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**The Gender Dimension of
Poverty in North Africa**

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THE GENDER DIMENSION OF POVERTY IN NORTH AFRICA

I. Introduction:

Are women poorer than men?

Are women-headed households poorer than households headed by men?

Are women, and women-headed households, relatively more vulnerable to impoverishment in adversity?

1. To adequately answer these questions, two requirements must be met: conceptual clarity and information sufficient to compare men and women, as individuals, and women-headed households to households headed by men, on valid measures of social welfare, and change therein. However, little rigorous assessment of the relative position of men and women, or households headed by men and women, on measures of welfare has been carried out in less developed countries. Evidence is mostly limited to micro-studies of limited relevance whose results vary considerably.

2. The basic contention of this paper is that working towards gender equitable societies would have a better chance of success if anchored in as complete an understanding of gender realities as is possible. This paper aims to provide evidence on aspects of the complex structure of gender differentiation in human capability and social welfare in North Africa. Since the rural/urban divide represents a salient feature of the landscape of poverty, it is used, in addition to gender, as a major factor of classification in the analysis.

3. Use is made of whatever information available in order to derive well-founded conclusions on the gender dimension of poverty. As shall be mentioned later on, data limitations preclude a comprehensive analysis. A relatively detailed treatment is possible for Egypt and Sudan due to easier access to recent sources of data. The task of the paper is made difficult by the heterogeneity of the countries constituting the North Africa region. On the level of economic performance, the region combines two "successful" reformers, by World Bank standards- one of them (Tunisia) at an intermediate level of human development according to UNDP- with two of the "least developed" countries in the world.

4. In addition, the countries of the region are undergoing, to varying degrees, a structural adjustment process generally guided by the international financial institutions. Structural adjustment programmes have brought about changes in economic structure with far-reaching implications for poverty. This accentuates the importance of considering *change* in the gender dimension of poverty in response to structural adjustment programmes (which necessitates the availability of comparable up-to-date information).

5. More importantly, the countries of the region vary tremendously on the gender dimension of social life, from an *avante garde*, western-styled, situation like in Tunisia, to a basically tribal set-up with strong matriarchal influences, such as in Mauritania, and all the shades in between. This variety renders a unified treatment extremely difficult.

6. In the rest of the Introduction distinction is drawn between two major approaches to poverty, a brief conceptual framework for gender differentiation is sketched and data problems are discussed. Then, based on available literature, a characterisation of poverty using the income-expenditure approach is given. The succeeding section uses international data sources to describe aspects of poverty, seen as human capability failure, specific for gender whenever possible. Next, three aspects of the gender dimension of human capability are investigated through analysis of a variety of data sources in Egypt and Sudan. In a penultimate section, a number of recent surveys are used to examine differences between women-headed households and those headed by men on a number of measures of social welfare. The paper concludes by a general appraisal of the gender dimension of poverty in North Africa.

Meaning and Measurement of Poverty

7. Poverty, is generally defined in terms of a "low" level of human welfare. From the vantage point of eradication, however, it is important to understand the aetiology of poverty, and poverty is then better defined as a failure of human capability. In this perspective, poverty is almost synonymous with powerlessness. Powerlessness does manifest itself in a low level of satisfaction of basic needs. But, more importantly, in a dynamic perspective, poverty results from lack of access to, and control over, capital: physical, human, and social. This characterisation of poverty helps reveal processes of poverty generation and reproduction and is, hence, crucial to elucidating the gender dimension of poverty dynamics.

8. Unfortunately, however, most treatments of poverty, and to a larger extent, measurement of poverty, overemphasise the economic welfare criterion anchored in the "poverty line" approach. In addition to the methodological shortcomings of the poverty-line family of measures, this approach does not provide a full characterisation of poverty. In addition, the poverty line approach does not even come close to the question of dynamics of poverty generation. Hence, it provides no clue to the eradication question. Instead, it tends to end with concern for alleviation through income transfers.

9. More specific to our purpose here, this family of measures tends to be *gender-blind*. Since the unit of analysis, and data collection and processing, for the basic income and expenditure information is normally the household, without differentiation between members. In one case, however, the gender dimension of poverty can be investigated through poverty-line measures. This is when households are classified by the gender of the household head which enables the comparison between women-headed households and those headed by men (refer to the conceptual framework below for problems with overemphasising this comparison). The classification on household headship is not, however, routinely carried out.

10. In as much as made possible by data availability, this paper will go beyond poverty-line measurement in the investigation of the gender dimension of poverty.

A Brief Conceptual Framework for Gender Differentiation:

12. Human beings are born *physiologically* differentiated by *sex*. All are *socialised* by social institutions. The most important socialisation process is *education*, in the widest sense. *Gender behaviour* has generally been considered as *acquired* through socialisation, which established the *sex/gender* (or body/mind) system in (western) feminist theory. However, recent discoveries about the brain structure reveal that the "human brain is not sex, or gender, neutral" and "since differences in the brains of men and women condition learning ... there is an undeniable connection between biological reality and gender identity". This understanding is proposed as a firmer foundation for sexual equality (Nadeau, 1996). Nevertheless, the *sex/gender* dichotomy remains a salient feature of life in all human societies.

13. To start with, boys and girls are treated differently in the socialisation process. In particular, this determines the *extent of access* to education and the *type* of education acquired. The gender differentials in access and type of education determine the gendered knowledge and skill endowment with which the individual negotiates all spheres of social life.

14. Though women are supposed to have a physiologically superior build to start with, girls and boys, as well as women and men, might be accorded different levels, and quality, of *nutrition* and *health care* which condition their respective physical well being.

15. *Participation in social and economic activities* is a main arena for gender differentiation. In addition to the level, and type, of human capital they possess, women's access to public social and economic activities could be restricted. For example women tend to be concentrated in unpaid economic activity within the household. In addition, women are further held responsible for human activities related to *house-keeping* and *care for children*. When involved in economic activity as well, particularly outside the household domain, this "dual responsibility" imposes a heavy burden on women which conditions their *productivity* and the level of *reward* to their different types of *labour*. Finally differential access to social activities determines different levels of *social position* and *empowerment* for women and men, which influence their roles within the household and in the society at large.

16. All these processes take place in a gender-differentiated *cultural superstructure* that conditions their outcomes. This is an especially critical factor in North Africa where Islam generally constitutes a mainstay of culture and resurgent Islamic forces condition the societal landscape. The end result of this complex system of gender differentiation can be strong contrasts between women and men in *human capability* and *social welfare*. In short, if the main cause of poverty in general is structured inequality, then the generation of poverty is clearly *gendered*.

17. If the human capabilities of men and women are that differentiated it stands to reason that their responses to social and economic *adversity* be different. This is an aspect of human *vulnerability* in which gender can be a major determinant of the final outcome of adversity. Natural disasters, social strife and civil wars clearly exact a gender-specific toll on those affected by it. But major economic changes that impact the standard of living in a society can also have gender-specific outcomes. Structural adjustment programmes fall under this category.

18. On another plane, if, in addition to a gender-differentiated human capability, women assume the, socially and economically, demanding task of heading the household, the social welfare of all members of the household, not only the head, might suffer, and be more vulnerable to deterioration in adversity. This is compounded by the fact that women heading households, not the norm in most contemporary societies, usually results from some social adversity such as abandonment, divorce or death of the husband. This path to

women assuming household headship might raise particular issues of vulnerability. Hence, it is important in discussions of the gender dimension in poverty, on the level of household headship, to distinguish between *de facto* and *de jure* women headship of households.

19. However, there is currently a growing realisation that the blanket generalisations of the *feminisation of poverty* thesis (women-headed households are poorer than men-headed households, women-headed households are the poorest of the poor, ...) are not correct and might indeed be harmful. For one, they tend to gloss over the fact that women could be relatively worse off in *men*-headed households. In addition, women assuming household headship does not release them from constraints imposed by men in other social structures. Women-headed households, in fact, can be found on widely varying levels of social welfare. Women-headed households tend to have a smaller size and might have a lighter dependency burden especially if there are multiple income earners within the household. Some aspects of social welfare of members of the household, as well as gender differentials *within* the household, might in fact be improved by women assuming the role of household head. Women heads are estimated to devote a larger proportion of income than men heads to household needs. They are also expected to be more gender sensitive in the treatment of household members especially with respect to the allocation of resources (for a recent review, see: Chant, 1997).

Data Limitations

20. A through treatment of the gender dimension of poverty in North Africa needs to address all the issues raised by the definition of poverty, and the conceptual framework, given above in the context of the, very heterogeneous, group of North African countries. This is an enormous task that cannot be tackled in a paper of the present size. Moreover, the information requirements of such a task far exceed the outer limit of present availability. Indeed, a full treatment of poverty, let alone the gender dimension of poverty, in North Africa is severely constrained by the scarcity of high quality, recent and comparable data, especially outside the borders of the countries concerned.

21. Although subject to many limitations, households surveys are the main source of information on the standard of living. Recent surveys of this type are generally in short supply in less developed countries. But even when available, the gender dimension, even on the level of the household head, is not a fundamental concern in the design, data collection and processing of these surveys.

22. In particular, these surveys normally do not provide gender-specific intra-household information to enable a full consideration of the gender differential in household strategies and distribution of welfare *within* the household. The dream of the analysts of gender differentials in poverty is to collect, process and make available, intra-household gender-specific data on income and allocation of resources. This ideal is, however, far from realisation. The end result is that we do not have a solid information base on the dynamic aspects of the gender dimension of household "survival strategies". Fortunately, however, household-based surveys reflect the *outcomes* of household decisions in areas that are crucial to the gender dimension of poverty such as education, employment and earnings.

23. It must be stressed though that the participation of women in economic activity is poorly measured in standard statistical operations. It is normally restricted to "formal" economic activities. The gravity of this bias increases in economies in which subsistence agriculture and nomadic styles of life are prevalent. In North Africa, Sudan and Mauritania are especially important cases in this respect.

