Each level of education consists of four years. Higher education was limited to the University of Khartoum, expect for less than 1000 students [10].

Education in Sudan was free and compulsory for children aged 6-13 years. Primary educations consist of eight years since 1990, followed by three years of secondary education. In 2007 total primary school enrolment across Sudan has reached 7.9 million [11].

Unfortunately Sudan had been faced ages of civil war since independent till now, which ended lately with south Sudan separation. This continuously war destroyed under construction and facilities in many part of Sudan especially in

west, south and east Sudan. As a normal effect of war it's impeding the development and destroying its abilities. Due to Sudan is number 166 in HDI standard of UN 2013.[12]

One the other hand the negative indirect effect of war is the shortage in objective studies and surveys, and the dearth of data base. Therefore most of the statistics the paper used is either old or contradictories.

As far as education is concerned, World Bank estimates for the year 2000 set the literacy rate in Sudan at almost 58% with females representing almost 46% of the literates. However, as an indication that the government of Sudan offers both sexes educational support, women's enrolment in formal education is increasing yearly. The percentage of female intake at level of basic schooling increase by 22% during the period 1990-1998, whereas the percentage of males increased by 8% only. The percentage increase in female enrolment in secondary schools during the period 1993- 1998 was equal to 75%, whereas the percentage of male students increased by 61%. The percentage of female students enrolled in universities increased to 62% in the year 1999 compared to 47.2% in 1995.[13]

Data from the Ministry of higher education in Sudan showed substantial increases in the percentage of female students enrolled in universities in Sudan from 12.2% in 1972-1073 to 34.7% in 1982-83 to 43.8% in 1992-93 to 53.6% in 2002-03 (figure 1 below).

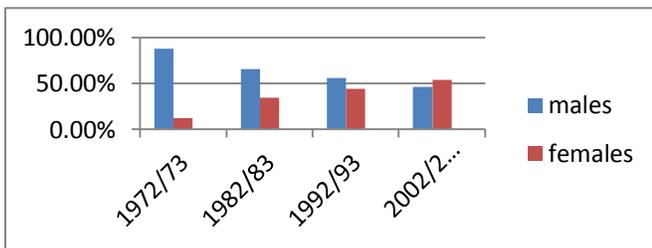


Fig. 1 Students enrollment at Universities in Sudan 1972/73 – 2002/03

Source: Elmulathum & Adam.

According to Ministry of The Cabinet, Central Bureau of statistics population in Sudan since 2008 to 2012 between female & male in (figure 2 below).

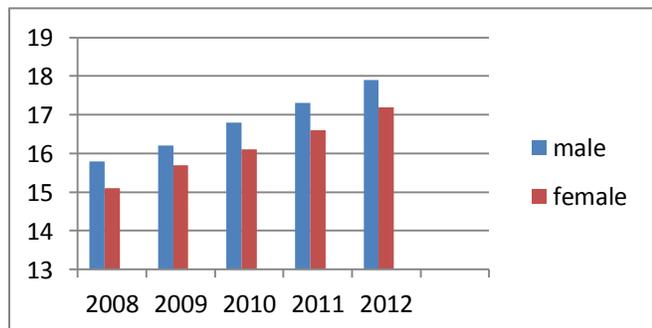


Fig. 2 Sudan population Estimates (in millions) 2008-2012.

Source: Central Bureau of statistics.

Presently women empowerment in Sudan:

- Female in population 48.7% compared with male 51.3%.
- Population Growth Rate 2.6%.
- The whole area of Sudan is 2.5 million k.m2.
- A woman who takes primary care through pregnancy is 71%.
- Life Expectancy at Birth is 57.1 years.
- Maternal Mortality Rate: 215.6 per 100000 Births (2010).
- Infant Mortality Rate: 32.9 per 1000 Live Birth (2010).
- Average household size: 6 (Persons).

Sudanese women have a long history of sharing responsibilities with men in all aspects of live, and sometimes instead of him. Especially in taking care of family and hold its responsibility instead of man under the war circumstances. For example the majority of displaced family households are headed by women because Men are absent in the fight or dead in it. Many of the women are widows trying to sustain their families. For all that reasons women play very important roles in Sudan and had indispensable importance.

In comparison with women in many other African and Middle Eastern countries, however Sudanese women have become relatively well-represented in public life. Since the 1920s Sudanese women have been part of the modern labour market, with large numbers entering nursing and secretarial work [14]. According to shami, at least 87% of Sudan's female labour force was concentrated in agriculture. Of these 78%-90% were involved in the traditional subsistence sector, whereas only 10% are involved in the modern sector.[15]

The total labour force of female is 26.5% this is up from 7 % of the work force in 1960[16]. That percentage may look very low comparison with developed countries, but if we realize according to culture and custom system that one of the major duty of man in Sudanese community, is to work and gain money for his family with granting all the needs of family members, we will definitely convince that this percentage of women participation in labour force is high. Since 1969 military government of *Ja'afar Nimeiri* agreed to put into practice the demands for equal pay and eight weeks' maternity leave, pensions and maintenance for a divorced Muslim equivalent to 50%of her husband's income.

Sudanese women joined the political activity earlier with nationalist independence movement in the mid-1940s. Pioneering women became actively involved in the trades unions and in their own new organizations, the first of which were the league of Sudanese Women and the Society for Promoting the State of Women. In 1952 the Sudanese Women's Union was founded and a year later it succeeded in gaining the right for women to vote. It began publishing the magazine "*sawt al-marra*"(the women voice) in 1955,

raising awareness about women rights. The women movement leads by the SWU in close collaboration with the progressive political parties and trades unions, continued to tackle major concerns regarding the law and women's rights.

One of the founders of the Sudan Women's Union, *Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim*, went on to be elected the first female Member of Parliament in Sudan in May 1965. Today the percentage of Sudanese women in parliament is 19.7%. Women are in federal ministries 6.8%. Women as minister 8.6%. Women in high position in civil services 41%. Women in Administration position 22.3% [17].

Finally there is a global convention to achieve human development and women empowerment goals, Most of countries attempt indeed to reach high level in UN measures, but some of these measures needed to realize the diversity in culture and norms without ignoring the importance of ethic and social system in mobilizing development process.

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