



MEMOS XIV

**Development of Women's Participation
in Sport in the Sudan**

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Introduction: the context of the study

Sudan is the one of the largest countries in Africa and the Arab world with a population of thirty-seven millions (excluding Southern Sudan which recently voted to secede. It is situated in the North East part of Africa. It is bordered by Egypt in the north, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Red Sea in the East, Kenya in the South East, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the South, Central Africa in the South, Chad in the West, and Libya in the North West.

Arabic is the official language of the country with English as its second official language. In addition there are a number of other local languages including Nubian, Ta Bedawie and Fur. In terms of religion the majority are Sunni Muslim with a small Christian minority and some local religions.

Sudan has suffered considerably since independence from civil wars, which held its development and prosperity back for many decades. In common with some other Arab and African countries, in Sudan there is a mentality which still rejects the principle of equality between women and men, despite the prominent existence and participation of woman in many fields such as medicine, engineering, teaching, armed forces, police and judiciary.

Although Sudanese women have had a significant role in social, religious, political, and military life since the Meroe kingdom (Kandaka) and throughout the different historical eras, women have suffered (and continue to suffer) from various forms of oppression. In the Fung Kingdom (the Black Sultanate), women experienced in particular two types of such oppression. They were forced into labor, and coerced to practice sex against their will. Female slavery also continued to exist in the twentieth century during the Anglo-Egyptian colonial period (1898-1956). However in Darfur Kingdom, women traditionally played and still do play a significant role in economic, social, and religious activity. Nevertheless Sudanese women have been subject to detrimental customs such as female circumcision, (Jambo & New Sudan Women Federation., 2001; Kashif, 1994).

The above mentioned practices (circumcision, Zaar, high dowries etc.) continued to prevail. In the days of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule, and brothels owned and managed by some traders, gained profits from trading in female misery and escaped from paying taxes as described by Slatin Pasha (1898, 1973).

With independence in 1956 women got the right to vote, which was passed by the first ministry following the revolution, and Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim won election for the Graduates' Constituencies, as the first Sudanese

woman ever to become Member of Parliament. Women's participation in police, Judiciary, diplomatic corps and other areas followed.

The years which followed also witnessed a significant international concern on women's issues (the international conventions) on issues such as equal salary, discrimination in education, fundamental rights, in particular through CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly), and by the Beijing Conference, and the optional CEDAW of 1999.

In Sudan and elsewhere women have struggled against the reactionary fundamentalist Wahabi Ideologies, which seek to deprive women of their historic gains. Women have also suffered from war atrocities, displacement, rape, especially in war in Darfur (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Despite the authorities' oppression, Sudanese women managed to take their place in various arenas. War situations, poverty, and displacement have forced many women to work, (Osman, 2005). This led to the attention of the Sudanese government concern with the women's issues. So it has carefully opened doors again in various fields such as engineering, medicine, judiciary, armed forces, police, and media.

But in the sports field, Sudanese women have lost a lot from what they gained in 1960-1988. Since the Islamists took power in Sudan; they have worked on reducing the role of women in the sports field by imposing tight restrictions for female players in the different sports activities. The authorities have prevented girls from playing football based on the directives and guidelines of the Ministry of Youth and Sports issued in 2003. Girls were also forbidden to practice sports on open pitches and playgrounds. Men were prevented from watching women's matches, which in turn led many girls to give up practicing sports. That also has forced many families to prevent their girls from sports when they have found it difficult to find playgrounds allocated for their girls.

During this period, Sudanese Women's Sport has been negatively affected and the number of female participants in local contests has declined. External competition has been restricted to the tournaments of the Islamic Consolidation for Ladies, along with some other low level participation for which Islamic clothing has been required especially tailored for girls. Moreover, the competences of sporting federations have been decreased in relation to ladies' sports by establishing the so-called the National Authority For Ladies' Sports in Sudan which has never provided tangible results in terms of promoting sport, especially after preventing the TV channels from filming girls while competing in sport.

Literature Review

Arab Women and Accomplishments

The sporting achievements of some Arab women have allowed them to reach a prominent place on the map of international sports, in particular through the Olympics. However, in many other instances Arab women have remained confined behind the walls of their homes due to the traditions and habits of the culture, and also the negative attitudes to women's participation in sports. Indeed, Arab women were absent from international competitions for a long time until a break through was established by the Moroccan athlete, Nawal El-Moutawakel who entered the annals of sports history by winning a gold medal in the 400-meter hurdles at the Los Angeles Games in 1984, followed by Hassiba Bomerka who won a gold medal in the 1500-meter race in the 1992 Barcelona Games, and by the Syrian athlete Ghada Shoa'a who won gold in the heptathlon in the 1996 Atlanta Games, and finally by Algerian Athlete Nouria bin Eida Rimah in the 1500-meter race in the 2000 Sydney Games. Despite the success of the Arab women athletes, Arab women sports is now characterized by a situation in which some countries don't attempt to develop women sport and others did the opposite and worked to develop women sports.