24. Though generally keen on gender disaggregation, international data sources are not greatly helpful in the investigation of the gender dimension of poverty. These sources are rather scant on recent data for less developed countries and sometimes tend to artificially homogenise basically incomparable information. At times they "create" data that do not exist in the first place by resorting to questionable estimation procedures. However, use of international sources for across-the-region comparisons is unavoidable.

25. With respect to data availability, the seven countries of the region fall in three categories: very little is known on two (Libya and Mauritania), two (Egypt and Sudan) can be relatively well-documented through privileged access to some of the most recent data sources, while the other three (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) occupy an intermediate position because of rather limited access to data sources. Hence, relatively detailed treatment of aspects of the gender dimension of poverty will be essentially limited to Egypt and Sudan, though not in a fully comparable manner if only for differences in data availability and quality. The possibility of some in-depth analyses for Egypt and Sudan is interesting because of important differences in the articulation of gender in society.

26. Availability of data does not mean, however, that data problems are over. The sources of data in the region are subject to serious errors of coverage and content. A most obvious, but straightforward, coverage deficiency in the case of Sudan is the exclusion of the south of the country from all recent data

sources. Other errors are much more difficult to unearth and these are the dangerous ones.

II. Monetary-Based Measurement of Poverty in the 1990s:

27. In *Egypt*, the latest estimate of the extent of poverty (Cardiff, 1997) asserts that the proportion of the poor has more than doubled between 1990/91 to 1995/96 (from about 21%² to 44%). The same source gives a more complete characterisation of poverty in Egypt, using the standard FGT family of measures, based on two Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIESs) in 1990/91 and 1995/96. See Table (1).

Table (1)
Extent, depth and, severity of poverty (%) by rural/urban residence,
Egypt, 1990/91 and 1995/96

Locale	P0		P1		P2	
	1990/91	1995/96	1990/91	1995/96	1990/91	1995/96
Rural	32	55	6	9	1.8	2.3
Urban	13	31	2	4	0.5	1.0
Egypt	21	44	3	7	1.0	1.7

Poverty, on the headcount criterion, is thus estimated to have risen considerably in both rural and urban areas of the country. In the mid 1990s, however, a majority of households in the countryside is estimated to have become poor. But the *relative* rise in poverty is much larger in the cities.

28. Though measures of depth and severity of poverty are estimated to have increased in the 1990s, poverty in Egypt is clearly both rather shallow and light, especially in urban areas of the country. However, the gravity of recent changes in poverty in Egypt goes beyond the standard measures of incidence, severity and depth. Compared to other, more encompassing, standard of living criteria, poverty-line calculations underestimate the extent of poverty seen as human capability failure. For example, a crude poverty yardstick that is used in international comparisons sets a minimum income of one US Dollar per individual per day. If we apply this criterion to the distribution of per capita household expenditure derived from the 1990/91 HIES it turns out that about 80% of the population (compared to the 21% given above) should be considered poor. Indeed, a majority of the population lives on less than *half* this poverty cut-off point.

² This level is considerably lower than most other estimates for the same period.

29. In *current* prices, average *household* income and expenditures seem to have risen by around 40% in urban areas and 20% in rural areas. However, accounting for inflation³, it turns out that *real* income has declined, on average, by 14% in the cities and approximately 20% in the countryside. Real household expenditures, on the other hand, declined substantially, by 20% in urban areas and almost 25% in rural areas. The comparison is not fully accurate, however, for household size varies over time (average household size seems to have declined by about one person on average between the two HIES; too large a decline for five years!). On per capita basis, the picture that emerges is still disturbing. Real per capita expenditure declined by 3% in urban areas and close to 10% in rural areas. While income per capita rose in the cities by 3%, it fell in the countryside by about a quarter.

30. More serious still is the fact that average income *per income earner in the household* deteriorated very fast especially in rural areas (by 19% in the cities and 32% in the countryside). These figures simply mean that a larger number of household members has to earn an income, *at a lower rate per person*, in order to maintain the level of real income of the early 1990s; an attempt that has, on average, failed, especially in rural areas! The 1995/96 HIES also provides data on household expenditures on different items. We here take a brief look at the most critical expenditure item: food. Real per capita expenditure on food is estimated to have declined by 13% in rural areas and 8% in the cities. This deterioration is all the more telling in light of the increasing monetisation of consumption in the country, particularly in rural areas, and the reduction in subsidies to food commodities. Taking these factors into account leads to the inevitable conclusion that the *quantities* of food stuffs consumed per person must have decreased considerably in the last few years, indeed at rates higher than indicated by the expenditure figures. This is a most serious sign of deterioration of the standard of living in the country in a short period of about five years only.

31. Related to this decline in expenditure on food is a most serious condition of malnutrition among poor children. Casual observation of anthropometric measurements of Egyptian children reveals the prevalence of *stunting* (low height for age) and *wasting* (low weight for height) as well as other signs of malnutrition. The first, ascribed to *chronic* inadequate food intake, is more serious because it is hardly reversible. Its deleterious effects produce physical impairment, preclude development of mental faculties and curtail learning abilities. Unfortunately, these evils stay with the thus injured throughout life. Such manifestations of poverty abort the *potential* for development in a country that is rich only in human resources.

³ The CPI in Egypt accumulates, over the period 1990/91 to 1995/96, to 170% in rural areas and 160% in urban areas, and this represents a lower bound in our judgement.

32. Two comparable Demographic and Health surveys in the 1990s provide information on the nutritional status of children younger than five years of age. In 1992, a full quarter of Egyptian children were estimated to be stunted. Three years later the proportion of stunted children rose to 30%. But this horrible fate afflicts some children worse than others. In rural Upper Egypt for example 40% of children were estimated to be stunted in 1996. Among the *poor* in Upper Egypt the *majority* of children could be stunted.

33. Thus, indicators derived from the HIESs in the 1990s document a *fast deterioration in the standard of living since the official structural adjustment programme started in the early 1990s. "Reform" has considerably impoverished the people and the countryside paid a heavier price.* This evidence commands much more credibility than that derived from macroeconomic indicators. In other words, the significant rise in per capita gross output in recent years touted by the government has not been reflected in an improvement in the lot of the people. To the contrary, the masses appear to have suffered a significant deterioration in their standard of living, reaching the critical area of food intake to the extent of severely undermining the productive potential of future generations of Egyptians. The only explanation is that the share of the vast majority of Egyptians of the national income has fell to the benefit of stupendous enrichment of the few.

34. It is important to point out that measures of income distribution from the HIESs do not reflect this deterioration, due to the shortcoming of truncation of the upper tail of the distribution of income or expenditures common to such surveys especially in less developed countries. Actually, according to the HIESs, the distribution of expenditures appears to have improved slightly since the beginning of the 1990s. The correct interpretation in our opinion is that the impoverishment of the vast majority results in homogenising *their* level of income and expenditure. With the exclusion of the rich from survey data, disparity among those included in the surveys, i.e. the non-rich, would tend to decline. In other words, the distribution of welfare is getting more equitable among the non-rich. Inclusion of the rich in the analysis, would significantly alter this picture.

35. Using monetary measures, poverty is estimated to have been rising in north *Sudan* and to have topped 80%, on the head count criterion, in the 1990s. This measurement might be considered "nominal". Effective social solidarity mechanisms, especially between the Sudanese abroad and their kinfolk at home, that permeate the Sudanese society, in addition to other "coping mechanisms", seem to have helped disguise poverty in the country to a considerable extent.

36. Further, there is good reason to believe that the measurement of the extent of poverty suffers shortcomings especially with respect to income and, probably to a lesser extent, expenditures. The last full-fledged income and expenditures survey was carried out in Sudan in the late 1970s. Since then, all measurement of income and expenditure has been based on a one-round survey and questionnaire items used to collect data have been rather skimpy. Even the appropriate food basket to be used in the calculation of the poverty line has been controversial.

37. A 1992 survey sponsored by UNICEF and the Social Solidarity Fund resulted in estimates of the headcount index of poverty defined on household *expenditures* of 83% in urban areas and 71% in rural areas of the north of Sudan. Shifting the basis of the poverty measure to *income* changes the headcount indices to 87% and 86% respectively. The difference between the two sets of indices was taken by the author as an indication of the extent of "coping practices", clearly more significant in rural areas (Nour).

38. Using the same food basket, though considered problematic, poverty parameters for 1990 and 1996 were estimated from two comparable Migration and Manpower surveys (Ministry of Manpower, 1997). The results are given in Table (2). Poverty is estimated to have widened, deepened and increased in severity, considerably in the 1990s in rural areas. On all three measures, however, poverty in urban areas is estimated to have ameliorated slightly (a conclusion the authors are not happy with- they point out that use of a different food basket would result in increasing poverty in urban areas as well).

Table (2)
Extent, depth and, severity of poverty (%) by rural/urban residence,
North Sudan, 1990 and 1996

Locale	1990			1996		
	P0	P1	P2	P0	P1	P2
Rural	65	34	24	94	72	60
Urban	88	61	47	85	58	44

Source: Ministry of Manpower (1997)

At any rate, compared to Egypt for example, poverty is much more prevalent in north Sudan, indeed massive to an extent that almost defies specific policy options. More significantly, the depth and severity of poverty have reached enormous proportions.

39. A recent work (Fergany, 1997b) constructed a *relative poverty map* for the north of Sudan on the basis of indicators of *non-monetary* indicators of standard of living derived from the 1993 population census on the level of Town and Rural Councils. The index is defined as the first principal component of the indicators, normalised to a minimum of zero (the poorest) and a maximum of one (the richest). A four-category classification of the extent of poverty was devised by dividing the range of the poverty index into *equal* subintervals labelled: *ultra poor*, *poor*, *non poor*, and *rich*, respectively.

40. The *distribution* of the constructed *index* is strongly skewed to the right. The majority of councils are concentrated at the lower values of the index. In the north of Sudan, almost three quarters of the population are estimated to be *poor*, more than 30% are considered *ultra poor*. Less than 5% are estimated to be *rich*. Poverty, particularly extreme poverty, is much more prevalent in rural areas in the north of Sudan.

