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## Influence of Globalization and Urbanization on the Structure of Food Systems in Greater Khartoum, Sudan

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**Abstract:** The structure and dynamics of the food system in Greater Khartoum have gone through massive changes as a result of the processes of urbanization and globalization made headway especially during the early nineties which witnessed the oil boom in Sudan. Revenue from oil trade stimulated the economy and opened the Sudan to the energetic forces of globalization. However, it is unfortunate that globalization and urbanization took their course in an ill-advised and amorphous economic system and an ailing economic performance with widespread corruption and favouritism. The ultimate result was the widening of income gap putting more burdens on the poor segments of society who can aspire only for the bare minimum. To what extent these processes have influenced the food system in Greater Khartoum is embedded in the mutual interplay of many factors which can be conceptually framed in the form of a equidistant triangle whose sides represent, respectively, food availability, food affordability and food accessibility. It is assumed that any shifts in the dimensions of any one of these sides can lead to distortions in the form of the triangle. Many of the inherent negative factors are highly related to the prevalent political and economic systems.

**Keywords:** Greater Khartoum, urbanization and globalization, food systems.

**المستخلص:** ساهمت عمليات العولمة والتحضر التي عاشتها الخرطوم الكبرى خاصة اثناء تسعينيات القرن الماضي في احداث تغيرات عديدة في بنية وديناميات نظم الغذاء وسط سكان المدينة. تزامنت هذه العمليات بصورة خاصة مع الطفرة الاقتصادية التي صاحبت دخول النفط كأهم مكون في الاقتصاد مما ادى الى افتتاح السودان بصورة اكبر على المؤثرات العالمية. لكن ما يؤخذ على هذه الطفرة الاقتصادية انها قد تمت في مناخ اقتصادي يعززه التخطيط مما ادى الى انتشار ظواهر الفساد و المحسوبية. نتيجة لذلك اتسعت الفجوة بين مداخيل السكان في الخرطوم الكبرى والتي وقعت آثارها الكارثية خاصة على فقراء المدينة الذين أصبحوا لا يستطيعون تغطية الا جزء اليسير من احتياجاتهم الغذائية. هذا وبما ان هذه التغيرات عديدة وترتبط بها العديد من العمليات والعمليات ذات الصلة بالاقتصاد السياسي والابيولوجيا السياسية فقد تمت صياغتها مفهومياً في شكل مثلك متساوي الاصلانع تمثل اضلاعه على التتابع وفرة الغذاء والمقدرة على الحصول عليه وتتوفر المدخل على الحصول عليه بحيث ان اي تغيير في العوامل التي تدرج تحت كل حالة م الحالات الثلاثة يؤدي الى تشويه في شكل المثلث مما يعني وجود خلل ما في نظام الغذاء.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** الخرطوم الكبرى، العولمة والتحضر، نظم الغذاء

### 1. Introduction:

Because of the importance of food for human existence, and driven by the greater than ever food crisis in many parts of the world, the analysis of global and local food systems has become a central theme in the agenda of a wide range of disciplines. Thus, it is not surprising that geographers are in the forefront in food research. This has tempted the International Geographical Union to approve in 1984 the formation of a Study Group on Famine and Food

Crisis Management. Since then, members of this Group continued to explore and investigate into a wide range of economic, environmental and social diagnostics related to food in different parts of the world. The food system is a multi-faceted theme which embraces the operation of a wide range of economic and social factors which are very difficult to put within a single conceptual framework. Two of these factors are globalization and urbanization. However, it needs emphasizing at the

outset that globalization and urbanization are two processes that reinforce and fuel each other and their combined and mutual operation can influence the local forces that shape the food system.

Although the shaping of component parts of the food system in Khartoum is a reflection of many structural problems, the mutual interplay of the processes of globalization and urbanization in particular has played a decisive role. The population of Greater Khartoum (Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman) is increasingly urbanized mainly as a result of internal displacement. On the other hand, the path of liberal economy followed by the government has contributed to integrate the Sudan in world markets. As a result, food tastes and preferences and dietary habits started to dramatically change leading to imbalances in availability, affordability and accessibility of food.