Barriers to Arab Women's Practice of Sports

The situation of women in Arab and other Muslim countries varies. A study conducted by the Centre for Research and Studies in the Organization of Muslim Women in Iraq on the reluctance of Iraqi women to join clubs emphasized that many Iraqi women athletes expressed their anxiety about current status of women sport in Iraq is mainly due to the deteriorating security situation and the difficulty of moving safely around the city. Their movement is often restricted due to road closures and limited progress of vehicles on roads and repeated explosions, resulting in their inability to reach. The study also found that economic factors are direct causes of girl's reluctance to participate in sports. Clubs lack the material and resources that enable them to promote women's sport and make it competitive with their counterparts in neighboring Arab countries.

In a study of sports by Abdul Ghani (1999) the author claimed that "it was evident that the social and economic dimensions prove to be the most obstacles to the practice of women in sport activities". Other factors that

hinder the participation in sports in women are the customs and traditions of the communities and religious values, and the lack of awareness of sports and the potential barriers to women and exercise. There are also many social and cultural factors that also have an effect of the participation of sports among women". According to Dr. Abdul Ghani women consume their time and energy in the education of their children and interest in their husbands so that they no longer find time to exercise, and they lack the awareness of sport and its importance. He also stresses the negative role often played by men. Their lack of support for the practice of women in sport is, he argues, a direct cause of the reduction of the participation in sports activities. He also explained that the negative role of men has contributed greatly to the marginalization of the reality of women's sports and the lack of women's awareness of the important potential contribution of sport to their personal life.

In spite of the multiplicity of views, pros and cons of women's sport, it still receives broad public attention at all levels of local Arab and international levels. Despite the difficulties Arab women teams are still being created to participate in both Arab competitions and international competitions. However, while progress is being made on this front, a major question that still presents itself is the question of Arab women's absence from decision-making roles in sport both nationally and internationally?

Women in all communities represent a foundation upon which the building of the sound and healthy society stands, for they have an obvious impact in bringing up and caring for children, let alone that their role is considered one of the standards that reflect the development of the community. Although the woman's role used to be confined to "looking after the family," nevertheless, their role in many societies has developed in alignment with the development of the community and women have started to take part in the economic, political and social construction. They have started to play an effective role in various aspects of life and areas that used to be carried out by men only. Women have not confined themselves to traditional roles and fields, but they have had to struggle constantly to realize their rights in exercising sports and participating in different sports contests.

Sudanese women have participated in building their community, economically and politically, and adopted a positive role in various fields, striving to realize their physical and health rights and to demonstrate their potential by taking part in different sport competitions. So their role in sports has developed, as athletes, champions, administrators and leaders.

The role which exercise plays in health has been well documented. The significance of practicing sports appears in its impact on the human internal systems (digestive, respiratory, nervous, and blood circulation) which in turn leads to the improvement of functions' performance (digestion, respiration, food combustion, blood pumping and distribution, and the increase of senses sharpness and response). Indeed, it has been known since the ancient ages that practicing the sporting exercises regularly improves general health, increases the vitality and dynamics of human's body different systems. Accordingly, the human ability for giving and shouldering life's burdens increases.

Medicine has proved that sports are a protective medication for many chronic diseases; sports have become the first medical prescription because it activates the blood circulation, melts fats, and consequently helps in getting rid of obesity. In addition to this, it is the first factor behind elegancy, slenderness, beauty, and vitality, apart from its being a signal of peoples' sophistication and development which is based on scientific principles and proofs for exercising sports competitively and taking part in the championships.

In addition to physical benefits sport has many effective psychological benefits, the most prominent of which is that it protects the individual from psychological crisis resulting from tension, it can make the person feel psychologically relaxed. It also increases and builds self-esteem and confidence, especially if he or she suffers from lack of confidence, or competences. It cools down those who are nervous and reduces depression and frustration. Therefore, most athletes, sportsmen/women may tend to be less stressed than others by feeling more positive, happy, and energetic ,also we should not ignore that sports brings about positive psychological qualities and attributes such as responsibility, determination, discipline and courage (Hellison, 1998).

Regarding social benefits, it is clear that sports develops the social and communal attitudes and a number of values such as realism, fair play, sportsmanship (Gibbons & Weiss, 1995). Sports also brings people from different of walks of life and different social backgrounds to share similar interests, enhances the sense of belonging to the team and club, and it develops capacity, preparedness and provides opportunities of being involved into social activities which participates in building social cohesion, ties and values (Bailey, 2004).

Sports it is claimed, also helps people avoid many detrimental practices like drug-taking. It is also claimed to reduce crime, develop teamwork and

team-spirit and cooperation amongst community's individuals, to teaches respect, and even to lessen illiteracy. Studies have revealed that the inactive child will become an inactive adult (Raitakari & et al, 1994), and warned that neglecting of physical education in schools will create an idle generation who will become a big burden for the society at large. It has been pointed out that studies have also reached the conclusion that periods of physical education at schools participate in increasing the rate of people activity in the coming stages of their lives (Sallis & et al, 1997; Simonns-Morton, 1994; Trudeau, 1999).