41. Poverty in *Tunisia* is relatively well studied but estimates of the incidence of poverty, using different poverty lines, vary widely. Six poverty lines are reported for 1985 and 1990 (Hamza & Chaabouni, 1995). The first is ascribed to the national statistical organisation (INS), two to the World Bank—one denoted Low and the other High, one to the ILO, another to the Tunisian national institute for nutrition (INNTA) and the last is attributed to the Tunisian workers union (UGTT). The differences are huge: the cut-off point of the UGTT is four times as large as the INS's at both time points. The INNTA poverty line is about 270% of the INS's (since all poverty lines are based on a minimum food intake criterion, it seems reasonable to place more faith in the INNTA's estimate).

42. In consequence, the resulting poverty rates vary considerably. Hence, both level and trend in the extent of poverty are contested. In 1990, the level of poverty, on the head count criterion, varies from less than 7%, according to the INS, to more than one fifth of the population, on word of the ILO. With respect to the trend, the INS would have us believe that the incidence of poverty has not changed significantly in the second half of the 1980s. The World Bank low estimates indicate that poverty declined by about one third, the ILO estimate tells us that poverty declined by less than one tenth.

43. Based on the Low poverty line of the World Bank, measures of the extent, depth, and severity of poverty in 1990 come to 7.4%, 1.74% and 0.63% respectively (World Bank, 1995, 14). As in the case of Egypt, poverty is estimated to be both shallow and light.

It is clear that poverty has declined in the second half of the 1980s in Tunisia. Improving social indicators on one hand, and safeguarding "social expenditures" in real terms per capita (Ben Amor, 1995), on the other hand, vouch for that. However, the World Bank estimates (especially the lower one), not to mention those of the INS, seem to underestimate the extent of poverty, and hence overestimate the extent of reduction, particularly in rural areas.

44. It is well documented, in addition, that real wages fell in Tunisia since the mid 1980s. This is especially important for the gender dimension of poverty since one of the factors that are glorified for an improving economy is a wider participation of women in export industries such as textiles and garments. Indeed this development is considered, in itself, a sign of economic progress. From the vantage point of overall social welfare, or poverty as capability failure, a larger number of women working for considerably lower real wages, even though it reduces income poverty, cannot be a cause for celebration. Women clearly paid the price for this instance of "economic improvement".

45. In *Morocco*, according to World Bank sources, which tend to underestimate the extent of poverty, the incidence of poverty is estimated to have declined from around 30% in 1985 to approximately 15% in 1991 (ILO, 1996). However, Morocco's "success" in reducing poverty is even murkier than that of Tunisia. This "improvement" was *not* matched by a corresponding success in improving social indicators. Some social indicators, for example girl's access to basic education, have actually worsened, especially in rural areas, in the second half of the 1980s. This is another case in which a deterioration in social welfare is clearly born by women.

46. It is worth noting that in the two countries of North Africa that are acclaimed internationally as success stories in poverty alleviation, by monetary criteria, women paid the price in the form of curtailment of two essential dimensions of human capability: education and earnings.

47. No recent estimates of the extent of poverty exist in *Algeria*. But the previously rising trend in social indicators seems to have slowed in the late 1980s and even reversed in the early 1990s. Evidently, the raging civil strife of the last few years has wreaked havoc on human welfare in the country. In *Mauritania*, a majority of the population around 1990 is estimated to have lived in poverty (UNDP, 1997b).

48. To summarise, the evidence is inadequate, but income-expenditure poverty is clearly extensive, especially in rural areas, and generally rising, in North Africa. However, available information on the poverty-line type of

measurement are almost totally silent on the gender dimension of poverty. Indirectly, though, we might expect, based on our conceptual framework, that under conditions of widening poverty women would suffer relatively larger losses in social welfare. For an assessment of the gender dimension of poverty in North Africa, we start by a look at some aspects of human capability specific for gender, whenever possible.

III. Aspects of Human Capability:

49. The 1997 Human Development Report (UNDP, 1997) constructs a Human Poverty Index (HPI). The HPI is a composite index of three essential elements of human welfare: longevity (measured by the proportion of people expected to die before age 40), knowledge (measured by adult literacy) and enjoying a healthy life (measured by access to health services and to safe water, and the proportion of malnourished children under five years of age). The choice of indicators is not ideal and was probably influenced by data availability. While the Human Development Index (HDI) is calculated for 175 countries, it was possible to compute the HPI for 78 countries only. For some of these, the basic indicators had to be estimated.

50. However, the index provides a first assessment of the extent of poverty based on non-monetary indicators. All countries of North Africa but Libya were among the 78 countries for which the HPI was calculated. On the HPI, the least poor country of the universe of 78 covered had a value of 4.1% while the poorest measured 66.0%.

Table (3)
UNDP's HPI, value and rank, North African countries

Country	HPI (%)	HPI Rank
Tunisia	24.4	31
Algeria	28.6	37
Egypt	34.8	44
Morocco	41.7	55
Sudan	42.2	57
Mauritania	47.1	65

Source: UNDP, 1997 HDR

It is well to remember that the income-expenditure measurement resulted in a much wider range of variability in the extent of poverty among the countries of North Africa. Clearly, disparities in real indicators such as longevity and literacy are not as large as in monetary quantities. Comparing the two sets of measurements, Tunisia seems relatively poorer on the "real" level while Sudan appears to be relatively "richer". Morocco is almost indistinguishable from Sudan on the HPI in spite of a huge difference in the income-expenditure measurement of poverty.

51. Let us now take a look at the two most basic aspects of human capability: *survival and basic health*, in the countries of North Africa using two, admittedly crude, indicators used in the construction of the HPI, but on which data exist for all countries of the region.

Table (4)
Two indicators of survival and basic health in North Africa

Country/Group	People not expected to survive to age 40 (as % of total population) 1990^a	Population without access to safe water (%) 1990-1996
Libya	16	3
Algeria	11	22
Tunisia	11	2
Egypt	17	21
Morocco	12	45
Sudan	25	40
Mauritania	32	34 ^b
North Africa	16	27
All developing countries	18	29
Industrial countries	5	..

a. Data refer to 1990 or a year around 1990.

b. Data refer to a year or period other than that specified in the column heading.

Source: UNDP, 1997 HDR

About 16% of children born around 1990 in North Africa were not expected to reach 40 years of age, slightly less than the average for all developing countries. But the countries of the region are divided into three classes: Sudan and Mauritania are clearly the worst, while Algeria, Tunisia and, to some extent, Morocco, are better off. Egypt and Libya are closer to the higher limit of survival in the region. But 27% of the inhabitants of North Africa were estimated to have had no access to safe water in the 1990s, again only slightly less than the average of developing countries. However, on this yardstick, Morocco gets the worst bidding, followed by Sudan. The best cases, and with a huge difference, turn out to be Tunisia and Libya.

52. Not only are the monetary and “real” measurements of poverty discordant in North African countries, but there is even lack of concordance between different dimensions of “real” poverty. In the conceptual framework we pointed out the crucial importance of *education*. Standard measurements of the extent of education do not even come close to describing the richness of the education component of the socialisation process. However, looking at the basic indicators of educational attainment gives us our first chance to peruse the gender dimension of one important aspect of poverty as failure of human capability.

Table (5)
Extent of literacy and access to education in North Africa, 1994

Country/Group	Adult literacy rate (%)		Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrollment ratio (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Libya	89	57	91	90
Algeria	72	44	70	61
Tunisia	78	50	71	64
Egypt	63	37	75	63
Morocco	55	28	52	39
Sudan	56	31	35	28
Mauritania	48	26	42	31
North Africa	63	37	63	53
All developing countries	78	60	60	52
Industrial countries	99	99	82	84

Source: UNDP, 1997 HDR

53. Judging by the extent of literacy, and compared to the average of developing countries, North Africa suffers a clear deficit of human capital *stock*, larger in the case of females. Only in Libya (and the statistics seem suspect) does literacy top the level of developing countries, and Tunisia comes close, but females do not possess this advantage in both countries.

54. Indeed, for the region as a whole, and for every country, the shortfall in females literacy is larger than in developing countries. The worst in this respect is Morocco, a country boasting a light burden of income-expenditure poverty, followed by Mauritania. Sudan, with the highest income poverty rate is reported to be better off than these two.

55. North African countries, however, fare better on the criterion of access of younger generations to the three stages of formal education. Access of both males *and* females in North Africa as a whole surpasses the average of developing countries. Sudan, Mauritania and Morocco, in that order, however, fall below the regional average as well as that of all developing countries. Libya comes out as the all around best performer, even for females.

56. Nevertheless, on gender disparity, North Africa falters again, compared to the average of developing countries, though slightly. The culprits in this case are the same trio mentioned in the previous sentence but in a different order. Their deficiencies are more than made up for by Libya (by far the best), Tunisia and Algeria, in consecutive order.

57. We close this section by considering three indicators of gender empowerment, an essential layer of our conceptual framework for gender differentiation. One relates to participation in legislative assemblies and two describe the occupational structure⁴. Though used frequently, these indicators loose a significant part of their meaning in international comparisons. A seat in parliament, for example, could mean a great deal more "empowerment" in a certain country than in another. Nevertheless, these indicators are the closest we get from international sources on the crucial dimension of women empowerment (we have no data on Libya this time).

⁴ Another indicator that is used by UNDP in the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is the "earned income share" of women. With the exception of Egypt, this indicator was not available for countries of North Africa.

Table (6)
Gender Empowerment Indicators in North Africa

Country/Group	Seats held in parliament (% Women)^a	Administrators and managers (% Women)^b	Professional and technical workers (% Women)^b
Libya
Algeria	6.6	5.9	27.6
Tunisia	6.7	7.3	17.6
Egypt	2.0	16.0	28.7
Morocco	0.6	25.6	31.3
Sudan	5.3	2.4	28.8
Mauritania	0.7	7.7	20.7
North Africa	3.4	12.8	28.2
All developing countries	12.7	10.0	36.7
Industrial countries	13.6	27.4	47.8

a. Data are as of 1 January 1997.

b. Data refer to latest available year.

Source: UNDP, 1997 HDR

58. Compared to the rest of the world, developing and developed, each of the North African countries affords women a lower level of participation in parliaments. In this sense, women are least empowered in Morocco (with very low income-poverty). On this yardstick, Mauritania and Egypt are also quite poor.