## **2. Globalization and urbanization**

A detailed review of relevant literature reveals considerable variations in the definition of globalization. Although the term had its origins in commerce, it started to acquire many other notions that made its identity very fluid. Regardless, it can be ascertained that globalization together with urbanization are exercising pronounced changes in the structure of the food system. This is natural, because all human systems, including the food system, are very sensitive to changes in external influences and autonomous aspirations. In the past, the food system of a certain community was largely influenced by local drives. But in a rapidly globalizing world, like that of today, things have necessarily changed.

Urbanization in Greater Khartoum is a topic which needs to be better understood in order to address issues of the urban food system. Throughout

the last two decades of the last century, Khartoum continued to receive a growing number of people mainly those who are displaced from rural areas because of civil strife and deterioration of the ecological setting which are, in end effect, an indication of the uncaring attitude of governments towards rural areas. This uncontrolled flow of immigrants in Greater Khartoum did not facilitate conducting an accurate estimation of population. Thus, estimates of population vary widely. For example, the UNDATA (2015) estimates that the population of Greater Khartoum increased from 300.000 in 1956 to 5.129 million, the larger part of them being displaced persons. This differs from the estimates of World Population Review in 2016 which puts the population of Greater Khartoum between 6 million and 7 million (World Population Review, Sudan Population). Added to this, and according to UNHCR (2014), there are about 80,000 refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries, mainly from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Chad, in addition to thousands of Syrians and Egyptians who migrated recently into the capital. The salient point about this population increase to this dramatic level is that it has occurred in a “rapid and unorganized and sometimes unauthorized” manner (Eltayib, 2003). However, the course of events of this increase did not proceed without consequences. It generated rapid changes in the spatial extent of the city as well as changes in the lifestyles of population. The inhabited area of Greater Khartoum jumped from nearly 17 km<sup>2</sup> in 1956 to about 1250 Km<sup>2</sup> in 2000 (El-Bushra, 2005) and is projected to increase. In addition, the new urban setting has forced the new comers to change their traditional rural styles and switch to urban ones because the city is

obviously not a place for agriculture-based rural livelihoods. This change is clearly reflected in the major elements of the urban food system, especially dietary behaviour, food procurement methods and food processing in addition to changes in distribution and marketing of food itself.

### **3. Dynamics of the food system**

As defined by Erickson (2010), the food system is “a set of activities ranging from production through to consumption”. This is obviously a broad definition. It denotes that a well-functioning system is one that warrants a satisfying level of availability, affordability and accessibility of food”. To ensure the realization of these three elements, food must be viewed as an intrinsic component of the geographical, economic, social and political landscape of cities.

The impact of globalization and urbanization on the food system manifests itself in all sorts of ways. This is the reason why it is difficult to build up a conceptual framework which embodies all its inherent components. Nevertheless, it is not impossible to draw a general outline which might unravel some of the influences which command leverage on the food system in Greater Khartoum.

The primary forces behind the food system and the changes which it endures can be divided into two broad categories: 1) disparate factors which are partly embedded in the economic system; 2) drives which are embedded in the social system, bearing in mind the reciprocal relationships between the two.

In developing countries, as elsewhere, cities are considered the drive engines of economic growth. Greater Khartoum as capital of the country preserved a traditional character not very much affected by external

influences. Its major commercial activities were mainly petty trading and limited export of primary agricultural products and the import of manufactured goods, transport equipment, medicines and chemicals. Food was available and affordable to the majority of urban dwellers and is offered in small traditional markets and outlets. Restaurants, cafeterias and street food were very few and so were their clients. Eating outside homes was unexpected. However, with the advent of the early seventies of the previous century, the economy in Sudan started to follow a more open free and liberal path in response to the wave of globalization. City dwellers became more exposed to external influences of demands as aspirations among urban dwellers started to rise. In response, the market expanded, gradually at the beginning but massively as time passed by. As a result, class-consciousness started to manifest itself in various forms. These progressing changes left their mark on the food system in Greater Khartoum. The small traditional food markets which used to be the traditional place for collecting household food requirements before the pace of urbanization has gained momentum has lost place and importance to the supermarkets and malls. Before the seventies of the previous century, it was not unusual to find only three or four groceries located on a long stretch of a main road which serve the provision of food items. Now, supermarkets have widely replaced the traditional groceries. They specialize in packed and processed foods, which are mostly imported, in addition to fresh and frozen items. The supermarket became the normal food outlet and traditional groceries are gradually disappearing from the scene. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that supermarkets, irrespective of the