For many of the above reasons the importance of exercising sports for women was enshrined in the recommendations of international conferences (Women's Sport International, 1994). So we, in Sudan, are in need of a national policy in women's sports, a policy which ascertains and defends the identity, values, and traditions of the community. We need a policy that promotes real participation and rights of the majority of women in health, stamina, safe movement as the community's ethics and values do not remain stagnant in today's progress, so the matter needs realistic solutions for women's participation, clothing, and facilities.

Nevertheless it might be argued that Sudanese women lack the culture and education that promote their participation in exercise and sports activities. The prevailing belief in many communities was that sports should be exercised by males only, whereas females should only look after the families which in turns makes their participation in sports very difficult. This belief has affected the inclinations and tendencies of both the girls and their families. Consequently, these trends have affected women's participation in sports and their achievements in competition. There are many wrong beliefs and misconceptions connected with woman's participation in sports. These have controlled girls and mothers' minds in many societies; they have believed that sports like gymnastics and athletics impact on some physiological aspects of a woman's body that affect her life as a woman, mother, and her embryo during the pregnancy period.

It is noticeable that most of the Sudanese families in big cities do not encourage their girls to practice sports activities due to traditions and different views of the importance of sport. These families think that the exercise of these sports might waste their girls' time, and they think it might negatively affect their academic attainment. Most of the families in the rural areas impose restrictions on their girls which prevent them from practicing sports activities due to traditions and customs. The families prevent their girls from undertaking any sports activity with or before male colleagues or before a male audience; they think if the females do so , they

will break the rule of modesty, which is an important female attribute in society. There is however less opposition to letting the females take part in some sports activities in a private place that keeps them unseen from the people's eyes.

Money can also play a big role- whether in cities or in countryside- in encouraging or discouraging females to exercise through sport. Whereas in cities there are a number of clubs and sports facilities, and youth centre's which in turn can be used by youth and students for exercising sports. In rural society, there are few clubs, or youth centre's, or sports facilities for undertaking sports activities. Accordingly, there are almost no places for participating in sports. Economic situations might play a big role in encouraging girls to practice sports activities. Wealthy families can afford to meet their girls' needs such as paying the clubs' subscription fees, or purchasing sports kit and clothing in spite of the opposition of some fanatical religious sects with a negative view towards females who undertake sports in Sudan. We cannot ignore this view and its obvious negative implications on female athletes in Sudan.

From the above, it is clear that a family's economic standard and awareness and the understanding of the parents for the significance of sports activities affects, one way or another, the trends of the boys and girls towards sports. This is what has encouraged the researcher to discuss these changes in an attempt to reach a new understanding of the social, economic, and cultural factors connected with trends in girls' participation in sport, and reconsidering the roles played by the youth institutions in raising awareness of females exercise and sports activities in the light of current social changes. Through these change we can reveal some problems associated with females practicing sports activities (family problems- practice problems- community's problems).

Table 1: Estimated Statistics provided by the Sudan Ministry of Youth and Sports for the numbers of those who participate in sport (males and females).

sports	total number of players	female's number	females' percentage in comparison with males
football	62885	120	2%
volleyball	5775	1730	30%
basketball	1643	245	15%
sailing	80	8	10%
hockey	207	62	30%
swimming	955	286	30%
equitation	1251	125	10%
weight-lifting	403	20	5%
wrestling	463	-----	-----
judo	265	8	3%
taikwando	6287	55	1%
karate	1919	19	1%
shooting	140	14	10%
Konfo	569	10	0.5%
table tennis	837	167	20%
Tennis	4080	1224	30%
cycling	378	38	1%
gymnastics(calisthenics)	470	188	40%
chess	2980	293	1%
squash	207	21	2%
Athletics(track& field)	1627	569	35%
Badminton	595	267	45%
boxing	282	62	3%
Disabled	289	86	30%

Ministry of Youth and Sports- Sudan, (2005)

Table 1 above provides data on the difference in participation levels between males and females in Sudan. To identify the causes that lead to the reluctance or the unwillingness of females to practice any form of physical activity, I looked at similar studies, which deal with such topics to review their objectives and methodologies and the methods used in reach their conclusions. I was able to find a number of these studies which were reviewed in their original context.

A number of the reasons that lead to the phenomenon of the reluctance of women to participate in physical activities were:

The lack of proper equipment impedes physical activity. No budgets for sports activities, and the lack of tools and uniforms due to poor economic and social climate. (Al Sayid Kadousi, 1976)

Environmental factors also have a big role to encourage women to participate in sport or not, Students that come from rural areas are more affected by some factors than those students from cities, as a product of the socialization process. Associated with the degree of aversion is the families' economic level. Students that come from middle class families with a good economic status experience less levels of aversion to sports than those from poorer families with a lower economic status. (Zo-Alnoon, 1997)

Society's perception of girls is not encouraging them to participate, Lack of the parents' interest in sports activities, the diffusion of the concepts and misconceptions about physical education among members of the community and parents in particular, are significant factors (Hind, 1985)

Most of the reasons cited by authors for reluctance included socio-demographic and psychological factors, and environmental, related to government policies. Also the lack of social support is the biggest major reason for the reluctance of women to participate in sport, and race and culture also have an impact on practice (Eyler & al., 2002).