59. Women's share of professional and technical occupations in all countries of North Africa is also lower than the average of developing countries. But the least empowering of women in this respect is Tunisia: the country with the lowest incidence of income poverty. More significantly, Tunisia is acclaimed for the "most advanced" personal status code and the highest status of women in the region. Tunisia is followed, closely, by Mauritania, one of the poorest countries in the world. Women are, however, given a slightly wider role in administration and management in North African countries than in the average of developing countries. But this advantage is due to two countries only: Morocco and Egypt!

VI. The Gender Dimension of Capability in Egypt and Sudan:

60. Human capital is a fundamental basis of empowerment. Hence, acquiring human capital is one of the most effective means of combating poverty. As such, disproportionate exclusion of the poor and women from education exacerbates inequality in societies suffering from wide, and widening, disparities in social welfare.

61. For the vast majority of the poor, work power is their only, or most important, asset. As a result, the *poorest* of the poor cannot afford the luxury of unemployment. This has led to a weak empirical association between unemployment and poverty. However, a very strong link between poverty and unemployment is evident if we consider the low income dimension of *underemployment*. Poverty and employment get to be almost inseparable when the institutional aspects of employment (especially with respect to finding a *good* job) together with poverty as powerlessness are considered.

62. In this section we examine the gender aspects of educational attainment, employment and earnings in Egypt and Sudan. In the Egyptian case we take a closer look at the issue of vulnerability to job destruction in the turbulent economic context of structural adjustment in the 1990s. Due to the importance of education, gender disparity in unemployment and earnings will be investigated specific for educational attainment. Since the rural/urban divide is also especially significant for the gender dimension of poverty, in as much as possible, comparisons will be carried out differentiating between rural/urban residence.

63. For Egypt, a variety of sources are used. But in the case of Sudan, our information derive from two Migration and Manpower surveys carried out by the Ministry of Manpower in 1990 and 1996. Both surveys were restricted to the north of Sudan. The former was based on a much larger sample (7,500 households) than the latter (3400 households).

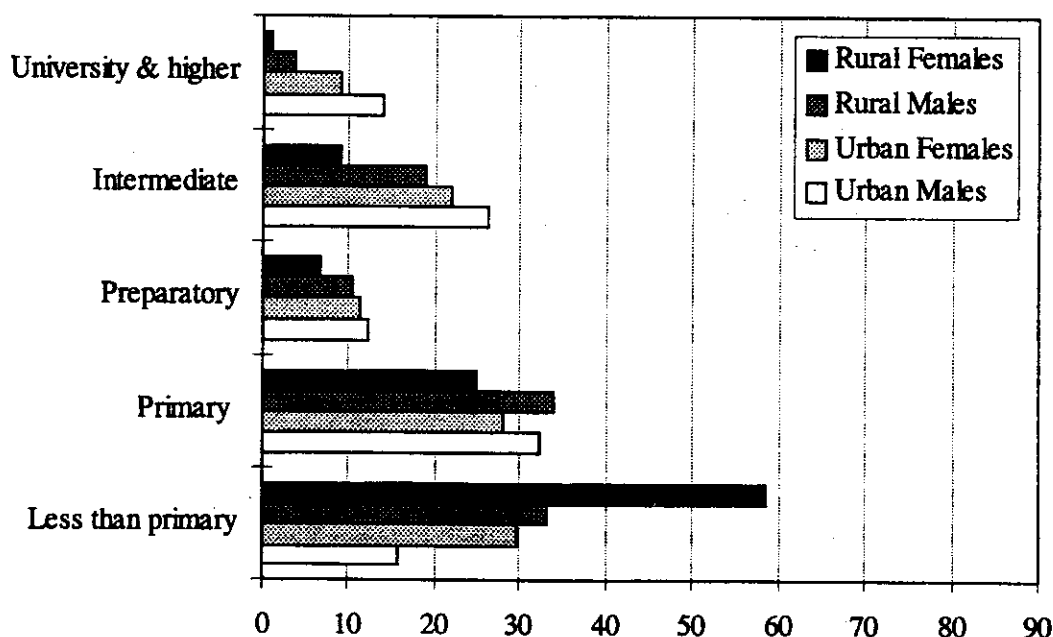
Education

64. As shown earlier, no country in the region has achieved universal basic education (though Tunisia has come close in the primary cycle). Exclusion from basic education is strongly selective of children of poor households, especially girls. The relative exclusion of the poor from basic education seems to have been increasing. Reasons include the institution of "cost recovery" for government services under structural adjustment programmes; the rising cost of education to households because of inflation in general and education-related costs such as private tutoring; and the high opportunity cost

manifested in remunerative child labour. Below we examine the gender differential in educational attainment in Egypt and the north of Sudan.

65. The chronic exclusion of girls, and the countryside, from education in *Egypt* is immediately clear from comparing the gender and rural/urban composition of those with less than primary education and the relatively fortunate few who attained university education. A pecking order of urban males, urban females, rural males and rural females is maintained beyond the primary education stage, and is reinforced with rising educational attainment. An exactly reverse order is shown by the lowest category of educational attainment.

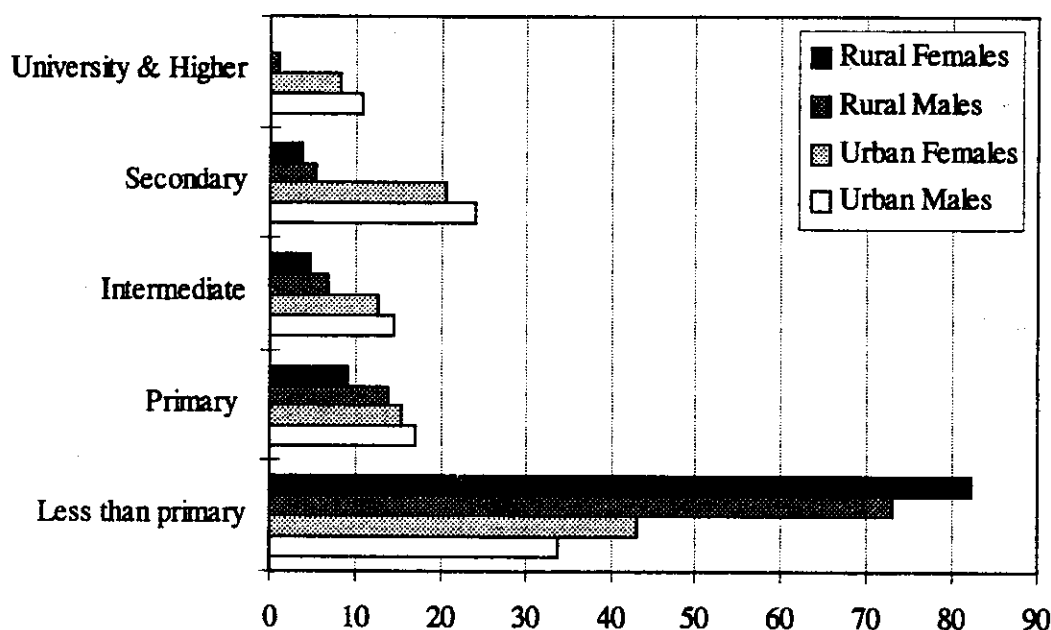
Figure (1)
Gender disparity in educational attainment by rural/urban residence,
Egypt, 1994



66. Research on the determinants of *access* to basic education and educational outcomes documents that *poverty* of the household is a barrier to initial enrolment and a detractor of the chances of completion of primary education, but exerts *no* significant effect on cognitive achievement. Like girls, children of the poor, are excluded from primary education though they represent no worse educational investment than children from more privileged social backgrounds. It is also shown that while *girls* suffer lower levels of initial enrolment and completion of primary education, they do *not* under-perform boys in cognitive achievement (Fergany, 1996).

67. In comparison to Egypt, three observations on educational attainment in *north Sudan* stand out: a much lower level of accumulation of human capital through education, a wider rural/urban differential at the extremes of educational attainment and the persistence of the gender disparity at all stages of education. Among those with less than primary education, the gender disparity across the rural/urban divide, comes to almost 50 percentage points.

Figure (2)
Gender disparity in educational attainment by rural/urban residence, north Sudan, 1996



Employment

68. Unemployment and vulnerability to job destruction, Egypt 1990- 1995

The following analysis is based on the reported results of the Labour Force Sample Survey (LFSS) during the period 1990-1995. The results of the LFSS are subject to significant errors of coverage and content: the present LFSS is judged to underestimate the participation of women, children and the aged in economic activity and requires active search for work during the reference period of the survey as a condition for defining unemployment (which tends to exclude "discouraged unemployment"). These two shortcomings are expected to result in underenumeration of the employed as well as the unemployed and, hence, of the labour force. On the other hand, the desire for employment in government results in an overestimate of unemployment since actually employed persons tend to report themselves as unemployed. In