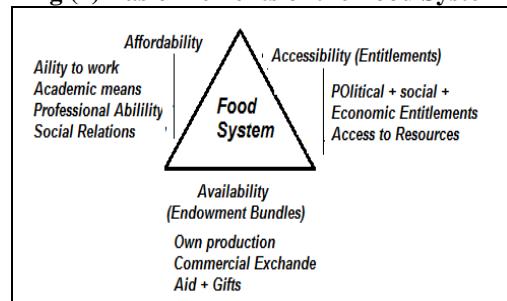
high prices of the items they offer, have introduced significant improvements in the food system with regard to quality and safety. But this should not mask the fact that the food they offer is not always accessible to all city dwellers. Generalizations to this effect may be misleading because of the distinct income inequalities among the population. In fact, urban poverty in Greater Khartoum is high and a significant proportion of the population is under the nutrition-based poverty line. According to a World Bank analysis of the National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS) of 2009, 26.5% of the population of Greater Khartoum live below the poverty line. Based on World Bank reports, this rate has soared since then because; as urbanization and displacement precede the numbers of urban poor will continue to increase.

The significant increase in the proportion of people under the nutritional based poverty-line is largely related to the influx of stressed rural groups who have sought seek sanctuary in the city or those who are in search for better and more paying opportunities after they lost their economic assets in rural areas. These social disparities drove Pantuliano et al. (2011) to describe Khartoum as "a patchwork of wealth and poverty". The larger part of these displaced groups lives in peripheral areas of the city with no access to basic amenities and decent living. Scarcity of safe water, lack of sanitation facilities and sanitary practices symbolize the unhealthy living conditions. In addition, the meagre incomes of the poor do not allow them entertain except the least of urban means such as refrigerators in which they can store food. The food of these groups, unlike that of affluent ones, is confined in most cases to grounded staple grains which are prepared in different traditional forms

or tomato mixed with peanuts or, in the best situations, a dish of *foul masri* (flava beans).

**4. Dynamics of availability, affordability and accessibility of food:** The trio availability, affordability and accessibility are the three forces that determine the food system and vulnerability of a person to food (Sen, 1981.,Watts et al.1993, Bakhit, 1994). The three are closely interlinked and the level of each one of them is determined by the interplay of social, economic and political factors. To simplify the complexity inherent in the point at issue, the three conditions can be represented graphically in the form of an equidistant triangle as shown in Fig (1).

**Fig (1) Basic Elements of the Food System**



In this figure, one side represents the state of food availability, the second side the level of accessibility and the third the level of affordability. As represented, certain attributes are ascribed to each case to define the areas of concern pertaining to it. The endowment bundles, as outlined in the figure, are the diverse potential sources which ensure whether food is available or not. The accessibility side represents the range and level of social, political and economic entitlements entertained by the individual or group. Both are very decisive in drawing the available resources when needed. In addition, food affordability depends to a large extent on the level and range of food availability and accessibility. It depends mainly on the abilities possessed by the individual or group which can be

exchanged in the market against acquisition of food if access to food is guaranteed and protected.

In a balanced food system of a person or a certain group, the three sides of the triangle are supposed to be equilateral. However, this is the ideal case which cannot always be attained, because the involved factors and processes in availability, affordability and accessibility are subject to various changes which can distort or upset the equidistant form of the triangle. Based on Fig. (1), these three elements can be combined in various forms whereby each combination leads to a specific food condition:

- 1) *Food is available, affordable and accessible = Ideal welfare case where all conditions are fulfilled.*
- 2) *Food is available but neither affordable nor accessible to many = this is the typical case which prevails during acute famine*
- 3) *Food is available and accessible, but not affordable = this is a case where poverty prevails*
- 4) *Food is affordable and accessible but is not available = this mostly happen when there food embargo as might happen during war time.*