A survey conducted in 2000 in the Canadian province of Alberta and that data was compared with previously collected data in 1981, 1982, 1992 and 1996 (Leslie, 2000) sought to identify obstacles to physical activity and whether the practice of sports differs in different activities and in different sectors in society The study found that the most important determinants of participation in physical activities included a rise in the material costs and the lack of sufficient time and the distance to places where physical activity can be practiced. It was also found that these determinants of practice affect every person, other than the degree of impact of gender (male, female), age and levels of income.

Of those surveyed, the desire among women to participate was greater than that in men. The desire to practice physical activity decreased in both sexes with age. In terms of participation the parameters were the costs of hardware and tools, then preoccupation with work and the admission fees to sports facilities, and finally the preoccupation with family and the crowdedness of places of practice.

The determinants of participation were classified into six groups namely awareness, accessibility and usability, personal reasons, costs, personal time and potential. In general it appears that material costs and personal reasons are the major determinants and they include entry fees and the costs of hardware and tools for practice as well as lack of personal ability to participate and lack of physical abilities. Accessibility and usability problems were in second place in terms of importance and included (crowded places of practice, poor maintenance, and safety and security factors.). Problems associated with the costs were of higher importance for those who wished to participate in physical activity (fitness) and recreational outdoor activities such as golf. Personal reasons were of higher importance to those who wished to participate in activities of the expressive, creative and cultural levels. The lack of physical abilities was of higher importance to those wishing to participate in collective sports activities.

The survey also recognized that the determinants have differing effects on different individuals, and vary often according to differences in age, sex, and income. Increasing physical limitations related to the capacity increased with age, while determinants of relevant costs of hardware, tools, and the entrance fees and transportation costs decreased with age.

From what has been reviewed, these studies, from a variety of social contexts addressed the reasons or obstacles that lead to the reluctance to exercise or refrain from physical activity. It can be noted that there are similarities among these studies. The majority of the studies relied on surveys and questionnaires as tools for data collection. Some of the differences that can be observed from these studies are the procedural aspects such as the number of respondents, ages, education levels and other distinctive demographic characteristics of the different groups. The researcher benefited from these studies in determining the objectives of the research but it is clear that the Sudanese context is rather different. Although some sources have considered women's position generally in the Sudan, little is known in relation to how female participants (and non-participants) themselves would describe what factors are important in influencing decisions to participate in sport.

The Motivation for the Study

The researcher, from her administrative position in the sports field- as first chairperson to the Badminton Sudanese Federation, and as a sports journalist- has experienced or observed many of the constraints and obstacles that impede the activation of women's role in sports in Sudan.

Above all, the researcher's participation and involvement in Women's Conferences on Sports in the Arab World and her participation in Arab and International courses on sports provided an opportunity to be acquainted with all constraints that impede her as a woman leader.

In general, the Sudanese community immensely suffers from the scarcity of woman leaders in sports fields specialized in sports management, and from sports practitioners. This in turn has forbidden them from receiving sufficient qualification in management and kept them away from the positions of decision-making.

The female leaders have been facing political, religious, and economic constraints, despite provisions of guaranteeing equality between males and females in Sudan Constitution. However, discrimination due to gender is dominating the process of appointing females in leadership positions.

Despite the gains and rights, the women have acquired throughout history, they are still marginalized in the projects of human development carried out the state; the woman is still not completely equal to man in the opportunities available on the basis of competence and capacity. Women are still lacking some rights, in general, and in sports in particular, and they are still away from leadership positions and decision-making institutions. Women in many parts of the world do not get the same opportunities the men get

Despite the existence of a political resolution in Sudan, which require the existence of woman in certain sports positions, these resolutions have not yet been put into effect and activated the way women have been looking forward to.

Methodological Issues

Why the Study is important

The importance of this study:

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first of its type in contemporary Sudan that investigates why girls / women do or do not participate in sport, and seeks to develop understanding of how we could increase the number of females practicing sports, and subsequently of those who participate in leadership positions and decision-making institutions.

It opens new horizons for similar studies on this topic/topics that get researchers viewpoints closer to developing practical solutions for this problem.

Participating in scientific planning to face and counter the constraints that threaten the role of Sudanese Women in taking charge of leadership positions in sports.

From the previous studies I have reviewed, I have dealt with the impediments, which can stand as an obstacle in increasing the number of females who exercise sports in a range of societies. It is noticeable that there are some similarities in many of those previous studies; many have been based on a descriptive approach as a means for collecting data. Even though there are differences, it is often simply in the procedures such as the size of sample, or the ages and education of respondents.

The researcher benefited from these previous studies in determining the research objectives for her own, selecting an appropriate scientific approach and means of data collection, to facilitate finding solutions for the problem. However because this is the first such study in modern day Sudan we have opted for an exploratory approach which will allow open collection of data rather than the use of closed questionnaires seeking restricted forms of information.

Methods

The core research question to be addressed was:

How do young women with a good level of education (secondary school or university) perceive and explain the opportunities and constraints affecting them in relation to sports participation?

