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Activating the Role of the Private Sector in Promoting Gender Equality in the MENA Region

Pilot Project Experience in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco





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This booklet documents the experience during the pilot project implementation in three countries in MENA Region (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco).

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Contents

SECTION I		SECTION III	
Introduction and Pilot Project Overview	5	The Project Journey in the MENA Region Countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco)	30
SECTION II Regional Framework	12	Egypt	30
Regional Framework Document (Summary Version)	13	Methodology and Activities	30
1. Main Obstacles and Factors Limiting Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Participation	13	Challenges and Coping Strategies	33
2. Positive Impact and Opportunities for Closing the Gender Gap	15	Project Participants Highlights: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Champions in Egypt	34
A. Benefits of Gender Equality and Women Economic Empowerment	15	The Future of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Egypt	36
B. Opportunities for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment	18	Tunisia	37
3. Review of Best International and Regional Practices in MENA Region	19	Methodology and Activities	37
A. International and Regional Policy Frameworks for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment	19	Coping Strategies	40
B. Highlights of Global Good Practices, Policies, and Tools for Gender Equality Used by the Private Sector Companies	22	Project Participants Highlights: Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Champions in Tunisia	41
C. MENA Region Good Practices, Policies, and Gender Equality Tools	23	The Future of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Tunisia	43
4. Conclusion and Recommendations for Achieving Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment	26	Morocco	44
A. Recommendations for the Government	26	Methodology and Activities	44
B. Recommendations for the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	27	Coping Strategies	47
C. Recommendations for the Private Sector	27	Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Champions in Morocco	49
D. Recommendations for collective responsibilities shared between the private sector, CSOs, and the government	29	The Future of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Morocco	51
		IV. Conclusion and Recommendations	53

SECTION I

Introduction and Pilot Project Overview

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to many vibrant societies, whose populations are one of the region's greatest resources. However, a large portion of those resources, women, are currently neglected, as this area is also a place where much of the world's share of marginalization of and economic discrimination against women persists. According to the World Bank, the cost of excluding women in the MENA region is "enormous" as women generate less than one-fifth of the region's GDP.¹ A McKinsey report also found that the share of regional output generated by women is only 18 percent.² The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that even though women in MENA are better educated and better skilled than ever, their participation in the work force is still the lowest in the world (24%) due to various legal and social barriers, concluding that "gender-based discrimination in laws and social norms costs the region USD 575 billion a year".³ OECD also reminds readers that "...failing to harness the talent of working-age women means lost economic potential and less inclusive growth. It is estimated that raising women's participation in the labour force to the same level as men could boost global GDP by USD 12 trillion, or 26%, by 2025".⁴

There are estimates that \$28 trillion could be added to GDP (Gross Domestic Product per capita) globally including in the MENA region by 2025 from advancing women's equality.⁵ The World Bank also reported that if the female labor participation rate matched that of males in Egypt, GDP would increase by 34%.⁶ The same study showed that women invest

most of their income (about 90 percent) back into their families (notably on education and health) and in their communities. In the long run, this leads to positive economic and social changes and contributes to further strengthening women's rights.

Empowering women to fully participate in economic life is truly essential to building strong economies, establishing societies that are more equal and secure, achieving internationally agreed upon development and human rights goals, and improving the overall quality of life.

Unfortunately, the situation in the MENA region is still far from this ideal, societies being plagued by gender inequalities, gender-based discrimination, and low female economic participation rates. According to the Global Report on the Gender Gap 2021 issued by the World Economic Forum, it would take an estimated 142.4 years to close the gender gap in the Middle East and North Africa, as most countries in the region lag behind the world in achieving gender equality, given key indicators such as access to education, health, economic participation and political participation.

Looking at gender related indicators in three MENA region countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco), it is obvious that enormous efforts are still needed to improve women's status and positioning there. Table 1 presents a glimpse into women's status in these countries.

In Egypt, despite the fact that women's educational

1 MENA countries can no longer afford to leave women behind (worldbank.org)

2 MGI Power of parity_Full report_September 2015.pdf (mckinsey.com) (p.12)

3 <https://www.oecd.org/mena/legal-and-social-barriers-holding-back-women-s-empowerment-in-middle-east-and-north-africa.htm>

4 MENA - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (oecd.org)

5 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>.

6 The World Bank: Women Economic Empowerment Study, May, 2018.

attainment rates are high, women's participation in the labor force is low (as shown above) due to many factors and barriers such as shouldering a disproportionate burden of childcare and household responsibilities, poor working conditions in the private sector, poor enforcement of anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment laws, and a high pay gap compared with men in the private sector.¹² Moreover, women's participation in the private sector is lower than the percentage for the government and public sector (18% and 36% respectively)¹³ and only 7.1% of managerial positions are held by women. These conditions are made even more difficult by the inability of women to access financial assets, including banking services and financing opportunities. Women in the informal sector also suffer from more difficult working conditions, as protection rates have declined sharply, especially because of the Corona pandemic.

In Tunisia, despite expectations and efforts to bolster economic equality and participation of women, recent reports indicate a persistent lack

of improvement in this area. In fact, "the trend in Tunisia is alarming, gains are fragile and the road to equality remains long."¹⁴

The Tunisian legal framework encourages women to be more active and present in the labor market but, the reality often turns out differently. Chances for fairly paid employment and a position that corresponds to the level of education are even smaller for educated young women outside of the capital. These chances become even more reduced as one moves into the country's interior. Thus, a woman finds herself in a situation where a choice is necessary: either to accept a lower-level position in her region since she is "over-qualified" or to remain unemployed and continue the traditional path of being a housewife. Otherwise, she might have to move to the capital in search of better work, which might negatively impact her family life.

The Moroccan government is committed to making advancements in this area. The Government Plan for Equality (PGE) 2012-2016 and 2017-2021 was

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT RELATED INDICATORS

	Egypt	Tunisia	Morocco
Global Gender Gap Index ⁷	Ranked 129 out of 156 countries	Ranked 126 out of 156 countries	Ranked 144 out of 156 countries
Percentage of women's presence in leadership and managerial positions	7.4%	6%-15% ⁸	13%
Labor force participation rate for females	21.9% ⁹	25.9% ¹⁰	23.4% ¹¹

7. Global Gender Gap Report 2021, Insight Report WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf (weforum.org)
 8. https://www.mastercard.com/news/media/1ulpy5at/ma_miwe-report-2020.pdf
 9. Women's Rights in Egypt - BORGEM (borgenmagazine.com)
 10. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1191562/female-labor-force-participation-rate-in-tunisia/>
 11. Morocco Slides Down to 144th Rank in 2021 Global Gender Gap Report (morocccoworldnews.com)

12. Barriers to Employment that Women face in Egypt, policy challenges and considerations, 2020; RAND_RR2868.pdf
 13. The World Bank: Women Economic Empowerment Study, May, 2018, documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/861491551113547855/pdf/134846-WP-PUBLIC-march-2-WB-Women-Study-EN.pdf
 14. https://blogs.worldbank.org/fr/arabvoices/status-women-tunisian-society-endangered?cid=mena_tt_mena_en_ext

initiated with the aim of integrating women's rights into public policies and development programs. The Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development lead this plan aiming to promote equal access to decent work and professional advancement opportunities, development of female entrepreneurship, and improvement of the economic status of rural women by allowing them access to the means of production and land ownership. However, female labor force participation is still among the lowest in the world at 23.4%.¹⁵ The low rates and inequalities in women's economic participation come at a heavy cost, but the opportunities for action and improvement are promising.

Based on the above-mentioned situation, a pilot project was funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and implemented by Hands Along the Nile Development Services, Inc. (HANDS) based in Alexandria, VA, USA, in collaboration with three NGOs from the MENA region (CEOSS in Egypt, CATWAR in Tunisia and Ennakhil in Morocco) to open a debate on the relationship between the private sector and society and to recognize that the private sector can no longer be perceived as merely an engine of growth, but also should be viewed as a decisive factor in sustainable social development. Indeed, as the private sector is held accountable for its impact on society, multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. This document has been produced to summarize the efforts exerted in the three above-mentioned countries.

About the Implementing Organizations

HANDS aims to support social development and building more inclusive societies in the MENA

region, particularly in Egypt, through collaborative projects that connect American and Western resources and expertise with local civil society organizations, thus increasing intercultural understanding and cooperation in the process of addressing social and economic issues of mutual concern. Our programs focus on empowering the most marginalized communities in MENA, especially women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other especially vulnerable groups, through direct programming and capacity building of local organizations that work on inclusion efforts. We expect to continue and expand this approach in the next five years.

In past 30 years, HANDS' programs helped vulnerable communities gain access to economic opportunities, education, and healthcare, and to become empowered community leaders, reaching 500,000 persons annually. The gender component is either the main feature or strongly present in all HANDS' programs. Recent examples include capacity-building exchanges for gender and disability advocates from MENA (with 150 alumni organizations), entrepreneurship training for young women and the disabled in Egypt, and IT job-skills training for Egyptian youth. We have worked with practitioners across the Middle East and North Africa to integrate a rights-based approach into socio-economic development.

In Egypt, HANDS has worked on gender programs for decades, including economic empowerment through microloans, small business development, job-skills training, literacy programs, education, leadership training, awareness raising and stopping harmful practices such as FGM, gender-based violence, and early marriage, as well as capacity

15. Morocco Slides Down to 144th Rank in 2021 Global Gender Gap Report (moroccoworldnews.com)

building for local NGOs. Since 2011, we have worked regionally on programs focused on legislative and economic empowerment of women and on capacity building of local gender-focused NGOs.

CEOSS is an Egyptian public non-profit NGO, registered under the Ministry of Social Solidarity with registration No. No. 468, which has been working in Egypt since 1950. CEOSS' mission is to promote the sanctity, equity, and harmony of life. It seeks to contribute to the transformation of society by nurturing moral and spiritual awareness, enhancing a sense of belonging, promoting respect for diversity, addressing conflict, and advancing social justice for individuals and communities. CEOSS is dedicated to improving social and cultural development, individual well-being, social justice and inter-cultural harmony. The organization delivers its services regardless of gender, race, religion, or beliefs. CEOSS reaches out to almost three million Egyptians annually in partnership with more than 300 CBOs in rural and urban communities. As an active voice promoting pluralism and mutual respect in an Egyptian context, CEOSS encourages the participation of Egyptians from all segments of society—Muslim and Christian, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, powerful and powerless—to work together toward common goals of the sustainable development. CEOSS—in collaboration with local partners—designs and implements development initiatives in the area of health, education, economic development, agriculture, gender mainstreaming, working with people with disabilities, and housing programs.

CAWTAR has been working in Tunisia since 1993. CAWTAR's mission is to empower Arab women economically, socially and politically, and ensure they fully exercise their human and civil rights. To achieve this, the Center looks at the root causes, forms, and implications of gender inequality, and trains NGOs as well as local authorities, government

agencies responsible for women's affairs, media professionals, and other public institutions to mainstream a gender approach in all sectors, including natural resources and climate change adaptation and mitigating its effects.

CAWTAR has been working since 2002 with its Arab Network for Gender and Development "@NGED," which includes about 450 NGOs and multidisciplinary experts from 30 countries inside and outside the Arab region, to share good practices and build strategic partnerships at the regional level. Most of all, it reaches out to public institutions and supports women's rights, in addition to defending equal access to services and resources. CAWTAR's support of @NGED has been recognized through two external assessments commissioned by the World Bank.

Ennakhil Association is a Moroccan NGO that has been working since 1997 for the establishment of human rights and equality in laws and public policies in Morocco through two strategic areas: the prevention of violence and all forms of discrimination against vulnerable groups and the development of participatory democracy for the promotion of public policies based on equal rights.

Program Overview

Over the last three years, HANDS and her three local partner organizations have cooperated on this project aimed at activating and equipping the private sector to lead and participate meaningfully in securing economic inclusion for women and advancing women's economic rights through achieving the following main outcomes:

- 1) Increased awareness of the private sector in select countries in the MENA region about the importance and benefits of securing economic inclusion and equality of women in the sector and overall economy;

2) Increased will and ability of private sector companies at the country level to implement practical actions to improve economic participation of women and inform stakeholders about lessons learned and helpful strategies and measures to be taken;

3) Increased information sharing, support and constructive dialogue activated regionally and locally between private sector, civil society, and government to support scaling up efforts and new initiatives for further improving women's economic rights in the region.

There are several levels of activities that have been implemented and outputs achieved in the three target countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco) on the regional and individual country levels.

- **Regional** training and networking activities included two conferences, one at the start of the project, to set the regional framework for this project, and then the final conference, where individual countries' experiences, results and challenges were shared.
- **Country level** activities included training, networking, and practical activity implementation with a network of participants from the private sector, civil society, and government to come up with more detailed plans, strategies, and solutions that are appropriate and needed locally.
- **Information sharing and constructive dialogue** to inform future strategies and activities was also an integral part of the project. The regional framework, local strategies and reports, lessons-learned and best practices have been compiled in this booklet to further share with other organizations, communities, and countries interested in the topic. In addition, social media pages were established for sharing information

among participants, documenting and publicizing the project and for further networking, and sharing information that goes beyond the project life.

Highlights of implemented activities

Under this project, several major sets of activities were implemented in the three target countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco) either at the country or regional level.

A regional network was established at the start of the project for constructive dialogue between leading NGOs, private sector representatives, and policy makers. The purpose of this network was to help different stakeholders understand and support the role of private sector companies in leading the process of achieving better economic rights for women in the MENA region. This network served as a central group in the expansion of country-level networks. The established regional network consisted of 12 people: HANDS (one person), CEOS (three persons), CAWTAR (three persons) and Ennakhil (one person), and four regional consultants.