From this categorization, it can be deduced that food availability is not always the guiding prerequisite in a healthy food system. As pointed out by Sen (19810) and Watts et al.(1993), failure of entitlements which in most cases throw its shadows on affordability is the criteria which should be given due consideration in any discourse over food poverty

The above framework helps to loosen to some extent the complexity inherent in the state and dynamics of the food system in Khartoum. Within this context, it is important to shed light and scrutinize how people in the city manage to obtain their survival needs, notably food and income. In general

terms, acquisition of food in terms of quantity and quality in the city is governed by the operation of many forces, most important of which are income level and food prices. But these forces cannot be properly diagnosed without reference to the prevailing state and performance of the economy which provide for employment opportunities and, consequently, influence the social map in the city. In this respect, it cannot be evaded to consider availability, affordability and accessibility of food in Greater Khartoum as one important manifestation of the prevailing political economy and political ecology in the city.

Although many economic problems partly inherited from previous decades, the economy of Sudan, since 1991, has been showing symptoms of degenerating performance as indicated by World Bank indices (Table 1)

It is not necessary to overemphasize the causes behind this deterioration. They are elaborated in many publications (Champers, 1995, El Battani et al, 1998, Abusin, 2005, Abdalla, 2008, Assal, 2008). Nevertheless, the undisputable fact remains that the control institutions in the government in Greater Khartoum were not wise enough to arrange for the integration and accommodation of the displaced persons in the city. All the same, one of the many repercussions of this uncaring attitude is the growing unorganized presence of the displaced groups in and around the city, a condition which widened the social gap between the wealthy and the poor.

Irrespective of irregularities in its equitable distribution and acquisition, food, as considered in gross terms, is available in Greater Khartoum. However, as far as food affordability and accessibility are concerned, distinct patterns emerge.

**Table (1): Economic Indicators**

	2005	2010	2013	2014
GDP	2652.5	65634.1	66480.7	73815.4
GDP Growth %	7.5	3.5	3.3	3.1
Inflation%	8.5	13.2	30.0	36.9
Export growth % of GDP	0.4	5.1	2.9	3
Import Growth % of GDP	8.2	6.8	63.8	- 4.0

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2015, UNDP, Human Development Report 2014.

In general terms, the socio-economic status of urban residents determines to a large extent affordability and accessibility to food. Following customary categorization, residents in Khartoum can be divided into three socio-economic groups namely; the wealthy, the middle class and poor, with due consideration that each group can demonstrate subdivisions. However, the social system is not a static entity. On the contrary, its structure exhibits active mobility in the course of real life. Indigenous social, economic and political opportunities, whatever their origin may be may wind up pushing a person either up in the social ladder or down to the lower category. This fluidal dynamism in social categorization is undisguisedly noticeable in Khartoum. One can quote many examples of persons who were once at the base of the social ladder and suddenly became among the top category.

One of the indicators of the social status of a resident in Greater Khartoum is the level of expenditure on food. Unfortunately, there is no quantitative data to this effect which would permit scrutiny of the behaviour of each group in the social ladder. However, there is no doubt that expenditure on food reflects to a large extent the level of affordability. The food system of the wealthy socio-economic group would logically be the

most better off among urban residents. The origins of wealth of this group are diverse. They include the traditional wealthy families who made their fortune from legitimate commercial activities after independence and continued to be so until they were devitalized by the successive military regimes in Sudan. The result was that part of them left the Sudan to continue business elsewhere and another part remained inside in the shadow of the economy. The traditional wealthy group was replaced by the “new rich” who were not the offspring of the old but the ones who climbed up suddenly assisted herewith by widespread corruption and favouritism. These constitute now a small group who possess and control power and, hence, the major economic assets in the country and are composed of a mixture of prestigious ministerial and constitutional personnel of the governing body, in addition to those who have recently accrued political capital and functions. Their preferred living places are mostly the affluent quarters in Greater Khartoum, a symbol of their higher economic and social status. Supermarkets and malls are their preferred shopping places for food and drinks, but not the popular markets visited by the ordinary people. No wonder, they can afford the high prices of these places without straining their assets and budgets. Usually, the expenditure habits of this affluent group are neither affected by economic deterioration, nor by the lifting of food subsidies and not even by currency devaluation or inflation.