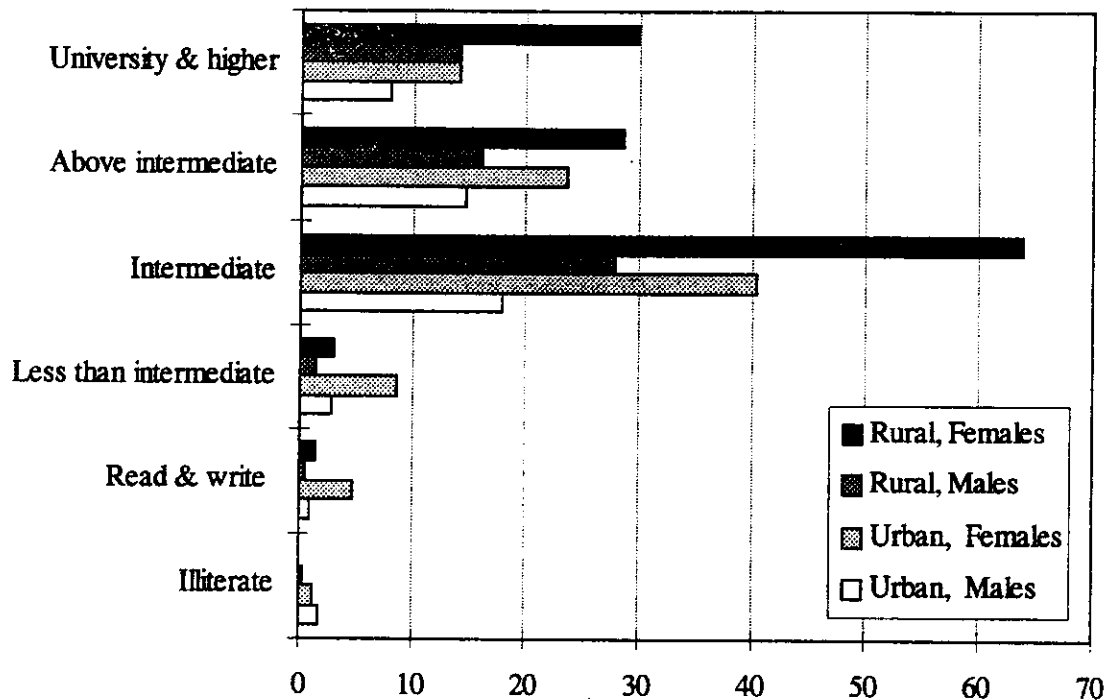
addition, many constraints on the implementation of the LFSS undermine the quality of data collected, especially with respect to detailed characteristics of employment and unemployment. Nevertheless, the LFSS remains the only source of detailed information on employment in the country.

69. According to results of the LFSS the unemployment rate exceeded 10% since 1993. However, as was mentioned earlier, the LFSS underestimates both participation in economic activity and unemployment. It is estimated that allowing for this underestimation corrects the level of unemployment upward by 3-4 percentage points in the early 1990s (Fergany, 1995). This level of unemployment corresponds to about 2-3 million unemployed persons in the mid 1990s.

70. Unemployment rates among women are much higher than men. Unemployment among urban women has been consistently higher than either men or rural women, and rose at a faster rate than that of men. In 1995, more than 70% of urban females in the (15-19) age bracket are reported unemployed. The fastest rise in the level of unemployment, however, is reported to have taken place in the case of rural women whose unemployment rate almost tripled in the five years considered.

71. Probably the most remarkable unemployment characteristic is its link with educational attainment, Figure (3). Those with intermediate education suffer an unemployment rate of 32% compared to less than 1% for illiterates. Above average unemployment rates are reserved for educational attainment categories higher than intermediate. University graduates suffer the next highest unemployment rate (19%). In addition to a flagrant lack of coordination between education and the labour market, the pattern described indicates *negative* labour market returns to education. With the exception of illiterates, women in both rural and urban areas suffer higher unemployment rates than men. The gender disparity in unemployment rates is higher among those with intermediate education or higher especially in the countryside.

Figure (3)
Gender disparity in unemployment rates by educational attainment, and rural/urban residence, Egypt, May 1995

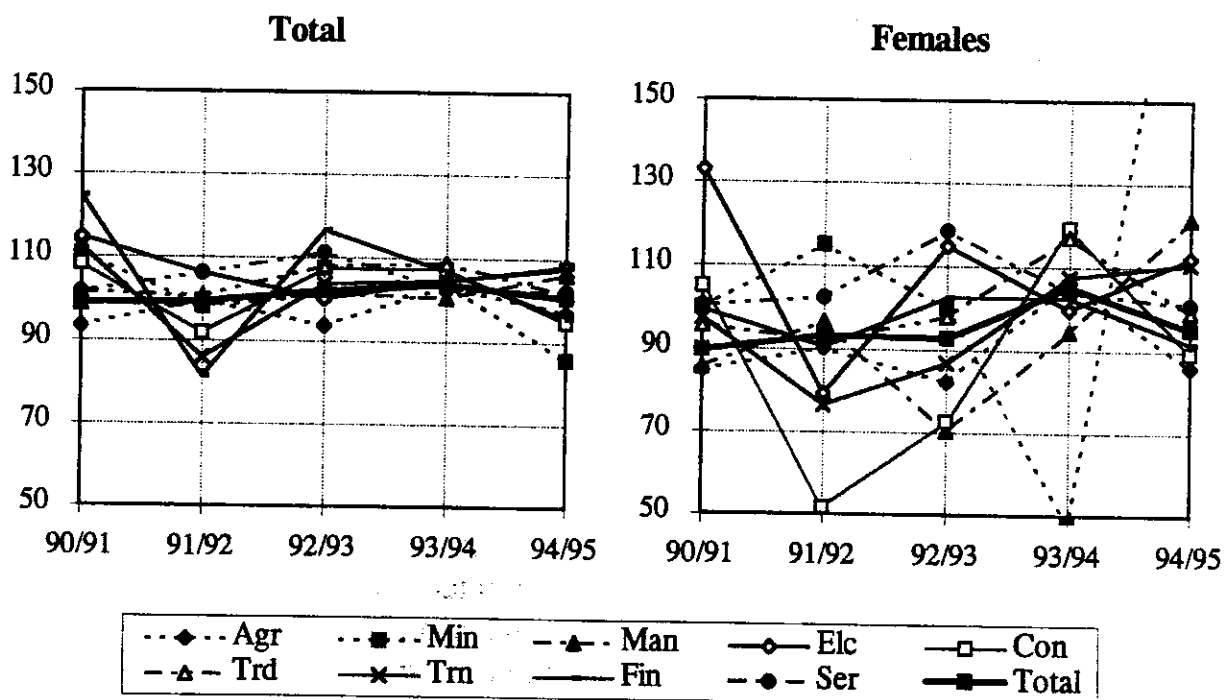


72. According to the LFSS during 1990-1995, women account for a little more than one fifth of employed persons. Women's employment is appreciable in agriculture (about 11% of total employment in the country) and services (about 7% of total employment in the country). Private sector in-establishments⁵ employment is the dominant type in the case of women (12% of total employment in the country) followed by government service (close to 7% of total employment in the country).

⁵ An *establishment* is defined as a building, part of a building, or some fixed facility used regularly for an economic activity. In the LFSS, a farm is considered an establishment. The in/outside establishments classification is a bit ambiguous. It does not transparently translate into formal/informal. Employment *in* establishments represents an upper bound on "formal" economic activity. Conversely, employment *outside* can be taken as a lower bound on informal economic activity. It is to be noted that most of agricultural employment is reported in the private *in* establishments sector. Thus, *outside* establishments employment in the *urban* private sector is a good approximation of *urban informal* employment.

72. Annual *rates* of growth in employment paint an extremely volatile picture of employment creation and destruction. Relatively minor changes in total employment are dwarfed by much larger *oscillations* in sectoral employment. No clear pattern of employment creation emerges, especially on the sectoral level. The level of volatility of women's employment is even higher. Women's employment has been subject to dramatic fluctuations indicating a higher level of vulnerability to labour market swings. See Figure (4).

Figure (4)
Annual rates of change in employment (%) by branch of economic activity,
Egypt, 1990-1995



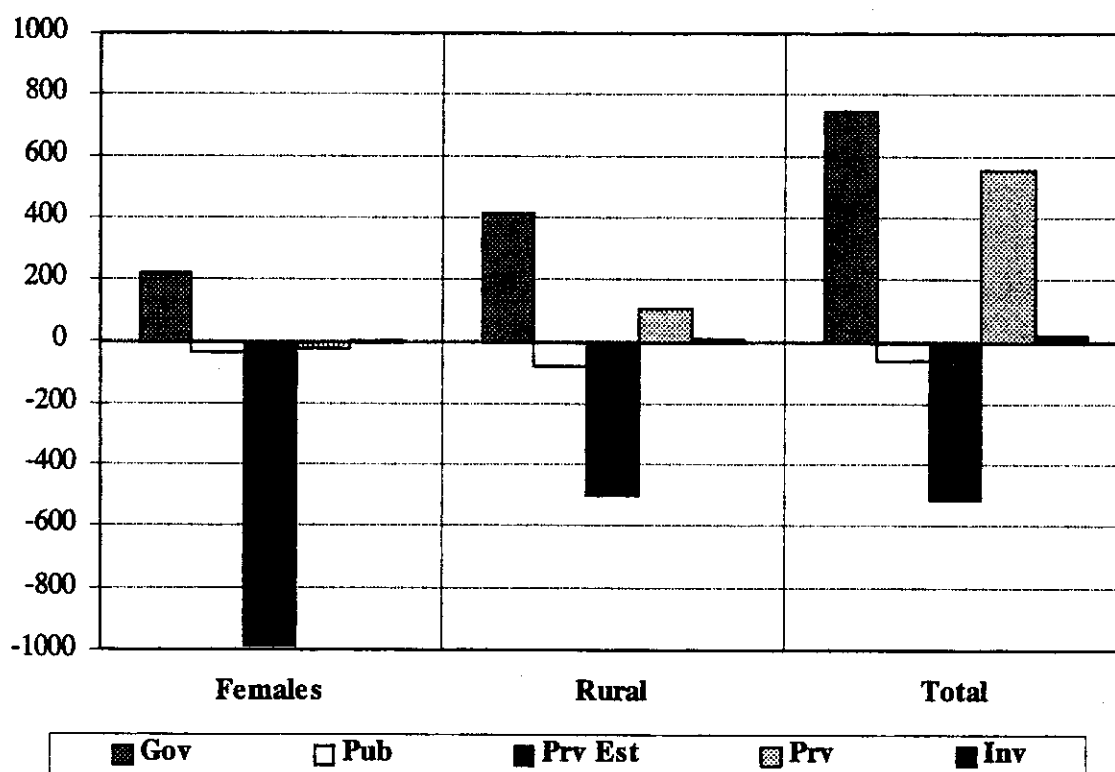
72. The picture of annual (absolute) changes in employment, though generally less noisy, is as disconcerting as in the case of relative change. Decline in total employment at the beginning of the period is followed by increases of widely varying magnitudes. Agriculture and services, the two largest employers, suffered the strongest gyrations.