Two regional conferences were organized with the goal of gathering all stakeholders including policy



makers, private sector, NGOs, and academics in one place, first to help set a priority topics framework under which the pilot would be implemented in the three countries, and also to share the results, experiences, and lessons learned at the end of the program and to plan for future steps.

The initial conference was held in March 2021, with 92 participants from the region in attendance. It engaged 17 speakers (two from the U.S., five in Tunisia, four in Morocco, and six in Egypt) from private sector, government, and CSOs. One of the main results of the conference was a regional framework document, which collected analysis and recommendations from the conference participants on how to activate the role of the private sector in improving women's economic rights and enhance gender equality in the region. A summary of this framework, which includes challenges, best practices and some recommended strategies, is included in the second part of this booklet.

The second regional conference was organized in Marrakesh, Morocco in February 2023 and

was attended by more than 60 representatives from private sector companies, government, and national and international NGOs, gender experts, politicians, and journalists from the three countries, and a HANDS representative. During the four days, participants from the region presented and discussed the results and lessons learned, analyzed the general environment around gender equality in which private sector is operating, and planned for next steps to build on the momentum and results achieved in this pilot project. Additionally, the UNDP made a presentation to all participants about their Gender Seal initiative.

Local networks were established in each of the three MENA countries. After the creation of the regional network and the regional conference, each country (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco) formed a national network to open communication channels and create a supportive environment in which positive partnerships and constructive information exchange could occur between the private sector, NGOs, and the government. The network served as a working body that went through the activities

together and supported private sector participants in designing and implementing their gender equality initiatives. The total number of participants in the Steering Committees is 45 people: CEOSS (16 persons), CAWTAR (19 persons) and Ennakhil (12 persons). See figure 1.

Overall, more than 280 private sector companies were approached in the three countries, and 51 companies participated in the project (15 in Egypt, 15 in Tunisia, and 21 in Morocco). More than



4,000 individuals benefited from the project in some way in the three countries.

Technical support and guidance for private sector companies was then provided by local implementing partners in each country to the local private sector participants to help them take specific steps to improve gender equality. A series of training workshops, coaching sessions, and awareness raising meetings, attended by the private sector representatives, NGOs, and policy makers, established support for the active role of and an understanding of effective ways private sector companies lead and inform the process of achieving better economic rights for women in the region. During these training and technical support sessions, private sector companies were guided in performing self-assessment of the gender equality needs, and then they came up with initiatives for gender equality improvements steps they would take as part of participation in this project.

Information sharing and project visibility was an underlying activity throughout the project. HANDS

and all implementing partners shared project highlights and information on their own web sites and social media pages (Facebook, Linked In, etc.) In addition, a Facebook group¹⁶ was created for all participants from different countries to join and share information.



FIGURE 1

THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEES



Egypt

- 3 Staff Members
- 4 Private Sector
- 3 Civil Society Organizations
- 5 Government
- 1 Gender Consultant



Tunisia

- 2 Staff Members
- 8 Private Sector
- 4 Civil Society Organizations
- 3 Government
- 2 Gender Consultants



Morocco

- 1 Staff Member
- 6 Private Sector
- 3 Civil Society Organizations
- 1 Government
- 1 Gender Consultant

16. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/296731392540844>

One of the main outcomes for this regional conference was a draft of regional framework document which was developed based on discussions and workshop sessions conducted during this conference. The purpose of this regional framework document is to set globally and regionally shared priorities and identify helpful strategies and recommendation for actions to be taken at the private sector level to achieve better rights for women, including rights to work, equal treatment, opportunities for advancement, inclusion in supply chains, etc. The expected impact of the document is a better link between global trends in gender equality in the private sector and their adaptation to the specific circumstances of the MENA region. This framework was then to serve as a starting point to taking further steps on the country level. Below is a summary of the document, prepared by the local teams in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

Regional Framework Document (Summary Version)

Authors: Dr. Maha Ismail, Egypt, Fatma M'Selmi, Tunisia, and Nadia Benouna, Morocco

1. Main Obstacles and Factors Limiting Gender Equality and Women's Economic Participation

During the afore-mentioned conference, one of the goals was to identify the most pressing challenges that prevent the private sector in the region from adopting better practices when it comes to integration and equality of women, as viewed by the conference participants. After engaging in discussions during working groups, the participants agreed that the following challenges were important to highlight and address:

- a. Lack of access to capital and finance, including bank accounts and financing channels due to conservative lending policies, the absence of collateral, or distrust between bankers and female entrepreneurs. Women often lack skills to file and collateral to qualify for loans, so they often turn towards microcredit. Moreover, women in the region operate businesses with lower levels of capital and are more reliant on self-financing, especially in the informal economy, where women cannot easily get access to credit.
- b. Limited access to adequate capital and finance: The loan size is quite limited. According to a study carried out by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in 2017, women's microenterprises in the MENA region suffer from a funding gap of \$16 billion, which corresponds to the second highest deficit in the world (29%) after East Asia.
- c. Lack of access to and participation in entrepreneurship and private business make women in MENA significantly less likely to run their own businesses than men. In addition, in times of crisis, like COVID-19, women are more likely to have to close their businesses for extended periods with substantially reduced or no revenues.¹⁷
- d. Lack of access to education and professional training (technical, managerial, and digital skills) and development of individual capacities, which leads to low employment rates and results in huge income differences between men and women.

17. OECD, Changing Laws and Breaking Barriers for Women's Economic Empowerment in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/ac780735-en/1/2/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/ac780735-en&_csp_=713128b841b1d585eb72ee2526efb7e4&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book

- e. Pay gap, in which chances for fair paid employment and a position that corresponds to the level of education is even smaller for educated young women. In Egypt, for example, women were paid 34% less per hour than their male counterparts and woman's income is on average only 22% that of a man. This is in addition to lack of access to structured, fairly paid, and stable employment. (Women are often confined to precarious or informal jobs).
 - » Maternity leave entitlements are often inadequate and, in some cases, where the employer must bear the cost, can act as a disincentive for firms to hire women.
 - » Inheritance laws favor men and make it difficult for women to obtain loans to start businesses. Labor laws that give equal rights to women are often violated, unimplemented, or unclear.
- f. Lack of digital skills among women. The future of women's employment and entrepreneurship in the MENA region will heavily depend on their access to digital skills.
- g. Limited access to information, networks, and markets: Prominent barriers that affect women's entrepreneurship also include inadequate knowledge of how to collaborate and a lack of access to technology, support, and information about business opportunities.
- h. Discriminatory labor laws and/or practices:
 - » Across the region there is significant diversity regarding the labor laws adopted. For example, Egypt still has discriminatory laws, under which women cannot, for example, be hired for dangerous jobs according to the Egyptian Labour Law no.12 of 2003, article no.90. In Tunisia and Morocco, the issue is linked to the operational implementation and the lack of control. These laws or practices are still based on cultural norms and often prevent women from participating in various sectors of the economy.
- i. Heavy burden of domestic responsibilities and household duties. There is an absence of an enabling and favorable working environment for women that takes into consideration the fact that unbalanced gender roles create a disproportionate burden on women. Working women, thus, find themselves in a situation where a choice is necessary: either accepting a lower-level position in one's region since she is "over-qualified" or remaining unemployed and continuing the traditional path of housewife. Moreover, women withdraw from work in the private sector after marriage because it is considered incompatible with their household responsibilities in addition to the often-limited availability of childcare.
- j. Restrictions on women's mobility and freedom of association: Lack of safe, reliable transportation is a significant constraint on women's ability to work. Cultural codes that require women to seek the permission of husbands to travel can also impede women's mobility. For example, in Egypt, women are forced by law to seek permission from their husbands to obtain a passport.
- k. Underrepresentation of women in managerial, decision-making, and leadership positions,

lack of opportunities for advancement and promotion at work.

- l. Poor working conditions in the private sector, poor enforcement of anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment laws, and a high pay gap compared with men in the private sector.¹⁸
- m. The double disadvantage of young women: young women can be doubly disadvantaged, facing barriers both as women and as new labor market entrants.¹⁹

Participants in the regional conference discussed and compiled their own list of the most significant factors limiting progress towards equitable inclusion of MENA women in the private sector and economies in their countries and in the region, as illustrated in Figure 2.

2. Positive Impact and Opportunities for Closing the Gender Gap

Numerous studies show that gender equality and higher female participation in companies and economies increases profitability, efficiency, and long-term sustainability. An awareness that women are the largest untapped human resource is also growing. In the MENA region, some companies are already committed to supporting women's equal participation, realizing that this is actually good for their own survival and growth. One of the aims of this project was to collect and highlight this information —from various available research studies, as well as coming from the insights and discussions among the participants of the regional conference.

A. Benefits of Gender Equality and Women Economic Empowerment

Gender equity is important not only for the sake of human rights but also for economic prosperity and sustainability. Gender equality is not just a 'good thing

FIGURE 2: MOST SIGNIFICANT GAPS AND CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR MENA ACCORDING TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE.

Unavailability of work contracts that guarantee health and social insurance	Lack of nurseries for children near the workplace	Lack of awareness among women about their economic rights	Unequal wages	Lack of friendly (safe) transportation
Unsafe work environment	Married women are not welcome due to family burdens	Women need to work harder to get promoted	Lack of education, skills and competencies	Sometimes telework doesn't respect work hours or women's family needs
Inability to get access to finance and resources	Gender stereotypes about women	Media underestimates working women	Law enforcement and control	Difficult access to information

18. Barriers to Employment that Women face in Egypt, policy challenges and considerations, 2020; RAND_RR2868.pdf

19. Claire McLaughlin: Women's economic role in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 2013, <http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq889.pdf>

to do' and an 'issue of rights' but is also an important matter for the survival, sustainability, and progress of companies, communities, and societies. Companies that invest in women's employment often find that it benefits their bottom line by improving staff retention, innovation, and access to talent and new markets as well as long-term sustainability. (IFC 2012). An increasing number of evidence-based studies confirm that achieving gender equality, closing the gaps between men and women, and higher female participation in companies and economies increase profitability, efficiency, and long-term sustainability and growth.

There is a strong and important correlation between improved economic inclusion of women and financial growth, as gender equality has strong, positive impacts on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which grows over time. In the European Union (EU), for example, it is estimated that improving gender equality would lead, by 2050, to an increase in EU (GDP) per capita by 6.1 to 9.6%, which amounts to €1.95 to €3.15 trillion; and would lead to an additional 10.5 million jobs, which would benefit both women and men.²⁰ Goldman Sachs²¹ research shows that narrowing the gender gap in employment in emerging markets could push income per capita as much as 20% higher by 2030.²²

According to a McKinsey study,²³ closing the gender gap in the economy would add \$28 trillion to global GDP by 2025, and, in the MENA region alone, \$2.7 trillion dollars would be added. According to the Women Matter Report (McKinsey 2016), Morocco

would gain \$30 billion in additional GDP by 2025 if it initiated proactive policies for women's economic inclusion and empowerment. The World Bank also reported that if the female labor participation rate matched that of males in Egypt, GDP would increase by 34%²⁴ and women's participation in the financial sector—especially at the executive and board levels—appeared associated with greater financial resilience and bank stability.²⁵ Another study by the World Bank showed that women invest most of their income (about 90 percent) back in their families (notably on education and health) and in their communities. Increasing their economic power, therefore, has a "snowball effect" on society, increasing living standards for all and, consequently, reducing poverty. In the long run, this leads to changes in social attitudes and an improvement in women's rights through policy and changing cultural norms.

From another perspective, big companies are also increasingly realizing that they can reap numerous benefits from promoting gender equality in the workplace. There is increasingly more understanding that companies that are committed to women's active participation and equality are seen as socially responsible, have more committed employees, improve their public image, and achieve greater efficiency and better personnel performance. Moreover, closing gender gaps can unlock opportunities for increased profit, growth, and innovation.²⁶ In addition, companies benefit from closing gaps between men and women through improved human capital, enhanced market demand, and an enabling operating environment.²⁷

20. Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the EU | European Institute for Gender Equality (europa.eu)

21. Charlotte Keenan, Head of the Office of Corporate Engagement International and Global Head of 10,000 Women Goldman Sachs.

22. RES-0054-GBCWEE-Report-171123.pdf (wocan.org)

23. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>.

24. The World Bank: Women Economic Empowerment Study, May, 2018.

25. Gender Equity Seal: A Key to Strengthening Egypt's Private Sector (worldbank.org)

26. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/gender+at+ifc/resources/gender+smart+investing+guide

27. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/a7e68cc1-cc7c-4436-88ce-a170fb9d810/1992_Gender_Executive_Briefing+FINAL.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=lv3NCn4

Other evidence-based highlights support the business case for gender equality:

- Companies with gender-diverse boards generate a higher return on equity than those without.²⁸
- Having more women in leadership positions helps to improve corporate management, increases innovation, is less risky, and promotes profitability and better accountability;²⁹
- Companies with gender-diverse boards outperform those with no women in terms of share price performance during times of crisis or volatility;³⁰
- High-performing companies are almost 50 percent more likely than low-performing companies to report that men and women have equal influence on strategy development;³¹
- Investors in companies with strong gender diversity strategies receive excess returns running at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.5 percent.³²

Additionally, the participants in the regional conference listed the following examples of how gender equality benefits the private sector and countries' overall economies and how women contribute positively when included in the workplace and in the economy.

a. Diversity Stimulates Innovation and Productivity

Diverse work teams are more creative and

"If you employ 50/50 men and women, you will have a very diverse, and a complete understanding of your needs in term of where you want to get, as men and women have different ways of approaching issues and setting goals".

-Younes Taguenit, Project Manager, ESPOD, Morocco (Conference Participant)

companies more productive. Mixed environments, where men and women interact on an equal footing, are therefore favorable to innovation, competitiveness, and productivity.

