

Women's Economic Empowerment and the SDGs in Egypt: Where Do We Stand ?

Women's economic empowerment in the SDGs

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) can be defined as women's ability to bring about positive changes in their lives and societies as a result of their participation in economic activities. A regular and independent source of income not only provides women with a greater voice and agency in the household, but also results in increased investment in the well-being of other household members, particularly children, with benefits for long-term growth. Yet, gender inequalities in the labour market remain pervasive, as well as women's access to decent work, with women being not only less likely to participate but also more likely to be concentrated in insecure, unprotected or under-protected and poorly remunerated employment. Moreover, women's active participation in the labour market is not enough to ensure their economic empowerment, as this cannot be achieved without women also having agency in other areas of their lives. Social norms, cultures of discrimination, inequitable laws, limited service provision (such as childcare), power structures, and gendered divisions of labour in and out of the home that lead to women performing the majority of unpaid care and domestic work can significantly hinder women's access to their economic rights.

Against this backdrop, **the SDGs recognise the impact of the unequal gender division of labour on women's economic empowerment** and calls for the **recognition of the value of unpaid care and domestic work** (target 5.4 *Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate*). The 2030 Agenda also **promotes a more equal access**

to economic resources (1.4 *By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance*) and emphasises that **women's access to decent work is an essential measure of inclusive and sustainable growth** (8.5 *By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value*).

Progress towards the SDG targets addressing women's economic empowerment

In the past years, Egypt has made some important legislative and policy related progresses towards women's economic empowerment. Those include:

- The introduction of a constitutional provision for gender equality in all spheres of life, including the economy, in the 2014 Constitution (Article 11);
- 'Gender' has become a protected category in the non-discrimination clause of the new Constitution (Article 53);
- Commitment to achieve social justice and to provide social solidarity to ensure a decent life for all citizens is enshrined in the Constitution (Article 8);
- A recent amendment of the Penal Code criminalises sexual harassment in the workplace, education and public spaces (Articles 306 a) and b) of the Penal Code);
- The Inheritance Law was amended in 2017 to impose stricter sanctions on those who withhold the inheritance from whoever has the right to such inheritance; and
- The inclusion of women's economic empowerment as a pillar of the National Strategy for Women's Empowerment 2030 with targets and indicators.

Snapshot of available data to populate the SDGs indicators related to Women's Economic Empowerment



Indicator 5.4.1: In 2015, 83% of the time spent on unpaid domestic and care work was performed by women, 17% by men (CAPMAS, 2015). **Indicator 5.a.1 (a):** In 2009/10, agricultural land owners were 99% men and 1% women (Ministry of Agriculture, 2009/10).



Indicator 8.3.1: The proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment is 29.4%: 11.4% for women and 33.2% for men (CAPMAS, 2016). **Indicator 8.5.1:** Average weekly earnings in 2015 is 879 EGP. Men earn 884 EGP while women earn 853 EGP (CAPMAS, 2015). **Indicator 8.5.2:** In 2016, women's unemployment rate is 23.6% and men's unemployment rate is 8.9%. The highest unemployment among women is in the age range of 20-24 at 42.8% (CAPMAS, 2015/16).



Indicator 4.5.1 and 4.6.1: Gender parity has been achieved in primary, secondary and tertiary education however, women's literacy rate stands at 69.2%, while men's literacy rate is 78.8%.

According to the Global Findex Database, formal account ownership among women has more than tripled between 2011 and 2017 (from 7% to 27%) however, it is still below the rate among men (39%) in 2017

Measurement challenges

Data on women's economic participation is needed to understand the full extent of women's contribution to the economy, particularly in paid work as well as unpaid care and domestic work. However, analysing and producing data on women' and girls' contributions in the available data sources can be challenging. For instance, labour force surveys that ask only about the respondent's 'primary economic activity' tend to leave out the contributions of women who perceive paid work as secondary to their unpaid care and domestic work¹. In addition, standard labour force surveys tend to undercount the extent of women's employment, which is more likely than men's to be seasonal, intermittent, informal and unpaid. The availability of time-use surveys, necessary to understand time-use differences between women and men and within groups of women to redistribute caregiving tasks, remains limited.

UN Women Egypt's work towards the SDGs targets related to women's economic empowerment

To support efforts toward women's empowerment, UN Women implemented several projects, focusing on **developing rural women's technical and entrepreneurial skills in agriculture; fostering women's financial inclusion and promoting safe and secure workplaces for women in the agribusiness sector.**

Fostering women's financial inclusion: The implementation of the *Village Savings and Loan*

Associations (VSLA) methodology in partnership with CARE International aimed at tackling the challenges faced by women in rural areas in relation to their limited access to financial resources, capital, and markets. The project supported the establishment of 1,036 VSLA groups comprised of more than 18,000 women members. Through their participation in saving and loans groups, women learned to better manage household cash and were given the opportunity to invest in income generating activities. More than 4.5 million EGP were saved. This project also contributed to building women's decision-making and entrepreneurial skills.

Promoting safe and secure workplaces for women in the agribusiness sector Provision of a mechanism to advance safe, secure, and women-friendly workplaces within the agriculture sector in Egypt through the endorsement and operationalization of the "women's empowerment principles" by Egyptian agribusiness firms. The model succeeded in retaining trained women within the value chains of the participating firms, stationing around 225 women with fixed-term job contracts with an average monthly salary of EGP 1,500 including bonuses, lunch allowances, child-care facilities, and safe transportation, coupled with social protection and medical insurance, excluding altogether the labour contractors. This breakthrough translates into EGP 4,050,000 cash inflow for salaries that empowered marginalized women economically, and benefitted their families, communities and local rural economy. This is in addition to EGP 868,000 for annual transportation costs, EGP 64,000 for infrastructure expenditures, and EGP 334,646 saved by working mothers in care economy due to the provision of child care facilities at their workplaces.

¹ UN Women (2018), Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.