The method adopted was to employ focus groups for detailed qualitative discussion. Focus groups are particularly useful for exploratory research. They require less time than a series of in-depth individual interviews and allow for the 'social development' of ideas as discussions develop among the group. There are dangers of course in relation to this approach since the interviewer needs to ensure that the discussion is not dominated by one or two confident or persistent individuals.

Five groups with a total of 30 students were selected, two from a secondary school (pupils aged 14-17) and two from the Faculty of Physical Education in Khartoum. The groups included young women who participated in sport and some who had participated in the past but no longer did so. The structure of the discussion was set in broad terms by the interviewer (see issues introduced below) but the respondents were encouraged to respond in an open manner. The meetings were recorded and themes which grew out of the discussion were analysed.

Constraints faced by the researcher:

Lunch or dinner was served during the session to help encourage participation. The interviewer provided a quick review of the reason for the focus group and asked the participants to provide open responses to the focus group questions/issues which were introduced.

I have faced some constraints and problems during the last 5 months. These constraints are that all the target groups were sitting examinations which were immediately followed by the annual holiday. Nevertheless, I managed to reach some of them through their families and some teachers. I met them in cafés and restaurants around Khartoum to interview them. The same happened with the female students of the Faculty of Physical Education, for they started their annual holiday which lasts for three months from February 2011). However, I managed, with some help from the faculty staff, to reach some of them. All that took more than 3 months.

Issues for the Focus Groups to address:

I selected key questions or issues for the five focus groups. I also took into consideration the need to differentiate some questions directed to the schoolgirls whose ages range from 14 to 17. I organised the research issues into five themes which are:

- Environment
- Social Upbringing and Support
- Personal Reasons
- Traditions and Customs
- Mass Media

1-Environment:

Are the sports facilities sufficient to allow you to participate in sports?

Does the distance between the pitch and accommodation have any impact on exercise of sports by girls?

Are there any ladies specialized sports fields / facilities?

Are the sports kits provided sufficient?

2- Social Upbringing and Social Support

Do you see any point of studying the physical education in schools, and are the periods and lessons allocated sufficient?

Is anyone of your family member exercises sports? If yes, does that affect your attitude towards exercising sports?

What is your family stance from woman exercising sports?

Are you afraid of the society's view towards the women athletes?

3-Personal Reasons and Motivations:

Do you have the right and sufficient time for exercising sports?

Do your family commitments impede you from exercising sports?

Are you more confident of yourself when you exercise sports despite the constraints?

What are your personal motivations behind exercising sports?

4-Traditions and Customs:

Sports exercise is a masculine attitude that does not suit women (it is a tough activity).

The exercise of sports might impede the girl from having a normal life and getting a family.

Wearing the sports costumes by women is something unacceptable.

5- Mass Media:

To what extent do the mass media handle the issues of women health?

The absence of data and information regarding the scientific practice of sports for realizing health benefits

Review of Findings

Through the discussion on the constraints, which impede girls from exercising sports, For most interviewees the main impediment was the physical environment. 28 female students out of 30 see that the lack of allocated places for girls for practising sports is a direct reason behind why they do not participate. The allocated time for men in facilities is more than the time allocated for females as as preference is given to me according to traditions and customs.

"man always finds the right time and place for exercises, but we do not find anything except suffering" (Focus Group Member B)

Moreover, many girls agree that the distance between the playgrounds and the accommodation is too great. Most of of the interviews cited the lack of sufficient money as another major obstacle that impedes them from practicing sports.

" my financial situations is the main constraint that prevents me from going to exercises on most days of the week." (Focus Group Member F)

One of the major factors is that the Sudanese society is conservative and still needs a lot of efforts and time to instil sports culture. 28 female students out of 30 pointed out to this point. 26 out of 30 female students cited social upbringing and social support factors as the second most important impediment to encouraging girls to participate in sport. However, the personal factors were the third most important set of factors (23 out of 30 pointed to that).

Lack of family support was also seen as an impediment. Interviewees also thought that time was not an impediment. Researchers attributed that to the effective management that the female students have, which they might have acquired it while they were students at university, or from the curricula of physical activity. However, the findings of many other studies points out to a different vision. For instance, there is a study that found out that time is main constraint (Kimm et al. 2006) that impede girls from practicing sports in three years during which there were consecutive studies for impediments. That study stated that for 69% of the study's sample (Canadian Institute for Physical Education and Lifestyle 1995) time is the major impediment that hinders girls from exercising sports and physical activity).

We can say that individuals in the study sample understand the importance of their family support in participation in sport. However, generally this support was very weak, and there were very few of the female students who received effective family support to participate in sport. According to the researcher, this is because the community has not yet understood the important role the sports play in physical, psychological, and social health for girls. This mirrors the opinion of researchers in other similar studies such as Alburwani et al. (2001) who suggest that the low standard of physical activity in Oman's schools is due to the lack of family interest in encouraging children. A study by the Committee of Community Protection Services (2009) also concluded that the individuals who got social and family support are physically more active rather than those who received less support.