"...Productivity gains from women's inclusion in the labor market come from the variety of ways women bring added value to their workplaces..." IFC 2013 – Jobs Studies – Findings on Gender.

"For male-dominated industries, removing obstacles for women to enter these occupations could trigger productivity increases by up to 13% – 25%." IFC 2013 – Jobs Studies – Findings on Gender.

"There is no greater indicator of an innovative culture than the empowerment of women. Fully integrating and empowering women economically and politically is the most important step that a country or company can take to strengthen its competitiveness. ...Innovation doesn't happen in closed environments." (Alec Ross, Industries of the Future).

28. MSCI. 2015. "Women on Boards: Global Trends in Gender Diversity on Corporate Boards." Available at: <https://www.msci.com/www/research-paper/research-insight-womenon/0263428390>

29. pwc-ceo-20th-survey-report-2017.pdf

30. 8 Credit Suisse Research Institute. 2012. "Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance." Available at: <https://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file/index.cfm?fileid=88EC32A9-83E8-EB92-9D5A40FF69E66808>

31. Earnest & Young. 2015. "Women. Fast Forward. The Time for Gender Parity is Now." Available at: [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-women-fast-forward-thoughtleadership/\\$FILE/ey-women-fast-forward-thoughtleadership.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-women-fast-forward-thoughtleadership/$FILE/ey-women-fast-forward-thoughtleadership.pdf)

32. Credit Suisse Research Institute. 2016. "The CS Gender 3000: The Reward for Change." Available at: <http://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file/index.cfm?fileid=5A7755E1-EFDD-1973-A0B5C54AFF3FBOAE>

b. Gender Balance Improves Teamwork

Gender diverse teams tend to be more collaborative. Participants felt that women tend to facilitate communication and conflict resolution in teams. Gender balanced teams improve the day-to-day functioning of a business. Participants also noted that integrating women fosters a sense of belonging to the company, especially since women managers have an easier time stimulating commitment from their teams.

c. Gender Balanced Teams Make Better Decisions and Better Understand Market Needs

A mixed team brings a greater diversity of opinions. In other words, teams including men and women analyze issues more thoroughly, which improves decision-making. In addition, including women's point of view also enhances companies' abilities to understand market needs and capture new business opportunities, just by the fact that 50% of the consumers and clients in the population might be women.

B. Opportunities for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment

The participants in the regional conference listed what they perceived to be the most important opportunities that could accelerate the process of achieving more gender equality and enhancing women's economic empowerment.

- Development and support for Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship not only offer an opportunity for income generating activities for women, but also generate employment and space for women's leadership and creativity.
- The existence of incubators that train women how to set up and manage their small business to succeed.

"80% of my staff are women, and I ensure that they are able to manage the time/work balance. Because of that we have a very high level of performance, even when compared globally. That is because they are responsible; they are able to manage their time well. When they are working from home, they are really performing. The Covid-19 lockdown was a demonstration of how they were able to achieve results and feel responsible for what they had to perform, even though they were working from home."

- Ilham Boujilid, Entrepreneur, Job2vente, Morocco (Conference Participant)

- New forms of business (social and solidarity enterprises) that allow women to come together to support each other and to pool their creativity and know-how (in particular within sectors where they are already active in large numbers but as part of informal labor force, such as agriculture or arts and crafts).
- New financial technologies (fintech) present an opportunity to strengthen and support women's economic inclusion. In a growing number of markets, digital platforms allow women to generate income while having access to flexible work that suits their daily constraints.
- NGO programs: Available programs by NGOs that provide training targeting capacity and skill development as well as business creation support.
- Adoption of new CSR practices: Companies' commitment to the principles of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility include the promotion of gender equality through a proclaimed commitment and HR policies in favor of diversity and equal opportunities.

- New forms of work: The COVID-19 crisis has also shown that flexible work schedules and working at home (remote work) are not a threat to productivity for companies, but are, in fact, quite the opposite. This might offer new opportunities for women’s work arrangements that allow for better work-life balance.

3. Review of Best International and Regional Practices in MENA Region

This chapter looks at some of the most important legislative frameworks (global and regional) that have been created over time in response to efforts to secure and enhance more equitable economic participation of women, as well as good practices already adopted by private sector companies, both internationally and in the MENA region. These can serve to provide guidance and encouragement to companies, governments, and civil society groups to join efforts in creating new models for equitable and inclusive economic systems.

A. International and Regional Policy Frameworks for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment

There are international and regional efforts that have been implemented to secure women’s economic empowerment and equitable participation in the labor force. These efforts have included issuing declarations, conventions, platforms, networks, and initiatives. Unfortunately, there is still a discrepancy between ratification and implementation of these efforts. Frequently, states fail to bring national legislation to reflect the provisions of the convention that they adopted. One of the obvious examples is the ILO Convention No. 100 on equal pay for equal value of work. In many signatory countries, the understanding in their national laws remains limited

to “equal pay for the same work”.³³ Therefore, there is a need to assess the situation in each country regarding compliance with the signed conventions and the interventions and conventions that should be signed or amended according to the context. For example, Egypt has not signed ILO convention no. 190 about violence and harassment at the workplace even though violence and harassment at the workplace negatively affect women’s economic participation and empowerment.

Despite the above-mentioned discrepancies, it is still important to review the major international declarations and conventions that the countries in the region adopted.

- MENA region countries are committed to the declaration and platform for action adopted at the Beijing UN World Conference on Women 1995. This declaration includes resolutions to

The Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact		
 HUMAN RIGHTS	1	Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.
	2	Businesses should make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.
	3	Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.
 LABOUR	4	Businesses should uphold the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour.
	5	Businesses should uphold the effective abolition of child labour.
	6	Businesses should uphold the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
 ENVIRONMENT	7	Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges.
	8	Businesses should undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility.
 ANTI-CORRUPTION	9	Businesses should encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.
	10	Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

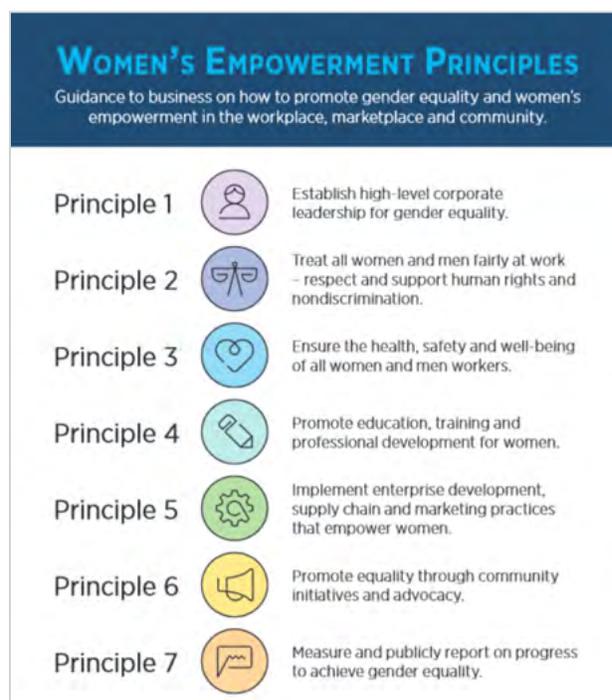
33. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_488475.pdf

prevent trade agreements from harming women's economic security and to open a space for women entrepreneurs to have a say in policymaking.³⁴ Most of the countries in the region have established equal opportunity units in ministries and organizations to promote gender equality.

- All the countries in the Arab Region have also ratified the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW concluded that weak institutional capacity, limited authority, and lowered status of national women's machineries in the Arab region hinder the monitoring of state adherence to international norms, which impedes efforts to mainstream gender in institutions, policies, and programs.³⁵ For this reason, CEDAW requires that State Parties ensure that private organizations, enterprises, and individuals promote and protect women's rights. Despite global efforts and a national willingness to empower women to reach their rights, the three countries involved in this program took a long time to commit to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979. Morocco and Tunisia spent years working to remove reservations, while Egypt is still struggling with some reservations.³⁶
- The Arab Women Organization of the League of Arab States (LAS) presented a Platform for Action to Implement the Sustainable

Development Goals 2030 for Women in the Arab Region. The first meeting was held in Cairo in November 2015 to promote the "Leaving no Woman Behind: Towards Transformative Inclusive Development in the Arab Region" SDG initiative.³⁷

- In 2016, The League of Arab States' Women, Family and Childhood Department (LAS-WFCD) launched the Arab Network for Economic Empowerment of Women, "Khadija".³⁸ The Khadija Network aligns with the Cairo Declaration for Arab Women and the Strategic



34. UN Women 1995

35. Conclusion of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the UN body tasked with monitoring the implementation of CEDAW

36. Women's Economic Empowerment in Selected MENA Countries: THE IMPACT OF LEGAL FRAMEWORKS IN ALGERIA, EGYPT, JORDAN, LIBYA, MOROCCO AND TUNISIA, OECD, 2017.

37. Technical experts, academia, representatives from national and regional institutions and from UN agencies gathered 18-20 September 2017 in Cairo to identify ways to leverage trade and make SDGs a reality in the Arab States. According to an initial assessment, several countries in the region have not yet integrated trade related components and activities into their national plans to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

38. In collaboration with the European Union and UN Women Regional Office for Arab States within the framework of the joint program between the European Union and UN Women, "Spring Forward for Women", which aims to enhance women's political participation and economic empowerment, funded by the European Union.

- Plan for Arab Women Empowerment (post-2015). It advocates for safer workplaces, fair access to leadership positions, capacity building, and labor laws and regulations. It also acts as a channel to exchange knowledge and advocate for gender-balanced approaches in the regional economy through engaging stakeholders from the public, social, and private sectors.³⁹
- The ILO's mandate on gender equality aims to promote equality between all women and men in the world of work. This mandate is grounded in the International Labor Convention, in particular the four key equality conventions. These are the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).⁴⁰ Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco have ratified the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work including conventions No. 100⁴¹ and No. 111⁴² of the Decent Work Agenda. Only Morocco has ratified convention No. 183 (Maternity Protection).
 - The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets a series of targets for the global community to reach by 2030, including on gender empowerment. Organizations including the ILO and the WTO are playing an active role in helping to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda, including Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.
 - The UN Global Compact (UNGC) Ten Principles are derived from The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labor Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.
 - The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP), launched in 2010, is a partnership initiative of UN Women and UN Global Compact (UNGC). It provides a set of considerations to help the private sector focus on key elements integral to promoting gender equality in the workplace, marketplace, and community. WEP provides a "gender lens" through which business can survey and analyze current practices, benchmarks, and reporting. Informed by real-life business practices, WEPs helps companies tailor existing policies and programs or establish new ones to realize women's empowerment. The Principles also reflect the interests of governments and civil society and support interactions among stakeholders. In the Arab Region, 123 companies, including 57 countries from the United Arab Emirates,⁴³ signed the CEO Statement of Support for the WEPs, signaling support for gender equality and encouraging fellow business leaders to do the same (WEP 2018).

39. <https://spring-forward.unwomen.org/en/events/economic-empowerment/second-meeting-arab-network-for-economic-empowerment-on-women-khadija>

40. <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/gender.htm>

41. www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11310:0::NO::P11310_INSTRUMENT_ID:312245

42. ILO Fundamental Conventions that correspond to core labour standard covers: Forced Labour (Convention 29); Freedom of Association (Convention 87); Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining (Convention 98); Equal Remuneration (Convention 100); Abolition of Forced Labour (Convention 105); Non-discrimination (Convention 111); Minimum Age (Convention 138); Worst Forms of Child Labour (Convention 182)

43. <http://weprinciples.unglobalcompact.org/Site/Companies/#search>

B. Highlights of Global Good Practices, Policies, and Tools for Gender Equality Used by the Private Sector Companies

Many international private sector companies have addressed gender equality and women's rights in the workplace, providing positive examples for others to follow. Below are a few examples.