Until the eighties, Greater Khartoum had had a thriving middle class which was composed mainly of high level bureaucrats, senior military, educated professionals, salaried middle- level and junior

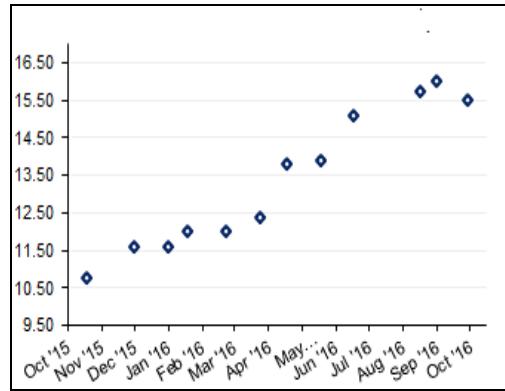
government employees, traders and entrepreneurs. This was at a time when the economy of the country, though small in magnitude, was cautiously manipulated and administered to secure against risks of inflation and corruption which might threaten survival. Under these circumstances, the middle class used to lead easy life. The salaries were sufficient enough to ensure covering their basic needs. Food, the most important basic need, was at that time available, affordable and accessible to all, irrespective of class.

However, with the advent of the nineties, things in the Sudan as a whole began to change in response to the oil boom. In the following two decades, Sudan became more open to the forces of globalization.

The economy expanded vigorously in a short time. In consequence, the middle class expanded and prospered. But this prosperity did not continue for long. Under failing government policies, corruption and accentuation of internal strife, economy started to recede in a speeding spiral.

However, the heaviest shock to the economy of Sudan correlates significantly with the cessation of South Sudan in 2011, whereby the government in Khartoum faced a loss of about 75% of revenue from the export of oil. In consequence, a steady depreciation of the national currency was put in gear (Fig. 1), The Sudanese Pound is now (December, 2016) trading at 17 -19 SDG to the Dollar on the black market.

**Fig.(2): Progression of the trading of Sudanese Pound to the Dollar in Black Market in Khartoum**



Source: world Economic Forum, October, 2016  
 In addition, inflation rate spiralled up steadily every month and every year as shown in Table ( 2).

**Table (2): Progression of Inflation Rate in Sudan**

Y ea r	20 00	20 01	20 02	20 03	20 04	20 05	20 06
Ra te	10	10	9. 2	8. 8	9.	9	9
Y ea r	20 07	20 08	20 09	20 10	20 11	20 12	20 13
Ra te	8	16	11 .2	11 .8	18	31 .9	25

Source: CIA World Factbook.

All these factors and processes led to the escalation of cost of living, especially in matters related to food. A recent quick survey of wholesale prices of some food items after the recent lifting of subsidies (December, 2016) are shown in Table (3).

**Table (3): Percentage of Rise in Price of Some Food Items (December, 2016)**

Item	% Rise
Sugar	<b>12%</b>
Cooking Oil	<b>19%</b>
Lentils	<b>20%</b>
Tomato Paste	<b>17%</b>
Noodles	<b>15%</b>
Foul	<b>16%</b>
Rice	<b>11%</b>

Source: Field Survey (December, 2016)

The first group to endure and suffer from these changes was the middle class. The Depreciation of currency and rising inflation in addition to the rise in food prices impacted heavily their previous customary livelihoods. The rising food prices started to swallow the larger part of their incomes and they were forced to switch to a-low-cost consumption behaviour. Meals were reduced to only two and sometimes restricted to the minimum quantity and quality. In addition, new forms of food habits began to emerge among this class. They became regular clients of street vendors for their meals. This demand spurred the growth of many corners in Greater Khartoum where sandwiches and *foul* dishes are offered. The income constraints drove many to resort to native foods otherwise prevalent only in rural areas. These vendors are now forcibly replacing the customary lunch or dinner which people used in the past to take at home. It is obvious now that under the stress of an ailing economy, the middle class will be squeezed still further. Statistics aside, the majority of what was once a middle class in Khartoum, are now below nutritional-poverty level joining, herewith, the ranks of the poor. In fact, the middle class in Greater Khartoum is on the way of being eliminated. This means that only two social groups, namely the wealthy and the poor, will dominate the scene in the city.