Traditions and Customs:

The majority of the study sample thinks that traditions and customs have represented a major impediment against women in exercising sports because many local communities in Sudan still believe that the practice of sports by girls is considered shameful and a blemish on their reputation. This belief has prevailed in many districts, especially in the rural areas,

"My brothers and parents do not look at the girls practicing sports positive land they call them names and I am afraid to be like that in the eye of the community ... our community is very conservative and I refuse to be odd" (Focus Group Member F).

"I live in a forest and jungle of old traditions and customs, and I do have to surrender to its lions the men and I do not have any other way, except to obey". (Focus Group Member M)

"To exercise sports means getting out of the family and community rules, and laws, and I love to practice it when I get the society and family's agreement". (Focus Group Member K)

A few members of the focus group thought that the practice of sports was not appropriate for a woman as women are delicate and refined human beings and sports are physically tough. Some argued that sports would affect woman physically and socially so that they would not have a normal life when it comes to marriage, reproduction and family. Typical remarks here included:

"I do not love to exercise sports because it is going to be an obstacle for me in marriage and family formation." (Focus Group Member M)

"I hate being called by a boy's name like Mohammed, and when our neighbours children call me Mohammed, I feel I am like men, so I prefer to keep away from sport despite my love of it. many girls who practice sport do not get a chance to marry and form a family, and I love to have a normal and natural life". (Focus Group Member H)

Some of the participants in the focus groups thus see sports as a masculine activity which does not suit women.

Although there are many communities which do not encourage their members to practice sports, some of them , although they are few, do give encouragement to women to practice sports.

"I feel proud when I hear the words of encouragement from my relatives and neighbours when I am on my way to exercise my favourite game". (Focus Group Member S)

"my father and brothers exercised sports and they made me love it. Therefore it was natural to get encouragement from them". (Focus Group Member A)

There are some girls who think that the practice of sports is very important, but they have some reservations, especially towards the community and think that more should be done to change people's attitudes, and to provide more private locations.

"Sports is very important but I practice and exercise it conservatively and away from the eyes of the intruders because my society is very conservative, and I do not want to lose my cause and the woman's cause in general in getting their rights to be active and effective individuals in the community. So whenever there is a private place for woman, this will be good and positive (Focus Group Member S)."

Upbringing and Social Support:

Most of the participants in the focus groups felt that upbringing and social support from other groups played a big role in sport participation in particular through their existence in schools in the subject of physical education as a major subject. This, along with family encouragement which most of them are lacking, is seen as very important

"The school provides me with my financial and morale needs to practice sports because it allocates some time for sports and provides teachers specialized in physical education. And I think one session (period) per week is not enough, we need more". (Focus Group Member N)

"the subject of physical education gives energy and appetite in reviewing my lesson; I find a big joy and interest in reviewing more lessons. So to me it is as important as the other subjects. (Focus Group Member A)

Some participants in the focus groups see that the family plays a major role in encouraging them to practice sports. Although some participants agree with this view, the dominant opinion is that most families are not interested in sport because they think it is luxury and a waste of time.

"my family do not encourage me to exercise sports because they think it conflicts with my study time." (Focus Group Member G)

" only my father encourages me, while my mother and my siblings do not because they think it is detrimental to my feminine role." (Focus Group Member B)

" if I exercise sports that will embarrass my family because they are conservative." (Focus Group Member S)

Environment:

Environment has the major problem that impedes the sports activity; it is the lack of infrastructure and insufficient money for purchasing the kit and equipment. The majority of the focus groups think that the facilities, pitches, and playground are not available. And even those that are available will be used and allocated for men.

the playgrounds are not available, and even the available ones are used by men ... the man does not give the right opportunity for exercising sports because they take up most of the week's days on the only one playground in the city (Focus Group Member A).

"the far distance between our house and the playground prevents me from practicing sports and my family refuses the idea of letting me go alone. (Focus Group Member K).

"my family do not have the right money for buying the sports equipment, nor the money that enables me to and from the playground, therefore I am unable to exercise my favourite sports" (Similar comments by Focus Group Members F, H and S).

The majority of the sports participants complain about the lack of playgrounds and equipment. A few think that they do not exercise sports due to the lack of female coaches, as most the coaches in clubs and universities are males.

"I am interested to exercise sports if there is a female coach because if the coach is a man, I will be conservative and train as required."

"my family refuses the idea of my being coached by a male coach. Therefore, female coaches are very important in our continuation for sports". (Focus Group Member H).

For the majority of the target individuals within the focus group money is an important factor in participation in sport, without which it is very difficult to keep on exercising sports.

"I can not afford buying the sports' equipment, and I think it is a problem that is facing many other women" (Focus Group Member S).

"the non-availability of equipment is a direct reason behind our refrain from sports. My family is concerned with and interested in sports and they encourage me to exercise it, but they do not have the right money that enables me to purchase neither sports uniform, nor equipment." (Focus Group Member K)

Few participants see that exercising sports can be fulfilled without the availability of equipment because there are other games that do not need equipment.

"I do not think that not having a racket or a ball prevents me from exercising sports. It is possible that I can participate in environmental games that do not cost me money". (Focus Group Member A).

"There are games which do not require any equipment to practice them such as Judo, Taekwondo, and some other ones." (Focus Group Member S).