- Coca-Cola created a Global Women's Initiative in 2007, with the purpose of accelerating the recruitment, advancement, and retention of women internally across the company. That initiative included the founding of the Women's Leadership Council (WLC), a group of senior women drawn from around the globe who advise top management on how best to build a pipeline of new women leaders within the company. The WLC, composed of 17 senior women leaders across many geographies and functions, advises the CEO and senior leaders on strategies and initiatives for the accelerated development and advancement of women for senior leadership positions. Internally, the initiative strategically prioritizes the recruitment, development, advancement, and retention of women, with the goal of achieving gender parity at all levels of the organization by 2020. Externally, 5by20 is Coca-Cola's global commitment to enable the economic empowerment of 5 million women entrepreneurs across the company's value chain. Coca-Cola's initiative has significantly increased women's representation around the world. Between 2008 and 2012, the proportion of women leaders increased from 23 percent to 29 percent among senior-level women and the proportion of immediate pipeline women increased from 28 percent to 34 percent, with consistent increases across regions. Globally, Coca-Cola's external recruitment of women leaders rose from 13 percent in 2007 to 41 percent in 2011. The representation of women in Coca-Cola's key assessment and development programs rose from 21 percent in 2007 to 49 percent in 2011. The reach of 5by20 has recently expanded to include 12 countries; by 2011, it had impacted 130,000 women, and was on track to reach 300,000 women by the end of 2012." (<https://www.catalyst.org/research/the-coca-cola-company-global-womens-initiative-women-as-the-real-drivers-of-the-21st-century/>).
- "In 2017, Sodexo—provider of quality-of-life services to more than 75 million customers in 80 countries—set the ambitious goal of having 40% women at its senior leadership level by 2025. Choosing that particular target was no accident. It was influenced by a gender-balance study Sodexo conducted in 2014 among 50,000 managers across 100 entities. The most important findings are: teams with a male-to-female ratio between 40% and 60% consistently delivered the best results, from financial performance (23% more gross profit) to employee engagement and client retention, investing in and accelerating talented, diverse women has a clear business advantage." Sodexo⁴⁴ is an outspoken champion of diversity. Led by an enthusiastic CEO and board chairwoman, the global multinational services company has publicly committed to improving five dimensions of diversity: gender, people with disabilities, generations (age), cultures and origins, and sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴⁵

44. A French facilities management and food services company based in 72 countries

45. [delivering-through-diversity_full-report.pdf](#) (mckinsey.com)

- Walmart Inc., launched the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Initiative to leverage Walmart's size and scale to help increase women's economic mobility in 2011. It worked to attract, retain and develop female leaders by elevating women. For example, female executives are developing and mentoring women throughout the organization. Furthermore, it implemented a women's empowerment program to train 60,000 women in 150 factories and processing facilities producing for top retail suppliers in industries with high percentages of women.⁴⁶ "Most of our 260,000 million customers are women. We understand that we need to source products that meet their needs on price, quality, and innovation. Walmart believes economic empowerment of women has a strong social case and business case. It's not only smart business, but is the right thing to do." (Jenny Grieser, Walmart).⁴⁷
- and Micro Enterprise Development Agency (MESMEDA), The Commercial International Bank (CIB) and Vodafone Egypt, three of the largest and most prominent private sector companies in Egypt were awarded this certification in 2021.⁴⁹
- Anti-Harassment Policy and Complaint Procedure: The American University in Cairo developed this policy to deal with allegations of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation that take place at the workplace or work events, regardless of their location. Every employer should have a written policy specifically prohibiting sexual harassment. The policy should be included in the employee handbook, distributed to all new employees, posted, and redistributed on a regular basis. After a policy against sexual harassment has been announced, managers and supervisors must also take follow-up action to make sure that employees are not engaging in prohibited activity. A complaint procedure should encourage employees to come forward with allegations of sexual harassment. There should be several people to whom an employee can bring an initial complaint. Human resources officers or other appropriate employer representatives should be designated to investigate complaints.
- Parkville Pharmaceuticals in Egypt believes in changes, diversity, and the fact that women provide a unique and worthy perspective that fosters Parkville's business growth. Parkville is among the pioneering signatories of the Women Empowerment Principles⁵⁰ in the Pharmaceuticals

C. MENA Region Good Practices, Policies, and Gender Equality Tools

- In Egypt, the World Bank collaborated with the National Council for Women in Egypt to promote, incentivize, and institutionalize gender equity in the Egyptian private sector through reviving the Egyptian Gender Equity Seal (EGES) certification, which was started in 2008 but was interrupted due to turbulent political events after 2010. This model promotes gender equity in the private sector by promoting best practices in the areas of recruitment, career development, family-work balance, and sexual harassment policies. It is guided by the World Bank's Gender Equity Model (GEM).⁴⁸ As part of this initiative, Small, Medium

46. [global-womens-economic-empowerment-initiative-fact-sheet-2013.pdf \(walmart.com\)](#)

47. [RES-0054-GBCWEE-Report-171123.pdf \(wocan.org\)](#)

48. World Bank Document "Setting International Standards for Gender Equality in the Private Sector, The Gender Equality Model"

49. [Gender Equity Seal: A Key to Strengthening Egypt's Private Sector \(worldbank.org\)](#)

50. [www.wepinciples.org/Site/PrincipleOverview](#)

and Biotechnology industry in Egypt with the belief that 'Equality Means Business'. Accordingly, they created an environment, framework, and culture in which women are treated equally, where they hold key leadership positions and have full empowerment in decision-making. Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but a strategic directive to Parkville as well. They are strongly committed to integrating the Women's Empowerment Principles into their business practices and to being an ambassador of current global rights reform.⁵¹ Females represent 41% of the company's workforce, and they are always looking for more female employees.⁵²

- Morocco, in 2014, adopted "Ikram", a four-year government plan for gender equality (2012-16) that has a significant budget, lays out 143 measures and sets 24 goals in eight areas. The Committee noted that the state budget had included a gender component since 2005 to take account of the differentiated concerns of women, men, girls, and boys, and that a report on the gender budget, which now covers 27 ministerial departments, was drafted and submitted to Parliament each year (OECD 2017).
- Vermeg⁵³ in Tunisia has set specific targets for nondiscrimination between men and women. These targets include: Encouraging the recruitment of women, both young graduates and experienced workers, retaining women by providing equal opportunities and implementing the Women's Empowerment Principles, promoting the professional development of women, particularly via access

to senior and key Vermeg positions, raising the percentage of women amongst the managers and directors to 25%, implementing solutions to enable a fair work/life balance in terms of organizing the work and accommodating the demands of parenthood, providing equal pay for men and women, training the staff, managers and leaders to address micro-discrimination, understanding and banning stereotypes, particularly through targeted internal communication, and developing diversity awareness and sensitivity for both men and women.⁵⁴

- Sodexo⁵⁵ in Morocco has worked on promoting gender equality over the last 20 years. They believe that gender balance fosters creativity and innovation and ultimately drives better business results. *"When women reach their full potential, businesses and society are stronger and more successful."* (Sophie Bellon, Chairwoman of Sodexo's Board of Directors).⁵⁶
- BMCI bank (Moroccan subsidiary of BNP Paribas) has formally committed to diversity and gender equality since 2016. Below are the set of actions they took to ensure gender equality:
 - » Adopted a declaration of commitment at the highest level of the company in favor of diversity and gender equality;
 - » Established a human resources policy that includes gender equality and equity at all levels (recruitment, performance evaluations, trainings, promotions and wages, pregnant women's protection, parental leave, work-life balance, moral or sexual harassment, etc.);

51. Parkville Pharmaceuticals | WEPS

52. Quality - Parkville (parkvillepharma.com)

53. VERMEG is an international software group operating across several lines of B2B services: pensions & insurance, wealth & asset management, financial & security markets and Digital Financial Services. It was Founded in 1993

54. Vermeg-CSR-Report-2017-EN.pdf

55. Founded in 1966 by Pierre Bellon in Marseilles, France, Sodexo is the worldwide leader in Quality of Life services

56. Pressing for Progress on Gender Equality (sodexo.com)

- » A corporate policy is signed by all employees during their recruitment;
 - » Created a Diversity Department dedicated budget line allocation. This department promotes the emergence of “Diversity Champions” inside the company;
 - » Their recruitment and advancement opportunities (promotions) method is based on considering an equal number of male/female candidates and prohibits all forms of discrimination,
 - » Implementation of fair and objective remuneration and benefit mechanisms (equal pay based on a salary scale, bonuses, social benefits, transparent and systematic evaluations);
 - » Internal communication / awareness raising related to the importance of diversity;
 - » Created a system for employees’ support during important life events. (For example, there is maternity leave, during which time women keep their jobs and benefits.)
 - » Introduced mechanisms to fight and sanction all forms of bullying (moral, sexual, etc.),
 - » Openness to hearing women’s needs and trying new working methods (flexible hours, teleworking, introducing company kindergarten, etc.)
 - » Set quantified objectives for the integration of women at every company level (recruitment, total workforce, framing and decision-making positions, members of the executive committee, union representation, etc.),
 - » Promote male-female collaboration to induce changes in perception, mentality, and female managerial values (with an attempt to always appoint as many women as men to project teams),
 - » Encourage women to “take power” and show solidarity by multiplying initiatives and trainings in favor of “female leadership and empowerment”.
- In words of their representatives, the implementation of a strategy in favor of diversity within BMCI has allowed a major increase of women representation and productivity growth through:
- » A more pleasant and motivating work environment,
 - » More complementarity in project management (different visions),
 - » Significant improvements in terms of organization and rigor,
 - » A gain of creativity and innovation.
- BLC Bank⁵⁷ Lebanon embarked on the Women Empowerment (WE) initiative by conducting detailed market research to determine the specific gaps in financial and nonfinancial services that female entrepreneurs face in Lebanon. This informed the development of a customer value proposition (CVP) designed for women that included, among others, the designing of a collateral-free loan for businesses in existence for at least two years, in recognition of women’s difficulty accessing collateral even when they are strong candidates for loans. This helped the Bank to gain more respect and trust from its women’s

57. Established in 1950, BLC Bank is one of Lebanon’s oldest banks

clients, and on the other hand, the clients were satisfied with the 'more personalized services'.⁵⁸

4. Conclusion and Recommendations for Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment

The reasons for the region's persistent lagging behind the rest of the world in empowering and including women in the economy are multiple, and the socio-economic conditions are challenging and complex, calling for a multi-stakeholder approach. Governments, private sector companies, as well as civil society, all have an important role to play in initiating and supporting change, and, preferably, they should complement and support each other in the process. The participants in the regional conference and the project team, including the consultants, discussed and formulated priorities and recommendations for all sectors to make stronger and faster progress in women's economic participation in the region.

A. Recommendations for the Government

It is well understood that the government has a major support role to play when it comes to defining and enforcing policies and laws that ensure an enabling environment for gender equality to be achieved in societies in the MENA region. Additionally, participants of the working groups during our recent conference also had the following specific recommendations for the public sector:

- Ensure there is a higher level of not only endorsing but also implementing the conventions for women's rights at work including the SDG5 on gender equality. They can also ensure the enforcement of the application of quotas for women's inclusion in the private sector.

"Some of the best programs that I have led, and were a success, there was a partnership in the private sector, non-profit, and the government. The government always have a role in a lot of things that we do. The Government in Morocco, e.g., if they want to pass a law, they will incentivize the private sector to be more inclusive and to help with many issues such as gender equality, and others."

Younes Taguenit, Project Manager, ESPOD, Morocco (Conference Participant)

- Ensure equal access is provided to the full range of financial services (savings, credit, insurance, payments, as well as the accompanying financial education to significantly improve women's social and economic empowerment because financial inclusion provides women with the tools to accumulate assets, generate income, and therefore participate and integrate fully into society and the economy).
- Introduce innovative incentives for companies that achieve gender equality, such as special tax breaks.
- Facilitate access to special funds for companies that set up initiatives for equal opportunities between women and men. This includes looking into Gender Responsive Budgeting, a tool for achieving equality, and a way for governments and non-governmental organizations to promote gender equality using administrative and fiscal policy. It involves understanding the differences in a budget's impact on men and women and subsequently creating policies to remedy inequalities.
- Establish a public policy of gender diversity, making sure that there is an administrative and legal

framework that takes into consideration the constraints women face in accessing the labor market.

- Issue more proactive policies and programs at the national and local levels to address the issues of structural inequality and to promote decent working conditions.
- Revisit labor laws to ensure that they abide by international standards, theoretically and in practice.
- Strengthen support for women entrepreneurs through programs that address gender specific supply constraints and help increase women's economic participation. This can be done, for example, through prioritizing micro level savings and loans schemes and by providing better financial services to women.
- Set up programs that facilitate women's access to positions and professions that were previously mainly reserved for men and give space, empower real change makers, and gender equality champions within the government.
- Improve women's access to business associations and networks that might not be as available as they are to men because of limited social mobility.
- Introduce educational materials in schools that promote gender equality from an early age. These can include developing a sense of work ethic among children equally between girls and boys and changing the stereotypes around women's role as homemakers and men's role as sole breadwinners.

B. Recommendations for the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSOs have a role to play to support the private sector to become more accessible to women's employment and gender equality. This includes the following roles:

- Help governments enforce labor laws and provisions aiming to stimulate gender equality in the private sector;
- Assist the process of incentivizing gender equality. CSOs could engage in measuring, awarding, and certification related to gender equality;
- Improve the quality and skill of women engaging in economic activity either through job skills or entrepreneurship training programs;
- Help provide timely and accurate information about market needs (in terms of product quality and supply chain opportunities, or workforce needs and opportunities);
- Assist in creating an enabling and safe environment for women to participate in private sector companies and economies (e.g. provide solutions for anti-discrimination policies at the workplace, provide training and orientation about anti-sexual harassment, etc.)

C. Recommendations for the Private Sector

- Support gender equality from the top: gender equality has to be supported by top management, which must appoint managers and allocate means for its implementation. Companies should not hesitate to set quotas for women (both for employment rates and decision-making positions). Management boards should place the issue of diversity and gender equality as central part of corporate strategy.
- Set up corporate policies in favor of gender equality: the human resources strategy should prohibit all forms of discrimination or harassment. Equal opportunities for all employees must be respected in all areas (salaries, promotions, training, etc.).