Notwithstanding the growing number of the “new poor”, poverty in Greater Khartoum prevails mainly among the displaced people. Their sudden influx in the city is relatively recent and goes back to the 1980s. Their arrival is responsible for the soaring increase in population and the complications that followed. The majority of the displaced persons live now in more than 100 uncontrolled squatter settlements

around the conurbation (Ahmed, et al, 1995). The problem is that the displacement of these groups coincided with the oil boom in Sudan, a condition which was supposed to be a blessing had public polices tried to accommodate the new comers in a humane manner in the urban milieu. What happened is actually the opposite. The displaced found themselves obliged to cater for themselves with little help from the authorities. In order to secure living, the majority joined forcibly the low-paying jobs in the informal sector where incomes are barely sufficient to cover food needs, not to mention the other necessities. The result of all this was the spread of diseases of malnutrition among infants, the young and old. Under these circumstances, the displaced developed a number of autonomous and group food consumption habits and strategies (Bakhit, 1994,). Hamid (1992) and El-Batthani et al. (1989) elaborated on many forms of these autonomous behaviours and strategies which indicate the limited affordability and accessibility to secure living in the city. As far as the food system is concerned, the most conspicuous food behaviour during such challenging and straining poverty situations is the cutting of the number of meals per day, resort to low-value, but cheap, food types such as boiled grains and beans, cucumber with pepper, tomato mixed with peanut paste and others. Even though, these food patterns and strategies are not usually affordable by all, as indicated by the spread of scavenging of eatable food remains in dumping places of rubbish bags. In addition, the prevalence of poverty obliged the poor to resort to crooked means to increase their income including the illegal brewing of alcoholic drinks, robbery, dealing in

drugs and prostitution as well as harnessing of relief agencies to supply them with food.

### **5. Conclusion:**

Food availability, affordability and accessibility in Greater Khartoum is highly influenced by globalization and urbanization. The population of Greater Khartoum used to entertain a balanced food system at a time when the economy was stable and taste preferences were not as diverse as they are today. At that time, the food menu of the wealthy upper class was not very much different from that of the middle or poor classes because societal divides and differentiation was within tolerable limits.

However, the early nineties and two decades thereafter marked a crucial era in the progression of urbanization and globalization. The oil boom propelled the economy of the country and made it more receptive and reactive to the processes of globalization. The massive movements of people from the depressed rural areas since the early 1950s, and particularly after the 1980s, triggered by drought and desertification in West Sudan and the civil war in the South has resulted in colossal spread of shanty towns which now accommodate about 50% of the population of Greater Khartoum. In the course of these events, forces of globalization and urbanization, coupled with flawed and defective government policies, stimulated significant changes in food habits and preferences of the population of greater Khartoum. In particular, they led to significant changes in the lifestyle choices. The structure and dynamics of the food system started to change accordingly. *Home cooking* and native foods seemed to many something of the past. So, to satisfy this new behaviour, elegant supermarkets, restaurants, cafeterias rose up in every street. Food of all types and forms became one of the most thriving and profitable enterprises in Greater Khartoum

The structure and dynamics of the food system cannot be dissociated from the behaviour of the government and performance of the prevailing economic system. There is an intricate mutual relationship between the two. Any changes in the strings of this relationship can lead to modifications and shifts in the food system.

In the Sudan, the irresistible influences of globalization on society and economy cannot be overemphasized. The problem is that globalization took its course in an ill-advised and amorphous economic system with widespread corruption. As a result of this, state of affairs income disparities in Greater Khartoum became more pronounced and the gap between the "haves" and the "have-not" widened progressively. The food system cannot be detached from these changes. Although food in Khartoum is plentiful, its spatial and equitable distribution is not in balance. While the wealthy can afford and access adequate supplies of food, a growingly large segment of the population can aspire only for the bare minimum. It is these shifts in the structure of food system structure which are an indicative sign of the shifts which take place in societal order. In Greater Khartoum, power and wealth have been concentrated in the hands of a small proportion of the Population. The wealthy are getting wealthier, the middle class is disappearing at a remarkable rate and the disadvantaged are increasing in numbers. As a result, the number of people living below the poverty line in Greater Khartoum will continue to increase if no remedial interventions are undertaken.

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