73. Women are shown to have lost more employment opportunities than the entire economy during downswings in employment, and did not participate in the upswings on par with their share of total employment. Between 1990 and 1991, the economy lost about 140 thousand jobs, but women lost nearly 400

thousand. Between 1994 and 1995 a slight gain in the total employment coincided with a loss of almost 150 thousand for women.

74. Throughout the period (1990-1995) the entire economy gained a little more than 700 thousand jobs. But while men scored net gains in all branches of economic activity, especially services, women lost big in agriculture (more than 900 thousand). Women also lost more than 100 thousand jobs in manufacturing and gained almost 250 thousand jobs in services.

Figure (5)
Absolute change in employed persons (12-64), in thousands, by sector, gender and rural/urban residence, Egypt, 1990 to 1995



75. Women are estimated to have lost almost a million job opportunities in the in-establishments private sector but gained a little more than 200 thousand in government. The countryside gained a little more than 200 thousand jobs in government but lost nearly half a million in the in-establishments private sector. Its gain in the non-establishments private sector was only in the order of 100 thousand. Thus, the sector on which high hopes for job creation are pinned, the "formal" private sector, has failed rural areas and, to a larger extent, women.

Clearly, the marginalisation of women and rural areas in the labour market was reinforced during 1990-1995, and promises to get worse with more extensive privatisation of economic activity.

Unemployment in the north of Sudan, 1990-1996:

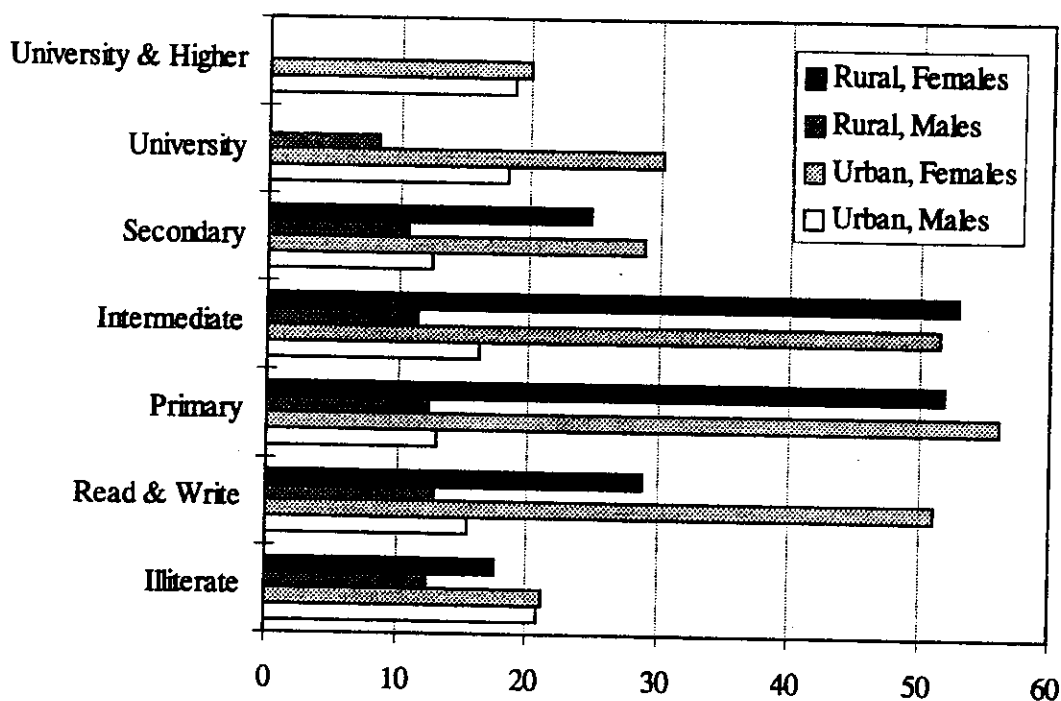
76. The results of the 1990 and 1996 Migration and Manpower surveys seem to suffer problems of coverage and content with respect to employment, earnings and other household characteristics. It is very likely for example that, as in the Egyptian LFSS, the surveys underestimate the participation of women in economic activity especially in the countryside. However, the two surveys are generally comparable in design and methodology.

77. About 17% of the labour force was estimated to be unemployed corresponding to about one million in 1990 and rising to 1.3 million in 1996. Females are estimated to have suffered higher rates of unemployment throughout the period⁶ but the gender differential has declined between 1990 and 1996. Unemployment in urban areas appears to have been solidifying. Over the six-year period, urban areas replaced the countryside as the higher unemployment locale. Nevertheless, rural areas continued to hold the majority of *unemployed persons* in the country. Throughout the period, however, urban females experienced the highest unemployment rates in the four-way gender and rural/urban residence classification.

78. Contrary to the case of Egypt, unemployment rates do not vary much by educational attainment, except for females among whom unemployment rises with education up to the intermediate level, in both rural and urban areas. The unemployment rate of female graduates of primary and intermediate education is more than three folds the national rate.

⁶ Females are reported to suffer higher unemployment rates in other countries of the North Africa region. In 1991, the unemployment rate among females was 150% of the males rate and 112% in Morocco. In Algeria, however, females enjoyed lower unemployment 77% of males (World Bank, 1995a).

Figure (6)
Gender disparity in unemployment rates, by educational attainment and rural/urban residence, north Sudan, 1996



Earnings

79. *Egypt: Gender disparity in wages in the "formal" business sector, 1970-1994*

Information on wages are notoriously weak in Egypt. However, firms' survey data on wages are available from the "Employment, Wages and Hours of Work" (EWHW) survey. The EWHW covers all public enterprises and private enterprises employing more than ten workers. As such the EWHW generally excludes employment in agriculture.

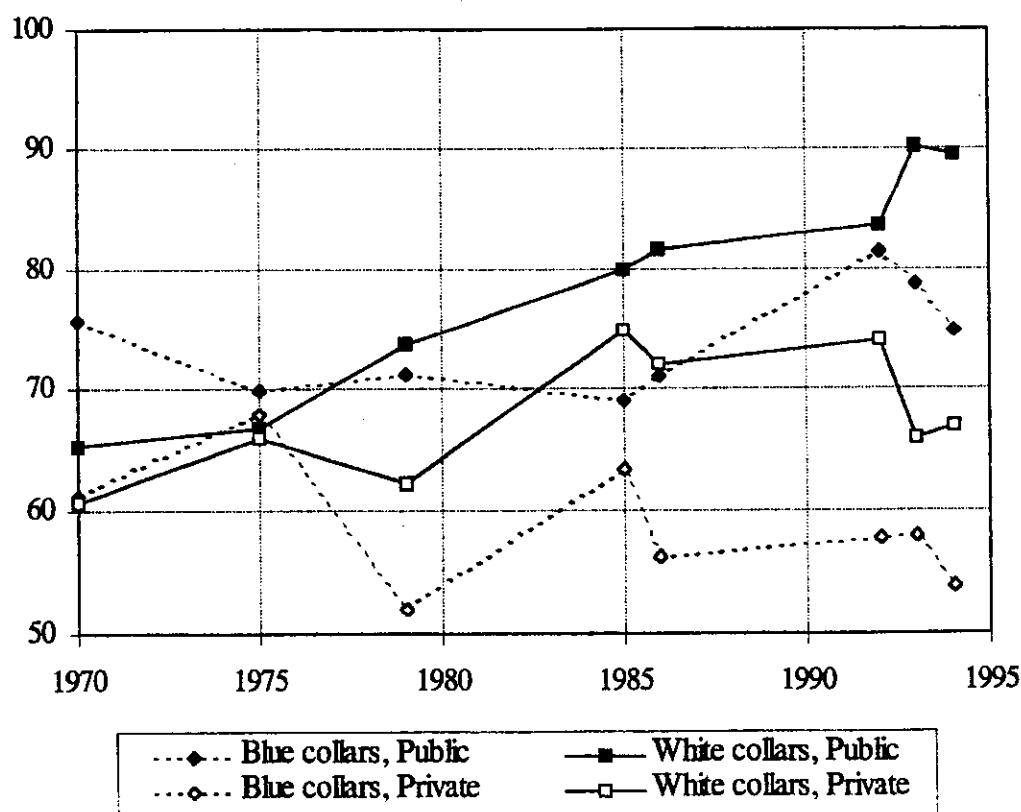
80. Wage data exist for a coarse occupational classification of two categories: "administrative, technical and clerical" and "workers", i.e. "white-" and "blue-collar", for a relatively long time series of the EWHW, going back to 1970, though there are breaks in the comparability of the series, and data are absent for some years. Data are available by *sex* separately for public and private enterprises. This coarse occupational classification is interesting since the wage level differs dramatically between managers and others. In addition to covering a long time span, the data series provides for consideration of the gender dimension.

81. Throughout the period considered, females received a lower wage rate in each of the two occupational categories, especially in the private sector. Clearly wages have been more equitable across gender in the public sector. But wage disparity across gender increased considerably over time.

82. The ratio of females to males wages improved over time in the public sector. Starting at about two thirds of male wages in 1970, wages of white-collar women reached, in the mid 1990s, 90%. Among public sector blue-collar workers, the gender wage differential showed signs of improvement in favour of women in the last ten years. In the private sector, however, improvement in the wage ratio of women in white-collar occupations, slower than in the public sector, was combined with deterioration in the case of blue-collar workers.

83. In short, the shortfall in wages of women has been largest in the case of poorer blue-collar workers employed in the private sector, and the level of relative disparity has been rising. With increasing privatisation of economic activity, it is to be expected that working women, especially the generally weaker blue-collar ones, will probably face less favourable labour conditions not limited to relatively lower wages.