- Employ a participatory approach: include all employees and stakeholders in defining the strategy and actions in favor of gender equality.
- Adopt rapid interventions to promote gender equality: it is important to focus on particular strategies and tools that can be applied relatively fast, without creating financial pressure on companies, and could pave the way towards positive change and make a difference.
- Include gender equality in the supply chain: include women or businesses managed by women within the base of suppliers, subcontractors, and other business partners. Large firms should, as part of their CSR policy, support women-owned businesses by integrating them into the value chain. (This could include sourcing from businesses run by women, using training firms managed by women, helping women's businesses to access markets or training, etc.).
- Participate in gender equality certification programs such as gender equality seals, equality certifications, etc., and promote doing business with equality certified companies and organizations.
- Create a safe and suitable working environment: put in place initiatives that increase the safety, health, and well-being of employees. (If possible, try to offer options that improve work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, telework, company daycare for children, and safe transportation, and implement and enforce anti-harassment programs).
- Consider sponsoring and working with NGOs on projects and initiatives that aim to increase women's economic empowerment and inclusion as part of Corporate Social Responsibility
- Share and document best practices (policies and strategies) and advocate for gender equality (through their annual reports and CSR audits, during meetings of business associations, human resources managers associations, other business engagements, etc.)
- Set up evaluation and monitoring indicators

FIGURE 3: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR MENTIONED BY THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Place gender equality and diversity as a strategic corporate orientation and support advocacy	Change culture, practices and behavior (equal pay, maternity, etc.)	Offer equal training opportunities	Offer equal opportunities for promotion	Offer child care services (inside the workplace or nearby)
Train HR employees on gender equality	Create change from the top	Apply gender equality initiatives and measure progress	Recognize women's achievement	Develop gender sensitive results
Work with CSOs on community projects	Include women's-owned businesses into the value/supply chain	Build inter-sectoral programs and collective labor agreements in favor of diversity and gender equality	Publicize positive results and best practices of the corporate strategies that favor gender equality	Organize awareness-raising actions concerning diversity

to measure the efforts and progress made in terms of gender equality. It is recommended that companies use “Women Empowerment Principles” (WEP) established by UN Women and UN Global Compact.⁵⁹

D. Recommendations for collective responsibilities shared between the private sector, CSOs, and the government

- Women’s workforce development: it is important to promote educational and training opportunities for females in the fields of science, technology, and engineering. In addition, it is critical to introduce re-skilling interventions for women and girls, helping them enter the STEM path, as there is a continuously growing gender gap in this area. Additionally, it is necessary to strengthen vocational and digital technology-related training for women to increase mobility and widen their occupational choices.
- CSOs should be hired to conduct training for companies to show them the facts and statistics demonstrating the impact of gender equality on profitability and performance of the company, informing them about all the laws and rules and raising awareness of different gender equality related incentives that are available to them.
- CSOs should support continuous dialogue between the private sector and government about women’s economic rights and understanding the role of different partners, including business associations, the government, and labor unions, in ensuring better female participation in the private sector.
- CSOs, in cooperation with government and the private sector, could conduct and publicize studies on the state of women’s participation in the private sector as well as the impact of gender equality on companies and economies in the region and in specific countries.
- Advocacy for working women’s equal rights: promote the message that gender diversity is good for companies because as women fully participate in the labor market, companies benefit from increased business opportunities and access to new market segments. This also includes highlighting positive examples of women’s participation in leadership positions and its positive impact on companies, or how hiring more women in the workforce results in increased productivity, resilience, and adaptability of companies. Additionally, the advocacy campaigns could also promote innovative ways companies are creating favorable environments, allowing women to achieve a work and life balance (e.g. flexible work hours, safe transportation, work from home options, parental leave policies, childcare solutions, etc.)
- Cooperate to enable long-term cultural change in local societies: many problems concerning gender inequality in the region are the result of deeply rooted social attitudes and stereotypes. Therefore, it is important to induce a change in the perception of traditional gender roles and attitudes towards women’s economic participation and leadership role by utilizing mass media, granting awards to companies implementing best practices, and involving recognized opinion-shapers who can influence the public.
- Involve donors and foreign investors in the propagation of the culture of equal opportunity. For example, fund programs aimed at securing positions for women in traditionally male-dominated fields or positions.

59. Women Empowerment Principle WEPs, <https://www.weps.org/>

SECTION III

The Project Journey in the MENA Region Countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco)

This project presented the implementing partners with a number of challenges shared across the three countries, as they embarked on the process of implementation. Some limiting factors included the local cultures, in which gender inequalities have been normalized; lack of communication between the private sector, public sector, and civil society organizations; lack of knowledge within the private sector about the importance of gender equality and the positive impact of women's inclusion and empowerment on businesses and the economies; and lack of technical skills and expertise in local companies to enable them to address discriminatory behaviors and women's issues and needs at workplaces. Additionally, the economic situation and COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the start of the project, were also factors that reduced the willingness of private sector companies to participate in the project as they were dealing with crises that jeopardized their own future. Each of the implementing partner organizations found creative strategies to overcome these challenges, managing to meet and often exceed the planned outcomes. The sections below include reflections by the partners about the challenges they met, and the methods they employed to overcome them within the specific context of their own country.

Egypt

Methodology and Activities

At the beginning of the project, the idea of encouraging the private sector to embrace gender equity, in part to benefit their own companies, was relatively new in the MENA region, and few organizations were working on it. Therefore, the CEOSS team focused on defining the guiding framework, including addressing ways to reach private sector companies, approaches for introducing CEOSS as a civil society organization to these

private sector companies, communication tools and the key messages to use with the private sector, ways of mapping the private sector, and a process for choosing which companies to approach. To answer these questions, CEOSS formed a national steering committee for the project, which included representatives from private sector companies, governmental entities, and civil society organizations. The national steering committee consisted of 16 members (four from private sector, three from CSOs, five from government, one gender consultant, and three CEOSS staff). The members of the committee had the opportunity to participate in the first regional conference, which was organized in March 2021, and some of them also took part in the closing conference, held in February 2023.

The key roles for the national committee were establishing guidelines and standards for selecting the companies that would participate in the project, supporting private sector companies in implementing practices and initiatives that empower women, and transferring experiences among the members of the committee.

With the help of the Steering Committee, CEOSS then worked to recruit national level participants and conduct a range of activities with them (a total of 33 persons—26 women and 7 men—were recruited). The key objectives and activities conducted on the national level included:

- Open communication channels and create a supportive environment in which positive partnerships and constructive information exchange can occur between the private sector, NGOs (civil society), and government;
- Help NGOs, private sector representatives, and policy makers on the country-level understand

and support effective ways private sector companies can lead and inform the process of achieving better economic rights for women in the region;

- Conduct training workshops to improve capacity to conduct gender-improvement initiatives;
- Review and provide the needed support to private sector participants in designing and implementing their gender equality initiatives.

When recruiting national level participants, CEOSS implemented several procedures to reach companies in the private sector, including the following:

- Implemented outreach activities through governmental entities to access private sector companies. These entities included the Equal Opportunities Unit in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Unit at the Ministry of Manpower, Office of the Minister of Tourism, and Ministry of Culture.
- Developed an assessment tool to be used with companies to understand the areas of improvements, their needs, and how to mainstream gender across different departments at the private sector companies.
- Conducted 85 field visits and outreach initiatives to the companies in the free zone and industrial zones in Greater Cairo and other areas. Some of the points CEOSS used to interest companies in joining the program included the prospect of learning from sample initiatives that other private sector companies had already used as well as the presence in the program of multiple government ministries, with which participating companies would have the opportunity to engage



- After recruiting 15 private sector companies, CEOSS conducted 35 field visits/ meetings to help these companies to assess and analyze their situation. Based on the findings, the team came up with a set of activities, which they could conduct at the company level to improve gender equality. In addition, CEOSS organized three workshops for national level participants, to provide them with additional support, and to encourage private sector companies to implement initiatives planned.
- CEOSS also conducted one-day workshop with Arab Women Investors that included representatives of 14 private sector companies to raise their awareness and gain their support, which was attended by 14 persons.
- The program trained a total of 78 participants representing private sector, governmental bodies, civil society organizations, consultants and CEOSS teamwork, which include 33 core national network participants and additional representatives of the three sectors.

The workshops focused on four themes, to ensure maximum benefit for all participants:

- a. **Knowledge:** The workshops were designed to focus on improving the participants' awareness and knowledge about gender issues, including discrimination and workplace violence. Principles and types of women's empowerment were presented, as well as the responsibilities of business owners applying them. Additionally, effective ways to increase the profitability and productivity of companies through gender mainstreaming were discussed.
- b. **Presenting models:** The workshops focused on presenting examples to motivate companies to take action towards ensuring gender equality and women's rights in workplaces. These examples included Equal Opportunities Unit at the Ministry of Planning, Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Unit in the Ministry of Manpower, and the Arab Women Investors Union.
- c. **Situation Analysis:** During the workshops, participants tried to define the current opportunities, challenges, and recommendations to overcome these challenges and move forward towards improving gender equality and women's economic empowerment.
- d. **Design Initiatives and Implementation:** Out of 15 companies which took part in the program, 12 medium and small companies designed

and implemented gender equality initiatives. The initiatives focused on promoting equal opportunities among employees, providing the needed support for women and people with disabilities to ensure they are integrated, and maximizing their participation. The initiatives included several measures such as:

- » Developing a code of conduct based on the principle of equality in pay, promotion opportunities, and training opportunities;
- » Designing plans to improve overall workplace safety and a plan to guide vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and people with disabilities during emergencies;
- » Assigning a responsible person to follow up and monitor the implementation of measures to ensure women's participation and gender equality;
- » Participating in opportunities to raise awareness about the importance of equal



opportunities, non-discrimination, and justice, and having no tolerance for violence and harassment through delivering training and raising awareness sessions and through developing anti-discrimination policies and grievance mechanisms.

Also, the project reached 4,200 employees who benefited from the initiatives implemented in 15 private sector companies.

Challenges and Coping Strategies

- In Egypt, not all private sector companies have policies or standardized procedures for gender mainstreaming. Therefore, at the start of the project, CEOSS conducted several meetings with different entities (Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism, The Egyptian National Railways, the Ministry of Transport, the Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Industries, Workers Union, and pioneering private sector companies and banks that applying models of equal opportunity and gender equality) to come up with the best approach for implementing the project that would meet the actual needs and build up a model that can be used to encourage private sector companies to work on improving gender equality and women's rights in workplaces.
- The project was impacted by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic negatively affected the private sector companies, who had to cope with their own challenges and very often fight for their own survival, which diminished their interest in participating in the project. To deal with this, CEOSS conducted in-person visits to the individual companies which applied to participate but could not attend the

workshops. During the visits, they were given the information that had been provided during workshops, and CEOSS' team assisted individual companies in developing plans for gender equality initiatives.

- The private sector company staff did not always have enough time to participate in the workshops for several consecutive days, so CEOSS used two approaches:
 - » Conducted 14 separate meetings with officials on the companies' premises for the 15 private sector companies to discuss the current situation and the activities for the project, which were attended by 28 people.
 - » Conducted three one-day workshops for 15 private sector companies in the national network, which were attended by 78 persons (24 males and 54 females), (42 participants from 15 private sector companies, 4 consultants, 9 participants from 4 civil society organizations, 16 participants from government bodies, and 7 attendees from CEOSS staff). Those workshops were conducted in close collaboration with other members of the national committee from the government and civil society.
- CEOSS is aware of the extent of the existing barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment in Egypt. These barriers include misperception about gender equality and women's ability to work, unbalanced gender roles and lack of division of labor at home, and a lack of knowledge about the importance and benefits of gender equality, to name a few. Therefore, CEOSS focused on improving the participants' knowledge and awareness about gender issues,

about the importance of economic inclusion of women in public and private spheres, principles of equal opportunities, and workplace policies that promote gender equality and women's rights.

- The private sector focuses on increasing profit and reducing costs. Therefore, CEOSS used three approaches during the discussions with the private sector companies to motivate them to participate in the project: suggesting interventions which are not costly and are realistic, presenting examples of other companies that implemented interventions at a low cost, and inviting multiple government ministries, such as the Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Economic Development, to participate in the committee. CEOSS focused on engaging more government ministries for two reasons: to encourage private sector companies to actively participate in a project because of access to these relevant government entities, and to strengthen the government's role in promoting changes and adapting gender-inclusive practices inside private sector companies.

Project Participants Highlights: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Champions in Egypt

El-Hassn Textiles: El-Hassn, a textile company, is one of the oldest dyeing and finishing companies in the Middle East. It employs approximately 1,300 people. It is one of the few local companies that have policies in place for equal opportunities and empowerment of women, such as an equal employment policy, anti-harassment policy, anti-discrimination policy, a complaints system, and regulations for the employment of women according to Egyptian Labor Law No. 12 of 2003.

Under the project, El-Hassn participated in the training provided by CEOSS and as a result, it



decided to further improve and solidify their gender equality practices by developing a code of conduct and providing gender equality awareness training that includes combating forms of violence against women and exchanging experiences with other companies from the private sector. The next step they would like to take with the assistance of CEOSS is to obtain the gender quality seal.

Riad Group: The Riad Group was started as a family business in the 1930s by its' founder Samy Riad. It was established as Fabrique de Flanelles Samir in 1947, focusing on the production of knitted fabric and ready-made garments for export. Today, the Riad Group is a vertically integrated textile and apparel producer, supplying quality products to leading international brand names and department stores.

This project helped us convince men that there is no place for discrimination based on gender.

- Osama Aziz, General Director, Riad Group



The group consists of three companies, Fabrique de Flanelles Samir, Egyptian Textiles for Dyeing and Finishing and Tiba Textiles. The company is one of the first exporting textile companies in Egypt and has more than 3,000 staff.

They participated in capacity-building workshops and designed an initiative to empower women by working on a code of conduct for equal opportunities, disseminating it among workers, and placing it in different places easily visible to everyone. The company sees the importance of working to empower women and open new horizons for them by focusing on increasing participation of women in the workforce, whether in the technical or administrative sectors. In addition, the company assigned a woman to be responsible for monitoring all women's empowerment activities and reporting across the three companies.

We are proud to say that we shared the policy with all employees, and we delivered training on the policy to 600 employees (300 women and 300 men). This helped women feel more safe and comfortable working with men.



Abdel Mohsen Mansour, Quality Assurance Manager, Riad Group

The Riad Group team learned how to develop anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies and codes of conduct. This policy included reporting procedures and complaints and investigation mechanisms. Such a policy helped the company in improving the knowledge among male employees. As a result, positive changes, in which male employees displayed more acceptance and respect towards female colleagues, were reported.

Women's roles are important. Egyptian women are patient, intelligent, skilled and masters at work.



Yasser Hamdi, CEO and Managing Director, L'avvento

In addition, this policy was beneficial while dealing with international clients because such a policy is one of the mandatory requirements when entering into new contracts.

L'avvento Factory for Leather: Founded in 2016, this company produces laptop and school bags and backpacks. It has more than 130 employees (70% of whom are women), and women are represented in the management, heading several departments such as quality, production, finance, and inventory.