Personal Motives:

The majority of participants in discussion think that some personal aspects and elements are major factors in exercising sports if they are available. One of these factors is that there is not enough time to participate in sports activities. Above all, these activities clash with some family duties and commitments. Most participants see that their personal motives are behind why they exercise sports as sports; it is just a matter of self-satisfaction in the first place.

"Sudanese community is strongly integrated and consolidated, but simultaneously is a complimentary society and does not acknowledge privacy, so we do not have enough time for exercising sports under such circumstances". (Similar responses by Focus Group Members S, F, N).

"my family responsibilities do not allow me to exercise sports, because I am a housewife responsible for my kids. Whenever, I have time, I do not refrain from exercising sports, at least to keep my body fit and elegant." (Focus Group Member F).

N says " I do not have a problem with adjusting my family responsibilities with my sports exercises. Sports is a part of my family priorities'.

Self-confidence is very important in the life of athletes. Therefore a number of participants see that practicing sports gives them extra-confidence.

"our confidence increases when we exercise sports. The feeling that we are doing something good increases our confidence". (Similar responses by Focus Group Members R,K, A).

"sports keeps our body elegant, and consequently increases our confidence. We keep exercising sports constantly, despite our family and work responsibilities." (Similar responses by Focus Group Members S, N).

Few participants in the focus group see that exercising sports decreases their self-confidence, especially when they wear sports uniform or playing in front of men, because they think their appearance might look unacceptable.

"I prefer not to exercise sports in front of men, as my appearance in a sports' uniform looks odd and embarrassing." (Focus Group Member W)

"I do not wear sports' uniform in front of elegant girls because am obese. I refrain from exercising sports so as not to hurt my feelings."

The personal motives vary among the focus group participants. While the majority think that they exercise sports for the sake of maintaining their health, elegance, gracefulness, self-satisfaction, and winning championships, the minority sees that exercising sports is a required social protocol, especially amongst the girls of the wealthy families.

"I exercise sports as a complementary activity for my social status. I am from a family which considers exercising sports is a very important part of their image in front of the sophisticated community." (Focus Group Member Y)

Media:

The media is considered as an important and direct factor in sports, and it plays a big role in it. The under-developed communities suffer from the weakness of media, especially in the field of women sports. The media in such communities neglect the role of women sports and contributes a lot in not giving the due importance of women's sports. The majority of participants in the focus groups see that the media play a big role in non-disseminating the sports culture regarding women.

"the media is, generally not concerned with women's cause, in general , and their exercising sports in particular. And we do not think the programs presented on and by the media, though little are tackling the issue of the importance of sports for women. (Similar responses by Focus Group Members H, K).

"information offered on the media doesn't give health benefits to women."
(Focus Group Member A)

S, R, and M say " the absence of sports' information on the media is direct reason behind the reason why many women do no exercise sports. The media have no role in educating families on the significance of sports."

Few participants think that the TV channels do not present the good examples, which in turn leads many women to refrain from exercising sports.

"we need the media to present the experiences of women athletes and international female champions so as to good examples for other female and to motivate many of them to exercise sports. (Focus Group Member Y)

"the media give a lot care and interest in presenting men's sports' activities and their champions. Women need the media to present good examples, which in turn contribute in creating awareness on the importance of women's sports.

The Focus Group whose Members have Participated in Sport and Continue to Do So:

Opinions and viewpoints in this group of the female students of the Faculty of Physical Education have been, to a big extent, similar. However, they all agreed on one point; their motivations on sports make them accept all the bad conditions and situations within which sports are exercised. To them, the constraints are:

No sufficient money and fund for purchasing sports kits and costumes.

Lack of participations in internal and external contests

Lack of media coverage which reflects their activities

The group that have not practiced sports and gave up:

This group ensured that they found themselves exercise sports inside the faculty because of the score and percentage they got in Sudan Certificate Examinations;

To them the constraints are as follows:

They have not been interested in joining this faculty. They see that they exercise sports only inside the faculty, as they are some female coaches available. However, for them, they do not exercise it outside because the coaches are males.

The majority of this students think that traditions do not allow them to exercise sports outside the university.

They think the athletic girl get more delayed in marriage than that who do not exercise sports(men are not interested in athletic girls because they muscular and get defaced(as they think)

To them exercising sports conflicts with the academic attainment.

The responses with the strongest agreement to the question, “What would help you to become more active?” were:

Low cost activities

Information about the activities available in the community

Drop in options

Not being forced by parents or other to participate

Incentive to participate

The responses with the strongest agreement to the question, “What would attract you to participate in sport?” were:

Respectful, open-minded, helpful, and flexible teachers and parents.

Better showers/change rooms (e.g., cleaner, more space)

Assessment strategies based on effort and personal improvement, not things like the ‘beep’ test

Schedule for the last block of the day so they don’t have to sit through school being sweaty

More female Physical Education teachers

The responses with the strongest agreement to the question, “What’s stopping you from being active?” were:

Being unable to make it to community sport practices because of transportation difficulties

Expensive equipments and lack of activity fees

Conflicts with academic goals/responsibilities

The responses with the strongest agreement to the question, “What are the main reasons for not participating sport?” were:

Takes time away from academics

Would rather do Physical Education outside of school hours

sport is not a priority for parents, academics is their priority.