Figure (7)
Gender disparity in wages (women/men %) in the "formal" business sector, white and blue collar workers, Egypt, 1970-1995



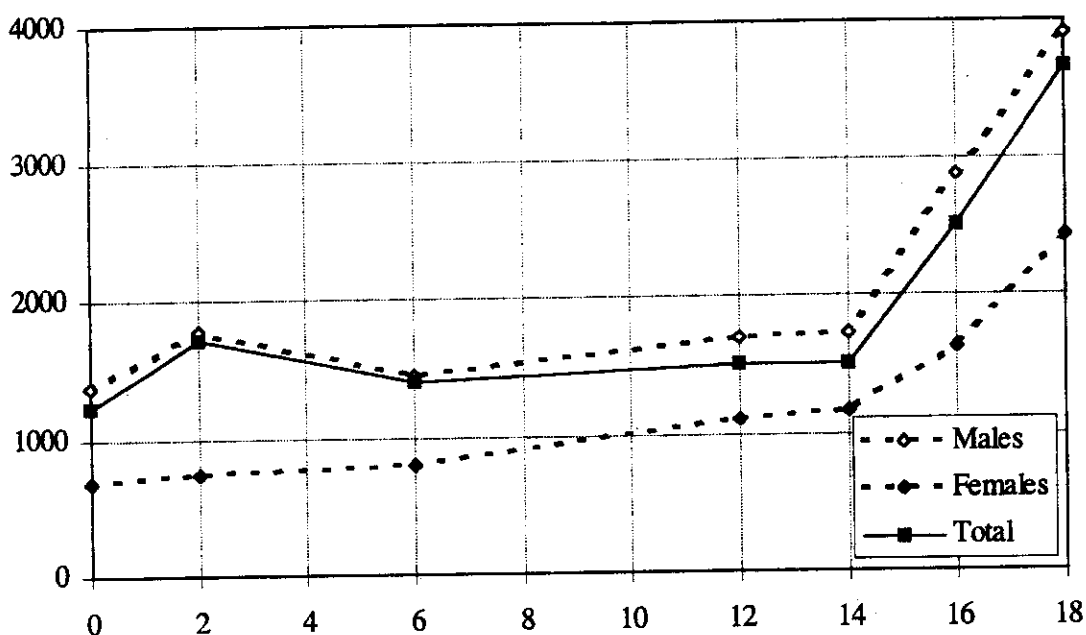
Gender as a determinant of earnings

84. The previous analysis has been limited to the "formal" business sector. It is possible to consider gender as a determinant of earnings in the entire economy, but from a relatively old data set: the October 1988 round of the LFSS. Though old, the richness of this data set justifies its use. In this survey all *net* income, in cash or in kind, received as compensation for work was measured for employed persons six years of age and older excluding only non-waged household workers. In the case of the self-employed and employers, earnings represent business income and as such include a component of return to capital.

85. Analysis of earnings by educational attainment shows that return to education is relatively low in Egypt except for university education and higher. However, less than primary education is associated with a rise in earnings, over illiterates. This reflects the higher earnings of skilled workers who generally drop out of education early and take up training in one of the crafts. By comparison, completing primary, or intermediate, education yields a *lower* level of earnings.

86. Females are shown to receive lower average earnings than males at *all* levels of educational attainment. The ratio of females to males wages is lowest for those who can read and write, reflecting the, males dominated, skilled craftsmen phenomenon mentioned above. Immediately higher levels of education result in a modest amelioration of the gender disparity in wages. At intermediate educational attainment, women receive close to two thirds of men's wages but the earnings disparity widens past that level of educational attainment.

Figure (8)
Gender disparity in earnings by completed years of education,
Egypt, 1988



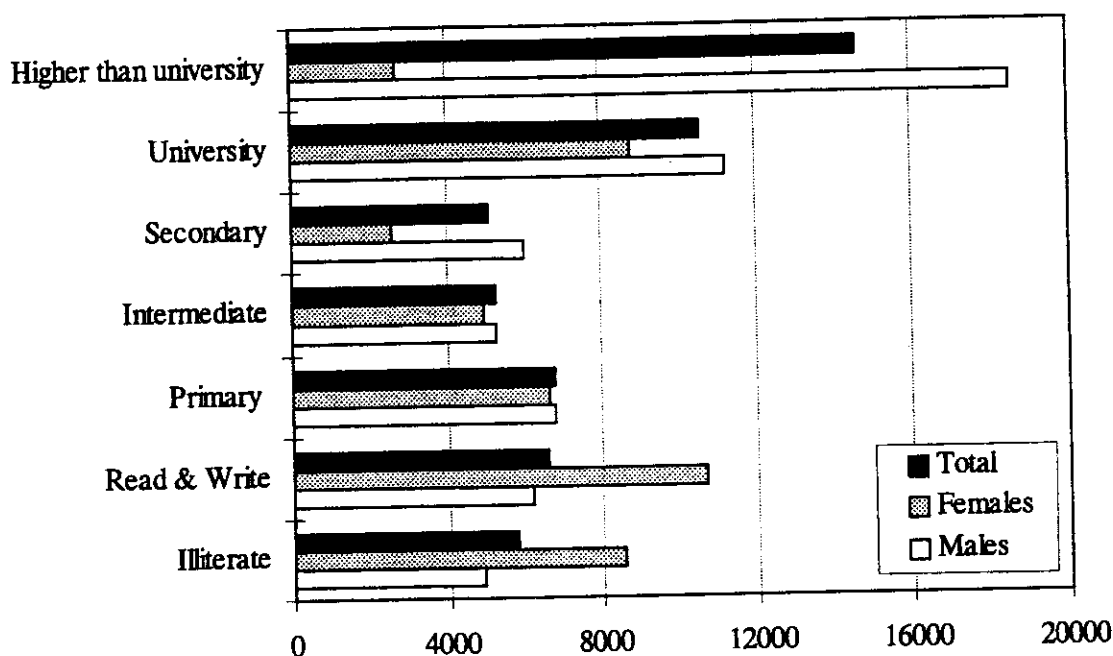
The north of Sudan, 1996

87. Here we restrict the analysis to data on wages from the 1996 Migration and Manpower Survey. Due to irregularities in the data set and a large incidence of missing observations, particularly in rural areas, the results should be treated with caution. The rural/urban differential in wages was rather minor (about 7% in favour of the latter). The gender differential was roughly of the same order (about 8%) but in favour of females! Indeed the highest level of earnings in the four way classification of gender and rural/urban residence is that of rural females. Women in rural areas are reported to earn more than twice their urban counterparts, about 70% more than men in the countryside and one third more than urban men. If not a reflection of differential reporting errors, this is an exceptional observation (compare the Egyptian situation analysed above, for example).

88. Even more interesting, is the pattern of gender differential in earnings by educational attainment. Women earn considerably higher (70% more) wages than men for the two educational attainment categories below completing primary education. At the primary educational attainment level, the earnings of women are roughly equal to men. But women earn less than men for higher levels of educational achievement. *If this pattern is not entirely due to differential underreporting*, then the conclusion is that the Sudanese labour market *favours* women at lower levels of educational attainment, normally associated with traditional institutional arrangements and informal employment. At higher educational attainment though, lower wages accrue for women. It is as if education, normally synonymous with "modern"

institutional arrangements in the labour market, rather than being an equalising influence, fosters gender disparity in wages (remember that the equalising influence of education on wages was rather weak in Egypt). Even if the “real” differentials are smaller, this is an observation worth pursuing for it has important implications for the gender dimension of poverty: earnings are empowering!.

Figure (9)
Gender disparity in wages by educational attainment,
Sudan, 1996



89. Further scrutiny of the wages data, however, reveals that these exceptional patterns are essentially due to a small number of cases with very high earnings (that surely include an element of return to capital). Excluding sample observations with earnings higher than 50 thousand Dinars per annum, the rural/urban residence- gender differentials exhibit the "normal" pattern: urban males receiving highest wages, followed by urban females, then rural males, and rural females getting the lowest average wage. Also, with this exclusion, females get lower wages at all levels of educational attainment, with the differential generally declining with education, the disparity being lowest for those with university education. So, *with the exception of a minority of very rich individuals*, earnings in the north of Sudan show a pattern of gender disparity similar to that observed in Egypt, though the extent of gender disparity is slightly lower in Sudan.

V. Gender of the Household Head and Poverty:

90. In this section we attempt to ascertain if the gender of the head makes a difference to the level of social welfare of the household, differentiating as always, between rural/urban residence. It is worth noting though that the category "household head" is problematic. Operational definitions in surveys, especially those that are not designed to study household dynamics, can vary considerably. Normally household headship is defined with respect to some "decision making" criterion.

91. Two major sources of data are used in this section. For Egypt the source is a survey of access to, and quality of, basic education (AQS) carried out in 1994. The survey covered about 5,000 households in 16 rural and urban locations in three governorates in different regions of the country. For north Sudan, use is made of the data set of the 1996 Migration and Manpower survey.

92. Before we present evidence based on the two major data sources for Egypt and Sudan, we attempt to tap a set of surveys carried out by the League of Arab States on child health (PAPCHILD) in the early 1990s. The surveys are not famous for high quality. However, in addition to the useful information on child health, an important dimension of the social welfare of household members, the set of surveys covers four North African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania and Sudan. Nevertheless, these surveys are used here in tentative fashion. More than anything else, they point out the difficulty of deducing inferences on the gender dimension of poverty, on the level of household headship, from surveys that are not expressly designed with this purpose in mind.

93. Based on these surveys, the ratio of women-headed households varies considerably among the four countries, from about 6% in Algeria and Egypt to a little more than 8% in Sudan, to almost 30% in Mauritania. A perceptible rural/urban differential in the prevalence of women-headed households is noticed only in Algeria (lower in the countryside). See Annex Table (A-1).

94. Women-headed households generally have a smaller number of members especially in Mauritania and Sudan. The differential in household size according to gender of the head is also more pronounced in these two countries, particularly in rural areas. Two indicators are utilised here as proxies to child health: *height by age* and an index of the *incidence of respiratory disorders*. Very little differences are seen in child health in response to the gender of the household head in the four countries.

95. Differentiating between rural/urban residence, however, reveals evidence of improved child health in *women*-headed households in cities in Algeria and, to some extent, in Mauritania and Sudan. In rural areas of Algeria, *men*-headed households seem to have healthier children.

96. Four additional indicators are used as proxies of welfare of household members: *crowdedness* (average number of members per room in the dwelling unit), an index of *ownership of assets*, whether the dwelling unit is furnished with *piped water*, and whether a *flush toilet* exists in the dwelling unit.