The company participated in the capacity building workshops under this program, which helped them to understand even better the importance of women's participation at work and support the belief in women's ability to do anything if they have the opportunity. In addition, the project helped L'avvento to become more aware of and address women's needs in the workplace in terms of safety and wellbeing. L'avvento worked with CEOSS on developing a complaint box, providing cameras, and understanding the importance of addressing the issue of childcare as a factor of women's economic participation. In the future, L'avvento will work on providing a nursery for the children of working mothers and conducting awareness raising sessions on gender equality concepts.

The Future of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Egypt

CEOSS focuses on integration, participation, and building partnerships at national and regional levels with governmental agencies and private sector actors to achieve a better future for Egyptians and to obtain the greatest benefit from the existing resources. CEOSS's proposed approach to continue working with the private sector after the project ends consists of four main pillars: integration, providing incentives, collaborating with civil society organizations, and publicity.

1. **Integration:** It will be necessary to look at areas of intersection, where gender equality can be improved while not adding unrealistic and costly pressures on the company. Ways to avoid interventions that require structural or functional changes will be sought. For example, promoting a safe environment for women in terms of combating harassment and respecting privacy helps create change towards better gender equality while also being low-cost. It will also be important to increase the sense of ownership of any designed and implemented interventions if we are to expect long-term sustainability.
2. **Incentives:** We need to think about incentives that can encourage the private sector to accept and implement change according to the project

objectives. For example, CEOSS proposed to the Ministry of Manpower an idea for an Egyptian Gender Equality Award for the private sector. Additional incentives might be more reputational, such as media coverage or publicizing a company's initiative and sharing it with other companies' decision makers. It can be useful to start with companies that serve as role models, so that other companies can be persuaded to follow suit. Moreover, it is important to allocate financial resources from the government (e.g., Ministry of Manpower) to reach larger number of companies and provide them with the needed technical support.

3. **The role of civil society organizations:** In addition to engaging the government, this project proved that it is important to strengthen the role of civil society organizations in assisting in building the capacity of the private sector to improve women's economic equality. We encourage the donor community to continue investing in this important role of the CSOs.
4. **Publicity:** It is important to raise awareness, share best practices and document successful examples of private sector companies who made change regarding gender equality and women's rights in the workplace to encourage other companies to follow them and become agents of change.



Tunisia

Methodology and Activities

At the beginning of the project, CAWTAR realized that some large companies in Tunisia were already receiving support from large international organizations⁶⁰ in the area of empowering them in the gender equality sphere, and quite a few already had policies and procedures in place that promote gender equality and implement gender equality initiatives. Therefore, CAWTAR decided to focus on supporting micro and small enterprises while also determining the needs of medium and large companies to continue to improve their practices in gender equality.

CAWTAR adopted a participatory approach through bringing together multiple and diverse actors including micro, small, medium, and large enterprises to enhance networking, share expertise, and support each other. In addition, CAWTAR chose also to use the organization's available resources that could be customized and used to support the implementation and achieving the goals of the project. Also, CAWTAR focused on building connections between its various projects to build on past results and ensure sustainability of efforts.

CAWTAR had several concerns related to the sustainability of the project due to the low level of knowledge and awareness about the importance of implementing supportive measures for gender equality in companies, especially in companies with dominant female representation, and the difficulty of integrating the action plans into the companies' actual plans since gender mainstreaming takes time to be implemented.



At the beginning of the project, CAWTAR designed a guide to reach the companies and select which ones would participate in the project. The interview guide covered brief questions about the company (e.g. when it was established, number of employees, and percentage of women), the company's plans to close the gender gap in pay and leadership positions, their opinions about the role of the government in closing the gender gap, and their own ideas and suggestions about how to close the gender gap in Tunisia.

A. Small and Micro Companies

CAWTAR assisted small and micro companies in adopting policies and procedures that support equality between women and men and strengthening the institutional environment for these companies. CAWTAR helped them to develop medium and long-term plans to integrate a gender perspective. These procedures included having companies sign commitment charters focused on providing equal opportunities and gender equality and using gender neutral and inclusive language in all their documents.

The main objective for small and micro enterprises was **developing and adopting a charter for equal opportunities**. The aim of the charter was

60. For example, The United Nations Global Compact network in Tunisia includes about 60 private sector companies. The network was launched in 2000 by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the United Nations Global Compact is a call for companies to align their operations and strategies with ten global principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption and take measures in favor of social progress.

to ensure equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making positions, skills development, no tolerance for discriminatory practices, and internal monitoring of the implemented initiatives and activities. CAWTAR started this with four micro-enterprises which participated in the project (ARTICA Engineering Services Office, Alpha N Consulting Office, MTC Office, and Matmour Tina's Consulting Office). The process of adopting the charter began with the participating companies first going through a series of workshops and coaching sessions (at least three sessions and workshops for each company). In addition to implementing the charter (which was the action plan implementation part of the project), the companies also made announcements about the charter on their website or their official Facebook page. Training was provided for four small and micro companies, attended by 17 representatives (11 women and 6 men). In addition, each of these companies received a personalized coaching and training program that suited their needs and the specificity of their work; it consisted of three training and skills development workshops.

CAWTAR also worked with three agricultural women's associations (Hareir Bougarara, Agri Women, and La Reine du Nord) and one company, Ten Al-Manar, on implementing an action plan to integrate gender into their work and implementing awareness and training activities on women's rights, equality at work, and leadership skills.

B. Medium and Large Companies

CATWAR also worked with large and medium companies on this project. Those companies were already somewhat aware of the importance of gender equality and gender mainstreaming at all levels to enhance the work environment. Hence, CAWTAR focused this part of the program on providing them with training programs to deepen



their gender equality capacity, such as training in **women's transformative leadership and combating gender-based violence**.

1. Capacity-Building Program in the Field of Women's Transformative Leadership

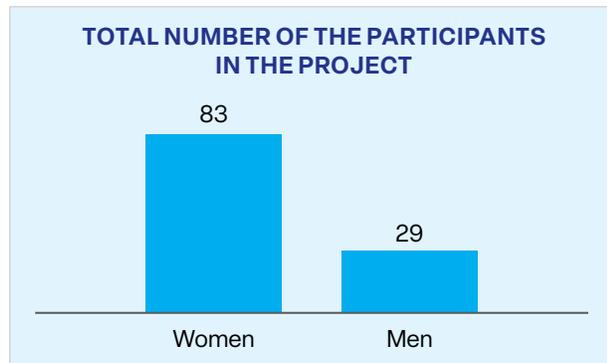
CAWTAR offered training modules for self-learning entitled Gender Transformative Leadership. The training program included self-learning and face-to-face training for two days. The training modules strengthened women's abilities to lead and influence their work environment to be supportive for women's rights. CAWTAR customized the training to fit banking sector companies and any other companies who were interested in attending this training. The training was attended by 14 participants (12 women and two men) from private sector companies (UIB Bank, ESPIT, ALPHA N CONSULTING, ARTICA, TLF, Managers), five female entrepreneurs, and two gender consultants.

2. Combating Violence against women

Violence against women is still one of the main obstacles that hinder women's empowerment, including economic empowerment. Accordingly, CAWTAR sensitized the private sector companies in the project to adopt and use "SAFENESS"⁶¹ a mobile application

that was launched by CAWTAR to report violence against women and girls in public places or wherever they feel in danger, even at home or in the workplace. CAWTAR, in close collaboration with Arab Tunisian Bank, launched a media campaign to promote the SAFENESS application.

Over the course of the project, CAWTAR achieved the following:



- The total number of individuals reached by various project activities was 112 (83 women and 29 men) through two network meetings, 16 coaching sessions, three consultation meetings, five field visits to medium and large companies, and seven interviews with women in decision-making positions in the targeted companies.
- 15 companies participated in this project, ranging from large to medium and micro enterprises (from banking, media, communications, education, consulting services, trade, and agricultural industries). Those companies have committed themselves to implementing some measures and actions relating to gender balance, diversity, integration in the workplace, and promotion of gender equality.

The involvement of the Tunisia Network in the **COMPACT Network** for the Global Charter for Corporate Social Responsibility represented an added value to the project, given that the network assists



61. SafeNess is a mobile application (working on Android and iOS) developed by CAWTAR to protect women from the violence they might encounter in public spaces such as sexual harassment and to strengthen the capacities of women to exercise their agency and enjoy the public space. This explains the choice of this app's name "SafeNess", which is taken from two words "Safe" and "Ness" that means "people" in Arabic. It is also currently available for women with hearing and visual disabilities. CAWTAR is also working on developing advanced technologies for women with hearing and visual disabilities, which will allow them to use the application without the need for a phone. The application records the geographic coordinates of the location, date and time to help the victim find help from the authorities. The application is based on 4 main axes:
1. The ability to choose a list of trusted people and send them the woman's position in case of danger, allowing them to follow her movements until she reaches a safe place.
 2. Users can ask for help by calling for help.
 3. The people who are asked to follow the movement of the woman can intervene in case of emergency either move on the spot or call for help.
 4. The possibility of saving information in the event of an assault.

nearly sixty private sector institutions, all of whom were encouraged to adopt the Charter for Corporate Social Responsibility. Therefore, the **COMPACT** network was considered a strategic ally for the project and its future activities, and a main contributor to the sustainability of what has been achieved. CAWTAR held a workshop under the title **“Women’s Empowerment is a Corporate Social Responsibility;”** with the aim of sharing the experiences of private sector initiatives in the field of promoting gender equality and supporting women’s participation in the private sector. The meeting was attended by 30 representatives of financial institutions, telecommunications, research and consultancy companies, United Nations agencies, and the media. The workshop was an opportunity to share experiences on the strategies of member organizations of the United Nations Global Compact (a strategic partner of CAWTAR) and the Tunisia Network in the field of human rights, international labor standards, environmental protection and anti-corruption. The meeting brought more visibility to the project and was an opportunity to exchange and share existing good practices, create connections, and build relationships between the participants, and was an outreach opportunity to add more partners to the project.

Coping Strategies

CAWTAR faced various challenges during the project lifetime and adapted the following coping strategies:

- The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a delay in the execution of project activities and challenges in meeting the original implementation timetable. However, CAWTAR did not stop implementing the activities and used the Internet to conduct some of the sessions, especially in the first part of the project. In addition, CAWTAR was patient and responsive to the needs of the companies in such challenging times.
- There were several initiatives by large international NGOs to address the issue of women’s empowerment and inclusion in the workplace, especially inside the private sector, at the same time as this project. This encouraged many Tunisian NGOs to work on that issue with private sector companies. Such a pattern created a challenge for CAWTAR when recruiting large companies since they had already partnered with these better-funded and larger international NGO initiatives. However, CAWTAR realized that women-led small enterprises needed support and could be a focus of this project since part of women’s economic empowerment in the private sector involves the empowerment and inclusion of women-led business into the economy.
- Tunisia’s private sector is skewed toward small firms. According to a report published by a European bank for reconstruction and development in 2018,” the distribution of private sector firms by employment size highlights the fact that one-person firms (self-employment) account for 86 percent of Tunisian firms. Only 0.4 percent of firms employ more than 100 workers. Such a pattern also posed a challenge to CAWTAR in recruiting big companies, thus making them decide to focus on women-led small enterprises instead.
- There were scheduling issues as well, posing challenges for big companies to join project training sessions. For example, in June 2021, there was a training session scheduled for companies that were interested in strengthening the presence of women in their organizational structure, but the number of private sector companies who joined was low due to their lack of availability. CAWTAR repeated the training session in October 2021, focusing the second time on micro and small companies since they were interested in participating, committed, and flexible regarding scheduling. Being in an early

stage of development, such companies were also expected to present less resistance to changing the culture in favor of women's rights and equality. In addition, CAWTAR resorted to delivering the training in the evening, understanding the workload and daily responsibilities of private sector companies.

- Lack of skills and capabilities in the companies to implement gender equality work plans, which would ensure the sustainability of the measures and initiatives that were adopted, required CAWTAR to give more technical support and guidance to them in implementing their gender equality initiatives. CAWTAR supported companies in the process of developing action plans (in progress) based on their needs, goals, and vision. Instead of group training, CAWTAR organized individual coaching sessions with each company and customized specific tools for each company based on their needs. Examples of this included developing a charter and publicity about a company's commitment to equal opportunities between women and men.
- In addition, CAWTAR was able to support the program participants by enhanced networking and exchange opportunities with other companies, as well as inviting them to attend other programs that complemented the goals of this project, providing further inspiration and encouragement.

Project Participants Highlights: Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Champions in Tunisia

l'Union Internationale de Banques (UIB): l'Union Internationale de Banques is a leading banking institution in promoting gender equality. It is the first bank in Tunisia to receive the gender equality label according to European and international standards. Women comprise 61 percent of the total staff, and

"SafeNess mobile application is of great interest to us on several levels. As we have female employees in the bank who are sometimes asked to stay late, this solution will put them at ease and above all in safety, mainly because the security component has become very sensitive. I really appreciate that this application takes into account blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing and mute women."



- Mrs. Ilhem Bouaziz, Deputy General Manager of the Bank

58 percent of the beneficiaries of the bank's training and capacity-building programs. The rate of women in decision-making positions is 40 percent.

Two representatives of the bank participated on CAWTAR's training session about Transformative Leadership for supporting women in private sector. Moreover, the collaboration between CAWTAR and the bank opened space for CAWTAR to continue promoting the "SAFENESS" mobile application and to encourage all the bank's female clients in its different branches to use it. After participating in the project, the bank's Deputy General Manager, Mrs. Baouaziz also expressed their commitment to participating in raising awareness of the economic benefits of gender equality at the workplace. She is interested to work on collecting data about the impact of gender equality on productivity, sustainability, and profitability of companies.