Conclusions and Recommendation

The table below summarises the main points developed from my focus groups. It identifies which types of organisations to target in order to influence policy. Obviously one person cannot do these things alone. However these actions can form the foundation for a programme of activities promoted by for example a women in sport commission or a similar body. Having used the MEMOS project to identify these key needs, the next major task is to develop a strategy for building alliances with appropriate bodies and individuals in education, in government, in communities, in sports clubs and federations, in women’s organisations and in the media..

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS	ACTION BY STAKEHOLDERS
Tradition and Customs		
Family (and community's) reluctance to support girls / women's participation. The negative image of women in sport.	Need to promote positive image of women, physical activity, sport and health	Government department responsible for Health, and for Education to be lobbied to develop positive image of women and exercise
Lack of awareness of benefits of sport. Ignorance in terms of assuming sport is bad for women's physiology	Incorporate the sport and health message into school biology curriculum, and into health education initiatives.	
Sport is seen as competing with academic activities	Promotion of the place of physical education in the school and university curriculum for men and women	
Physical Environment, Equipment and Facilities		
Lack of local facilities (long travel distances)	Provision of additional facilities and / or provision of safe travel to sports facilities	Seek to provide 'safe travel' strategies or subsidised transport for women travelling to and from facilities.
Financial cost of / lack of equipment	Promotion of low equipment cost activities. Provision of equipment loan systems in sports clubs and schools.	Lobby national federations and their clubs, and schools.
Use of facilities dominated by men	Development of advice and guidelines to promote fairer access patterns.	Lobby national federations to develop guidance for local providers to promote more equitable access.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS	ACTION BY STAKEHOLDERS
Organisational Changes		
Lack of female coaches	Employing the female graduates of the Faculty of Physical Education as coaches at the universities, and then following up their qualification through postgraduate programs	Lobbying university authorities
Girls feeling uncomfortable in sport	Preparation of the atmospheres of exercising physical activities at girls' campuses and boarding schools	Make providers aware of girls' / women's perceptions and in particular those things which make women comfortable or uncomfortable in sporting and exercise environments
Lack of interest or action on the part of Sports Federations and Clubs in recruiting women.	<p>Activation of the role of women sports' federation in disseminating and conveying the culture of sports to women</p> <p>Organization of sports programs in collaboration with the civil society organizations and the NGOs which are concerned with women.</p> <p>Activation of the role of Women Sports Union in encouraging girls at schools and universities to exercise sports</p>	<p>Lobbying the women's sports organisations to act.</p> <p>Running awareness campaigns for organisations serving women's interests</p>

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS	ACTION BY STAKEHOLDERS
Media		
Lack of positive media coverage	Setting special media programs on women's sports activities to reflect the importance of sports for women	Lobbying the media to develop programmes that focus on the contribution which sport can make to women's lives and for the benefit fo the wider community

Abstract

This study comes into five chapters. Chapter one tackles and discusses the study problem and its objectives. It includes the introduction in which the researcher describes the history of Sudanese women's sports, and the history of their participations in the Olympic Games. The chapter includes, as well, the study problem, its importance and objectives, which aim at exploring the constraints facing woman's participation in sport. It also explains the study procedures, which include the research community represented by schoolgirls and students of the college of Physical Education. The researcher has chosen 30 female students who formed 5 focus groups from the students mentioned earlier, whose ages ranging between 14-17 years.

The researcher adopted and followed an exploratory research methodology using focus groups as the main data collection tool.

Chapter 2 includes the theoretical framework and literature review and it deals with the following subtitles:

- environment
- social upbringing and support
- Traditions and customs
- media
- Personal aspects

Chapter 3 discusses the study problem, study procedures, methodology adopted, and the ways of selecting samples

Chapter 4 includes the presentation and discussion of the research findings, which reveal that financial disabilities, infrastructure, traditions and customs are the major constraints and obstacles that impede women from exercising sports.

Chapter 5 concludes with the financial capabilities factors, non-availability of playgrounds and family understanding to sports' importance are major factor behind the abstention and refrain of woman from exercising sports. The other factors are connected with community and the good example in the media. All these factors are all contributing to why women in Sudan do not take part in sports in big numbers.

Chapter 5 ends up with the recommendations, the most prominent and remarkable of which are :

- activate the school's role and incorporating physical education subject into the curriculum,
- revival of environmental games to solve the problem of poor families incapability,
- recruitment of female instructors of physical education in schools and clubs,
- activating the role of media in educating families and community on the significance of sports exercising for women.

Appendix 1

Focus Groups

March 13, 2011 – Faculty of Physical Education (Sudan Technology and Science University) (group A)

March 15, 2011 – Faculty of Physical Education (Sudan Technology and Science University.(group B)

March 20, 2011 – Faculty of Physical Education (Sudan Technology and Science University.(group C)

March 29, 2011 Ibn Baydab Secondary School (Khartoum) (Group D).

May 19, 2011 Al Jeraif west secondary school (Khartoum) (Group E).

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