97. By virtue of smaller size, women-headed households tend to live in less crowded dwelling units, especially in rural areas. On the three other indicators, differences between households headed by men and women are minor with the exception of dwelling unit amenities in favour of *men*-headed households in the cities of Mauritania and, to a lesser extent, Sudan.

98. To sum up the, rather shaky, evidence from the PAPCHILD surveys, *no consistent differential* in the social welfare of members of the household across the four countries emerges. *Women* household heads seem to have a small edge on child health. *Men*-headed households, on the other hand, appear to have an even smaller advantage with respect to other aspects of welfare especially in *urban* areas of Mauritania and perhaps Sudan.

99. By comparison to the PAPCHILD surveys, our two major sources on Egypt and north Sudan do not include information on child health. However, both sources provide data on an important variable: household income. It is to be remembered, nevertheless, that measurement of income from surveys not specifically designed for this purpose cannot be expected to yield very accurate information on this tricky variable. An additional indicator of dwelling unit amenities is also included in this analysis: use of *electricity for lighting*. Finally in this analysis, households are classified according to whether the household head is married or not to approximate the *de jure/de facto* divide of household headship.

100. For one, compared to the PAPCHILD surveys, and in spite of the difference in time reference being about three years only, the ratio of women-headed households is estimated to be larger in these two surveys than indicated by the PAPCHILD surveys, especially for Egypt (14% in Egypt compared to a little more than 10% in the north of Sudan). The prevalence of women-headed households is estimated to be lower in rural areas of *both* countries. In sharp contrast to men-headed households, women-headed households are overwhelmingly of the *de jure* type, especially in Egypt. In

both countries, *de jure* women headship is slightly more prevalent in the countryside. See Tables (A-2) and (A-3).

101. As seen previously, in both Egypt and Sudan, women-headed households have a smaller number of members and, hence, tend to show better values on the crowdedness indicator. More significantly, women-headed households are estimated to have higher per capita income than those headed by men in both countries, though the disparity is much wider in north Sudan. This advantage, equally strong in both rural and urban areas of north Sudan, is relatively stronger in rural Egypt but almost vanishes in urban areas.

102. In the case of Egypt, however, the relative position of women-headed households vis-à-vis those headed by men is clearly reversed on the most important of the remaining indicators of household welfare: ownership of assets. A slight such reversal of this sort is noticeable in urban areas of Sudan. Women heads of households seem to be richer in terms of current income, but they tend to be less wealthy.

103. These global patterns hide considerable differences between households differentiated by the marital status of the head. In both countries, households headed by married women fare better than those headed by married men on almost all indicators of welfare considered in rural areas, and to a lesser extent, on average.

104. Similarities between Egypt and Sudan end when the, more important, *de jure* category of household headship is considered, however.

In Egypt, a lower level of welfare prevails in households headed by unmarried women especially in urban areas, and at large.

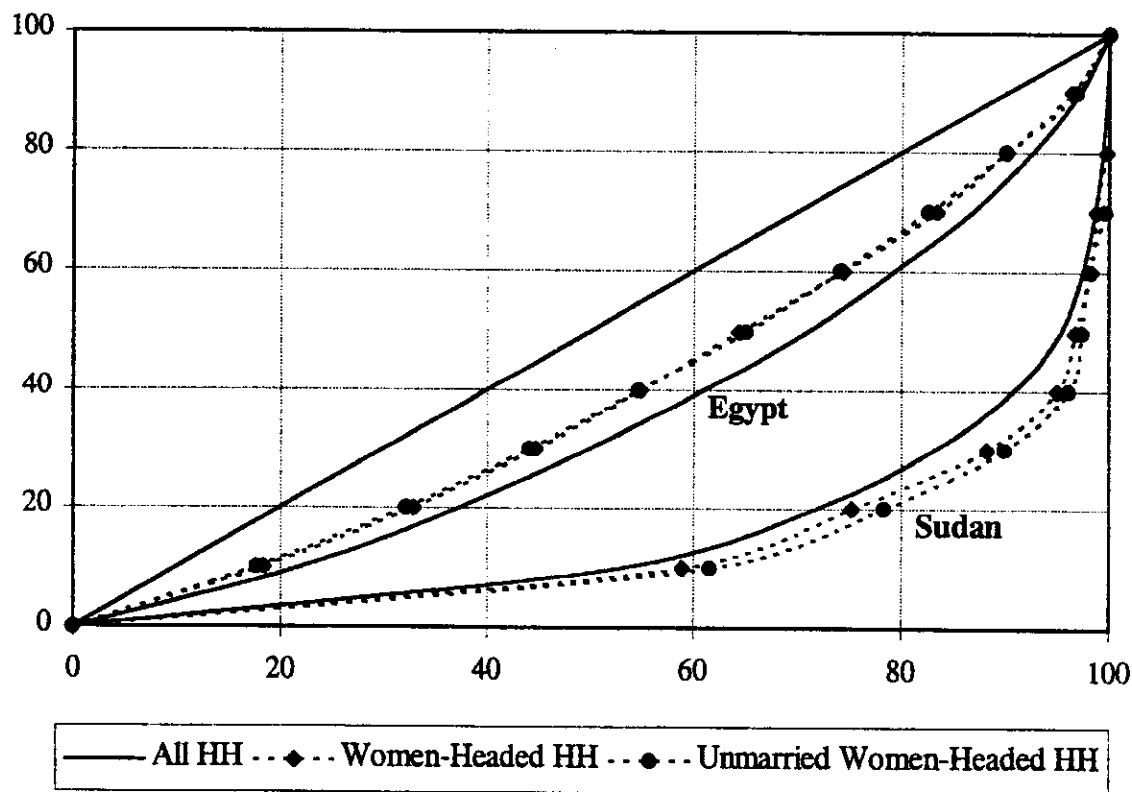
In Sudan, as was the case with married heads, per capita income is higher in households headed by unmarried women than those headed by unmarried men. But *de jure* women-headed households are clearly less wealthy on most other indicators of welfare throughout the north of Sudan.

105. However, a more interesting comparison is that between the vast majority of women-headed households, those headed by an unmarried woman, and the norm of household headship in society at large, i.e. households headed by a married man. Households headed by an unmarried woman are shown to enjoy higher levels of per capita income than households headed by married men. This advantage holds in both Egypt and north Sudan, though much stronger in the latter. The advantage also obtains in both rural and urban settings of the two countries. A strong rural/urban differential in the advantage appears in north Sudan, with a larger relative advantage in the cities.

106. Judging by per capita income alone, this observation almost destroys the “endangered species” label of women-headed households, even the *de jure* category. Nevertheless, this advantage is reversed on other indicators of social welfare, particularly ownership of assets, especially in rural Egypt and urban areas of north Sudan.

107. So far, we have been concerned with comparisons on *average* values. Does the distribution of welfare vary *within* each type of household headship? There are indications that the distribution of welfare tends to be different among women-headed households, of both the *de jure* and *de facto* varieties, than among men-headed households. The direction of difference in Egypt, however, runs opposite to that of north Sudan. Women-headed households in Egypt are estimated to have a more equal distribution of household income but a more *unequal* one in north Sudan (the richest household in the sample of north Sudan turns out to be headed by a woman, living in an urban area), see Figure (10).

Figure (10)
Lorenz curve for per capita household income by type of household headship, Egypt 1994 and north Sudan 1996



108. To get an indication of the influence of the different distribution among women-headed households on the average level of social welfare, we exclude from the analysis the highest-income households (those receiving more than a natural cut-off point on the distribution of *per capita* income: higher than LE 350 per month in Egypt and more than 100 thousand Sudanese Dinars per annum in north Sudan- in US \$ terms, the latter is roughly half the former which seems to account for the difference in the level of overall economic performance).

109. The exclusion of highest income households in Egypt slightly improves the position of women-headed households, relative to those headed by men, on the income dimension of welfare in urban areas, but not in the countryside. On other measures of welfare, however, virtually nothing changes.

110. In north Sudan, on the other hand, exclusion of highest income households results in dramatic changes in the position of women-headed households, relative to those headed by men, on the income dimension of welfare. In urban areas women-headed households end up with per capita income *lower* than those headed by men, the decline being largest among *de jure* women-headed households. On other measures of welfare, a clear downward shift in social welfare is observed in the case of households headed by unmarried women in the countryside.

VI. Conclusion:

111. Though the information base is deficient, poverty, as measured by the poverty-line method, is clearly massive in North Africa, particularly in rural areas. More importantly, poverty seems to be generally on the rise. Tunisia seems to be an exception but not as glorious a success as hailed by the international financial institutions. Morocco is even less of a success story.

112. North Africa is also considerably poor, relative to developing countries, on different dimensions of human capability. The human capability concept, it is to be remembered, provides better handles for poverty eradication than the poverty-line approaches.

113. Examination of the gender dimension of human capability across countries of the region reveals a clear deficit in the case of women on educational attainment and indicators of empowerment.

114. Perhaps more important is the presence of substantial discordance between relative positions of countries of the region on income-expenditure poverty compared to different aspects of human capability failure. This discordance is quite pronounced on some aspects of the empowerment of women.

115. Detailed investigation of the gender dimension of three aspects of human capability: educational attainment, employment and earnings, using data for Egypt and north Sudan reveals interesting differences between the two countries and modes of articulation of gender with rural/urban residence.

116. Women suffer considerable shortfall in *educational attainment*, especially in rural areas, that is much more profound in north Sudan. Women also sustain higher *unemployment* rates, particularly in rural areas at present. Together with rural areas, women are judged as well to be more vulnerable to job destruction, and less disposed to benefit from creation of job opportunities, during the adverse conditions of labour markets under structural adjustment in Egypt. *Feminisation*, and *ruralisation*, of unemployment seem to have been hallmarks of employment dynamics in the 1990s.

117. On *average*, women tend to earn less for their work in formal activities than men. This differential can be masked by the presence of women in the minority of high earners in the economy, as shown by the case of north Sudan. There, contrary to the Egyptian case, cultural factors seem to sustain