The Arab Tunisian Bank: The Arab Tunisian Bank was established in 1982. Women represent 48 percent of the total number of senior executives in the company. The board of directors includes



"ATB has built a strategy to strengthen women's capacities. CAWTAR brings its' know-how through its' network to the implementation of this strategy. It accompanies the roadmap by providing these women with access to leadership training to improve their chances of holding decision-making and management positions. ATB continues to roll out its capacity-building program to improve the situation of women in continuity, as well as opening up new opportunities. CAWTAR has been and will be ATB's partner on this path."



– Mrs. Imen Mesaadi, Central Director of Marketing and Communication at the Bank

two women members and bank's executive board includes 6 women and 9 men, and female executives head over 28 of the bank's 133 branches.

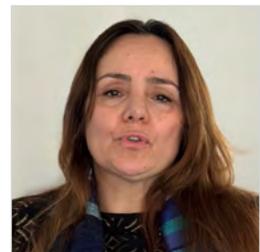
CAWTAR responded to the needs of the bank and delivered a customized leadership training program to a group of the staff and launched a media campaign about SAFENESS.

Tunisia Leasing et Factoring (TLF): TLF is a company for financial leasing, with 12 branches in the country, employing 185 persons. Under this project, CAWTAR provided training to support three of the staff members in strengthening their knowledge and capacities in terms of gender equality. In addition, CAWTAR developed a specific and adapted training material for TLF to be able to integrate gender in their action plan.

"Managers" Magazine: Managers is a business-focused magazine that was founded in 1987. Since 2014, the magazine has experienced a new vision and assignments among journalists and editors. The Editor-in-Chief Mrs. Sahar Mechri took on the task of making women entrepreneurs and influencers in the business world more prominent in the magazine and published an issue in April 2015 dedicated to the careers of influential women in this field as the first step in this direction. The magazine organized entrepreneurship award which reached its seventh edition in 2022.

In October 2022, CAWTAR announced about the transformative leadership training during the award ceremony for women entrepreneurs organized by "Managers" magazine. The ceremony was attended by more than 100 people (women and men) representing various active structures in the field of women's economic empowerment. In January 2023, CAWTAR provided transformative leadership training to five winners, all female entrepreneurs.

"Before attending the training with CAWTAR, the idea that all managers are men did not cause any problem for me and I did not think about it. But the training opened my eyes and I found that we don't have many women in managerial positions; it is only one female manager in marketing department. I was shocked by this, actually. Now, I always think about what I can do for women in my company."



– Mrs. Saloua Arab, Deputy General Manager of TLF

In addition, other women were invited to exchange their experiences during meetings organized by the center within the framework of the project. Moreover, four female entrepreneurs and the Editor in Chief of Managers attended the second meeting of the project, which took place in November 2022.

ARTICA Engineering Services Office: ARTICA was founded in 1996 with the idea of creating both beautiful and functional spaces either through designing new buildings or developing outdoor entertainment centers. The office has four employees (one woman and three men). CAWTAR assisted ARTICA in the development of a charter for equal opportunities. The charter was adopted as an official document and published on ARTICA's web site and Facebook page, and they also became a champion and advocate for gender equality, encouraging other companies in the industry to adopt similar steps. ARTICA is a member of the national union of architects, and inspired by the program, they are now also exploring the gender equality practices and initiatives of the International Union of Architects and ways they can further be involved.

"I learned a lot during this project and I want the adoption of the principle of equal opportunities not to stop at my level. This is why I presented the charter to the council of architects of Tunisia to adopt it at the national level and I think it will be done in the next year since the charter is now being reviewed."

– Mr. Sabri Nasfi, owner



and two branches. The office employs 15 male and female experts in various fields: accounting, environment, corporate social responsibility and entrepreneurship. CAWTAR assisted ALPHA N through the development of a charter for equal opportunities between men and women in the workplace. The charter was adopted as an official document and published on ALPHA N Facebook page.

The Future of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Tunisia

The momentum that has been initiated by the project is excellent and promising. It must be maintained and enhanced. In order to build upon the achievement of the project, CAWTAR plans to use different mechanisms to continue the journey of improving gender equality and women's empowerment. These mechanisms include:

- Systematic gathering of documentation and data about the implemented initiatives and achieved progress is needed to encourage companies to replicate successful experiences. In addition, publicizing achievements of companies and the initiatives implemented under this project is needed to encourage other companies to follow and to replicate the experience with other companies and in different regions and countries.
- Continuing to support and follow-up with the private sector to encourage them in applying the developed plans and tools and sharing the results of implementation. In addition, it is important to document and share all initiatives and projects related to women's empowerment at national, regional, and international levels.
- Encouraging private firms to have more women in the high positions and to understand that more gender equality in the private sector is a real lever

ALPHA N Consulting: It is a multidisciplinary consulting office established in 2013. It has a head office

for success. This cannot be achieved without institutionalized procedures and regulations to guarantee the principles of equality and to foster a gender-sensitive environment.

- Organizing more awareness raising, capacity building, and networking activities targeting both women and men to create a culture based on gender equality values.
- The Arab Network for Gender and Development “@NGED” is also one of the CAWTAR’s mechanisms that provides its’ members with opportunities for collaboration and networking. The beneficiaries of this project will be invited to join the network and integrate into its’ continuous work, which will also help achieve the project sustainability.
- CAWTAR will invite partners and participating companies to engage in other activities related to the same objectives of this project. CAWTAR’s strategic plan, developed based on the SDGs, includes expanding space and multiplying opportunities related to gender equality and the promotion of women’s rights, through providing a permanent platform for collaboration, networking, and exchange of experiences.

Morocco

Methodology and Activities

During the implementation of the project, according to the staff of Ennakhil, the project faced some challenges that were local and global in nature. Locally, the reality is that the private sector in Morocco is dominated by family-owned companies. In this setting, women’s access to key positions and resources within the company is mainly due to their family membership and doesn’t always come because of having access to equal participation and

opportunities. Among the global factors affecting the project heavily were the COVID-19 pandemic at the very start of project implementation and, later, the war in Ukraine. These two events affected the local private sector companies in Morocco, adding strain and pressures on them that made the topic of women’s economic participation lower in their priorities. Several targeted companies, unfortunately, even went bankrupt during the project. In addition, in the early days of the pandemic, it became virtually impossible and outright dangerous to have any in-person activities and meetings, forcing Ennakhil staff to convert many planned activities into online events. This increased the level of effort and expenses to motivate and guide the project team and partners. Ennakhil used their personal connections with local networks and government entities as a main channel to get lists of private sector companies to be approached in Morocco.

The project activities had four main components:



Regional Level Activities: Ennakhil prepared and participated in an initial online conference in March 2021 and the in-person closing conference, which took place in Morocco in February 2023,

and was hosted by the Association Ennakhil. The main purpose of the initial regional conference was the creation of a network dedicated to sharing experiences, good practices, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and the potential threats for the private sector to promote women's economic rights in the countries that are involved in this project. The conference also resulted in the creation of Regional Framework Document (summarized in the first part of this booklet). The closing conference aimed to present the results and lessons learned of the project, share the experience of the private sector partners, and discuss the next steps and sustainability of efforts in promoting gender equality in the private sector.

National Level Activities – creating a national network and mobilization of private sector

companies: Ennakhil worked in partnership with the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises and the Women Entrepreneur's Association to identify a list of private sector companies to be approached to participate in the program. Ennakhil used the list of these companies, sent a presentation about the project, and then contacted the interested

companies. Around 200 private sector companies were approached, of which 43 were interested, and 21 participated in the project.

Providing technical support for the participating

companies: Ennakhil organized two rounds of initial trainings for the private sector and representatives of civil society and government, one focused on companies with under 50 employees, and another one for those employing more than 50 persons. Ennakhil organized multiple training workshops as well as technical assistance and individualized coaching sessions for the participating companies. These activities aimed to raise awareness, deliver training, and provide support for them in their journey to incorporate tangible actions to promote gender equality and women's economic rights within their companies. To assist the companies in this process, the gender consultants and trainers also used an easily applied needs assessment tool, a questionnaire that helped understand the level of awareness of the participants about gender equality and their highest priority needs. On the positive side, most (90-100%) participants were interested in promoting gender equality in their workplace

and greatly valued the importance of gender equality and inclusion, and a large percentage of participants (around 70%) described their organizations and companies as already having some measures and practices in place (such as equal pay, maternity leave, anti-sexual harassment practices, etc.) However, it was discovered that none of them had a formal, institutionalized approach to gender equality and women's empowerment. It was found that none of the companies compiled human resources statistics disaggregated by gender, none of the companies set up awareness sessions or other actions taking into account gender equality, and 60% of companies did



not have formalized non-discrimination and equal opportunity policies (neither general ones nor in terms of recruitment or career advancement). Furthermore, 60% of companies did not check that their suppliers respected the values of corporate social responsibility, including gender inclusion and equality, and companies had very few quantifiable results relating to monitoring and evaluating a gender equality approach.

Developing supportive tools and materials:

Originally, it was planned to have companies research, design and implement their own gender equality actions based on the needs assessment conducted. However, during the implementation process, it became clear to the staff and consultants of Ennakhil that what their participants needed most was assistance and clearer, simpler guidance in formalizing gender equality measures into policies and guiding principles. As mentioned above, many of the companies already understood the benefits of gender equality and had a will to implement changes, but needed low-cost technical support and simple examples that could be easily adopted and employed. Because of that, Ennakhil decided to develop a simple, unified “package of measures” that all participating companies could try to adopt. The package contained five directions/measures, and it was decided that the companies should adopt a minimum of two before the project ended. The guide includes three parts:

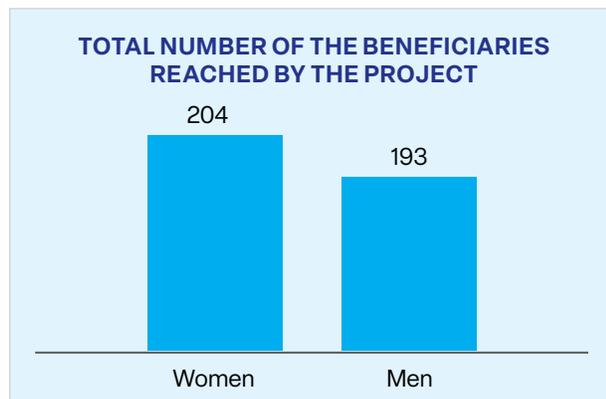
- a. A legal framework (national and international) that addresses violence and discrimination against women and women’s empowerment. This part includes a reflection on this from the Moroccan constitution, the Moroccan labor law, and international conventions such as CEDAW and SGS.

- b. Information on the importance of gender equality in workplaces taking into consideration the available opportunities, strengths and weakness in the Moroccan context.
- c. Five templates of steps/tools that can be used by the companies. It was decided that the companies should adopt a minimum of two before the project ended. These steps are:
 1. Incorporating firm principles of gender equality and anti-sexual harassment in a company-wide code of conduct.
 2. Formulating employment contracts on principles on gender equality.
 3. All company statutes incorporate values of gender equality, according to the Moroccan legal framework.
 4. Establishing recruitment and hiring policies that reflect gender equality and prevent discrimination.
 5. Adopting a charter of collaboration with suppliers and customers that includes rejection of exploitation of women, young girls, children, and the informal labor force.

Ennakhil staff was able to make the following achievements:

- Ennakhil reached twice the number of private sector participants as originally planned. They also succeeded in mobilizing local private sector gender equality champions to serve as speakers in workshops and offer examples of models and tools their companies use.

- A total of 46 direct participants were involved in training workshops (26 women and 20 men). Among them, there were 35 private sector participants, three from the government and eight representing civil society organizations.
- In addition to direct participants, the project reached more indirect beneficiaries. At the end of the project, 397 Moroccan individuals (204 women and 193 men) benefited from different activities undertaken during the project.



- Ennakhil innovated and added actions which were not included in the original project plan. They emphasized signing partnership agreements with recruited companies to guarantee continuity beyond the end of the project. These agreements will support female employees in companies by providing them with access to a listening center to respond to any type of violence women experience at their workplace, such as sexual harassment.
- Eighteen companies adapted some of the standardized tools from the guiding document, especially the conduct of gender equality and the code of conduct for sexual harassment.

Coping Strategies

Despite the impact of some obstacles faced, Ennakhil adapted to negative circumstances and was able to adjust and overcome them in the following ways:

- The project was impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on the companies, especially by the economic consequences, which endangered the companies' sustainability. The epidemic led many companies to withdraw from the project, except for some female-led businesses, which were not the target of the project. To deal with this, in the national network, Ennakhil focused on enterprises that had a better chance of surviving and were less affected by the crisis such as big companies in the services sector and small and medium enterprises that had a strong potential of survival. Additionally, Ennakhil decided to split the process of recruiting participants in the local network into two "waves", one in the summer and another one in the fall to achieve a bigger pool of candidates in the private sector for the final national network. In addition, Ennakhil used technology to continue implementing the project and converted activities from in-person activities to online ones.
- The national network provided the participants with a supportive and encouraging space where



they could reflect, discuss, and share their thoughts and experience regarding improving gender equality and women's economic rights. This space was used for discussion and reflection, which strengthened the involvement of companies despite the challenges and barriers they were facing.

- Ennakhil developed a guide to respond to and solve the negative consequences of culture and gender norms such as toxic male practices that challenge initiatives such as equal pay, female leadership, professional advancement, and women's autonomy. Ennakhil believed that by developing a guide to be used to improve women's status and rights in the workplace, this could also serve as helpful and beneficial tool for destroying stereotypes about gender roles and women's economic participation. In addition, this guide can be used as a formal tool for gender equality, equal opportunity, non-discrimination, and women's empowerment when there is no measure in place to guarantee such rights within companies. Moreover, this guide can be considered a monitoring tool to ensure that suppliers, contractors, vendors, and other partners respect the values of respect, safety, and equality, and reject the exploitation of women, young girls, and children and use of an informal labor force. Additionally, Ennakhil responded to the concerns of the recruited companies and their challenges regarding participation in the project. One such adaptation was that Ennakhil encouraged the recruited companies to adopt a single action plan (with the same package of steps to be conducted, from which they could chose to implement one or more of them), instead of having separate actions for each company. Therefore, Ennakhil

produced a very helpful set of resources to be used easily by companies, according to their actual needs.

- Ennakhil also sought the best use of available resources. The negative consequences of the global economic crisis (inflation, over-taxation, etc.) undermined the motivation of the companies to some degree. However, due to its adaptable management, expertise, and good standing in the local communities, Ennakhil succeeded in keeping 21 companies involved in all stages of the project. (The project target was 15, so, despite this challenge, they even exceeded the originally set benchmark).
- Ennakhil staff used various approaches to adapt to the nature of the companies and their concerns and challenges to make their participation in the project less burdensome. For example, when scheduling the meetings and activities, Ennakhil staff were careful to be mindful of other obligations by company representatives so that the program would not interfere with their ability to be productive



at work. Ennakhil also provided individual coaching sessions and conducted visits to the companies instead of asking them to attend the workshops.

- Ennakhil also decided to specifically address the impact of violence against women at workplaces. They focused on providing supportive services (legal assistance and counseling) for women who experienced any form of violence and discrimination. Ennakhil signed five partnerships with 10 of the recruited companies in the project to provide access for their employees to these listening and legal support services at Ennakhil.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Champions in Morocco

Boujrad is a consulting firm that consists of five staff (two women and three men) in addition to about 30 external contractors who have been selected based on the commitment to gender equality principles. Boujrad participated in the project through an invitation from the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises and Ennakhil. Boujrad participated in the training and coaching workshops to implement effective actions that can contribute to the economic rights of women and diversity within the firm. Boujrad benefited from the guide and the supportive tools provided in the project. He implemented three actions (equality charter, gender equality recruitment policy, and the code of conduct against all forms of harassment).

Class Confection is a family business in the industrial textile sector. It has 20 staff (10 women and 10 men), 15 employed in the manufacturing division

Since our organization is a family business, before taking part to the project, we had not thought about the risk or impact of harassment against women. Only after attending workshops, we became fully aware of the dangers of gender stereotypes, and verbal and physical harassment. As far as the promotion and professional integration of human resources in our firm is concerned, it is based on the expertise and needs of the position and not on any gender basis. The training provided us with expertise to be able to deliver gender training programs as part of our provided services.



- Ellouzi Mohamed, Managing Director of Boujrad Consulting Firm

(seven women and eight men) and five employed in the administrative department (two women and three men). Under this project, the company attended the two rounds of training provided by Ennakhil to support private sector companies and help them integrate steps to improve gender equality. The Class Confection Company signed a commitment declaration, pledging to implement one or more steps from the developed guide.

Participation in the project helped the company improve their work environment, changed their perception, and deconstructed the stereotypes around the male-dominated jobs in the following ways:

After participation in the project, a woman was hired as a courier, an occupation traditionally seen as a man's job.

Truthfully, before we joined this project our company was operating on a purely profit-making basis and the parity observed in our workforce is a pure coincidence. In fact, this project made us realize that there is no such thing as a male or female job. On the contrary, we realized that in the specific case of our company, women have always excelled in functions that were previously assigned to men. Also, project made us understand that we are "ambassadors" of our company and an example to our partners, as we hold and practice the values supportive of gender equality. We didn't realize our leadership in that sense before.



– Mohamed EL Bousserghini: Member of the board of directors and co-manager of the Class Confection company

- Being part of the project, men began to see themselves as agents of change who can lead by example in defending women's rights and restoring gender equality.
- The company adopted a measure to give women the opportunity to participate in decision-making. The team collectively decided the position of chair of the Board of Directors would alternate between women and men, instead of being reserved for men only. This will be implemented through rotating the management every four years, instead of six, and appointing a chairperson of the Board of Directors, alternating between women and men.

Moroccan Institute for Local Development:

The institute collaborated with Ennakhil under the project "Activating the Role of Private Sector in Promoting the Gender Equality in the MENA Region" to advocate for the generalization of parental leave rights in the private sector. The institute successfully achieved an extension for paternal leave from 3 to 15 paid days within the public sector.

The institute benefited from the participation in the project as following:

- The institute continued and expanded their work regarding paternity leave, which they want expanded to four weeks of mandatory

This project is a real opportunity for our institute. During our participation in the meetings and training workshops, we have been continuously reminding and advocating for equality between women and men.



It is an imperative to have the permanent support of the man for his wife, especially after childbirth. To achieve this, it was necessary to encourage and motivate the private sector actors and remind them of the importance of the private sector's role, but more importantly, their responsibility to restore this fundamental right, which is a source of fulfillment at work and within the family in general.

– Amina Fannane: Director of the Moroccan Institute for Local Development and head of the advocacy project for equality between men and women in Morocco

leave, with an option for an additional four weeks as set by international standards.

- The institute's participation in this project provided them with the space to share information about their experiences and struggles in promoting gender equality in the workplace.
- This project provided the institute with a chance to participate in meetings and training workshops where they were able to encourage and motivate the private sector participants to remind themselves about their responsibility and roles to restore gender equality and equitable labor division, both in the workplace and at home (where the institute aims to let men be responsible for childcare alongside their wives). In this way, this will secure women's presence in the labor force because childcare and household responsibilities will be shared between men and women.

The Future of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Morocco

Ennakhil recommends the following to create more inclusive work environments in the future and build on the achievements of the project:

- When replicating this project with other private sector companies, it is important to be mindful, while looking at companies and awareness among the employees, that knowing gender equality and women's empowerment principles does not mean they are able to implement any proactive measures or that they have the will to make actual changes related to gender equality in their companies. We need to provide support to help companies to translate their awareness about gender equality into formal policies and tools. This can include presenting examples to encourage them and alleviate their fears about a burdensome and costly implementation process.
- In the long term, all stakeholders (CSOs, government, parliament, and private sector) must work together to force the state to issue a new law that provides benefits to companies who



respect women's rights and ensure gender equality in the workplace. These advantages can include tax deductions, having priority to apply for state tenders, gaining access to international markets, and obtaining land from the government at low cost or for free. By applying this law, all companies will be encouraged to ensure gender equality to benefit from all the provided advantages.

- In the medium term, Ennakhil sees the value in having more programs that certify or give labels to companies that are committed to the cause of women's empowerment, to be accompanied by tax benefits and government assistance in financing, infrastructure, and access to economic opportunities.
- In the short term, Ennakhil recommends the establishment of quotas for businesses owned by women or managed by women or businesses that have women in leadership positions in accessing contracts, business opportunities, and financing.
- Advocacy initiatives are needed for more gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the private sector through drafting and adapting new laws. One example is the need to work on the integration of clauses in companies' contracts in favor of women's empowerment. In addition, Ennakhil will continue in raising awareness and advocacy for more programs (either by civil society or government) supporting businesses that are committed to women's rights.
- Ennakhil will continue to focus on lobbying and collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and local authorities to fight against gender-based violence (GBV) in the workplace because GBV is one of the major obstacles threatening women's participation in the economy. Ennakhil will continue to support efforts to establish anonymous reporting channels in all companies that women can use when they experience any form of violence and sexual harassment. In addition, Ennakhil will continue to provide legal and psychological support to survivors of violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.





IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

The project benefited both the private sector and the implementing organizations. From the private sector point of view, the project provided companies with the knowledge and know-how to mainstream gender in their workplaces according to their needs and available resources. The project also helped shift the perception that the responsibility for achieving gender equality and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially goal number five, rests on the shoulders of civil society organizations and government towards an understanding of collective responsibility.

From the implementing organizations' point of view, the project helped them understand the culture of the private sector, including specific challenges and burdens the sector deals with. This allowed the development of an atmosphere of partnership, in which the implementing organizations learned how to find compromises and create win-win situations when engaging private sector companies. All

implementing partners agree that this pilot project has had a capacity building impact on them in terms of adding new knowledge and skills that will be very helpful in future initiatives.

This project succeeded in creating productive and mutually supportive connections between the representatives of the private sector, public sector, and civil society organizations. The experience of bringing the private sector to the table with the government and civil society organization as an equal partner and a dialogue participant was beneficial at different levels. It helped in providing the private sector with a space to discuss their challenges and needs, working collectively to provide the private sector with the support to respond to their needs, and improving their sense of responsibility towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Moreover, implementing regional activities helped the tripartite actors to:

- 1) improve their knowledge about the importance

of gender equality for the success of companies and economies, 2) share successful strategies in which the private sector can take the lead, and 3) create communication and networks where these actors are mutually supportive. All this will, in turn, support long-term change and inform similar efforts to improve economic rights and increase equitable labor participation of women in the MENA region. In addition, the actual implementation showed that involving the public sector in the project activities was an added value as it helped the participants understand the vision of policy makers regarding gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as highlighting mutually supportive tools and resources that can help all involved work together towards progress. The government representatives were also often helpful in proposing private sector companies to be approached by the implementing organizations, so they helped in participant recruitment efforts.

The networks that were created on the national levels in all three countries provided the participants with a supportive and encouraging space where they could reflect, discuss, and share their thoughts and experience regarding improving gender equality and women's economic rights. Such spaces strengthened the involvement of private sector companies in the program despite the challenges and barriers they were facing.

Finding gender champions in each country to help encourage others to join the program proved to be an important factor of success when approaching initially reluctant private sector companies. Additionally, implementing partners adapted the approach to meet the needs and challenges of the private sector companies. The companies received guidance and technical support based

on their actual needs and circumstances and were encouraged to take steps that were within their reach, without causing excessive burdens on their resources. Ultimately, that encouraged companies to participate, and the majority of companies involved in this project are now highly motivated to do more in the area of gender equality. In addition, each country used different approaches and selection criteria in selecting the partner private companies. Some focused on female intensive industries, like textiles in Egypt or the banking sector in Tunisia, while in Morocco, Ennakhil looked at approaching companies of various sizes.

This project was also an opportunity for the three MENA-region implementing organizations to learn from each other and share available resources they developed. Throughout the project, they exchanged training materials and assessment tools. They also shared other available resources from projects they had previously implemented to make use of all potential resources. For example, Ennakhil shared a training manual of women's economic empowerment with CAWTAR to use in their training with small enterprises. Another example is that CEOSS shared their organizational assessment tools with CAWTAR and Ennakhil. This tool was developed to determine the areas of improvement for private sector companies regarding gender equality and women's rights at workplaces. CAWTAR offered the use of financial literacy training, the SAFENET app, and other women's economic empowerment training resources to CEOSS and Ennakhil and their program participants to further strengthen the ecosystem favorable to advancing women's economic empowerment in the region.

The regional aspect of the program helped the project teams in the three countries in sharing

challenges, lesson-learned, opportunities, successes, and awareness of what was happening regionally. It is important to foster such opportunities for regional cooperation more in the future to maximize the benefits and create greater momentum and support networks.

In the three countries, women's safety is a main issue because sexual harassment and violence against women in the societies, including the workplaces, are some of the major challenges that negatively affect women's employment. It is not surprising that all three local implementing partner organizations provided support for the participating private sector companies to combat violence against women. For example, CEOSS helped some of the companies in developing anti-sexual harassment policy, employee safety practices, and grievance mechanisms. Meanwhile, Ennakhil developed a template on sexual harassment policy that can be used by any company and linked companies' employees with listening and legal aid services. For their part, CAWTAR collaborated with a banking institution to launch a social media campaign about a mobile phone application, SAFENESS.

Recommendations

With the goal of ensuring project sustainability, HANDS and the three implementing partner organizations agreed on assigning a coordinator from each organization to work on electing a regional committee for sustainability. During the closing conference in Morocco, it was decided that a meeting will be held in March 2023 to elect committee members and discuss the sustainability plan. Moreover, below is an additional list of recommendations that were mentioned by the partners in the project and should be considered for future replication of the project.

- Engaging men and conducting awareness raising activities that target men are essential to improving their understanding about the importance of respecting women's rights, including in workplaces, changing stereotypes about women's abilities and skills, traditional gender roles, and the positive impact of gender equality on the business, economy, and the society. It is also important to work with children to raise them on the values of equality and respect for human rights.
- To ensure sustainability, there are two important issues to be considered:
 - » Create action plans for the implementing NGOs to ensure sustainability after the project ends;
 - » Ensure sustainability for the recruited private sector companies. Such a process can be done in two ways: either developing a specific action plan for gender equality or including gender mainstreaming in the company strategy.
- Creation of a regional network for the implementing organizations and the recruited private sector companies and public sector entities is needed to share information, resources, and best practices and document the experience of the members of the network.
- Highlighting the best models, initiatives, and success stories that have been achieved with the aim of spreading this culture and practices and to motivate companies to adapt the principles of equal opportunity.
- Despite the fact that labor laws in the countries have established many measures in favor of gender equality, there is a lag in the

implementation of these measures. Therefore, it is important to train labor inspectors on gender-related concepts to ensure active implementation of the labor laws. In addition, more awareness activities that target employees are needed.

- More capacity building is needed for the private sector on the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality. Moreover, more technical assistance is needed for the NGOs to build their expertise in working with the private sector on the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Working closely with public sector entities is recommended to create sets of incentives for the private sector, which would further encourage them in ensuring gender equality and women's rights at workplace.
- Working with the informal sector is needed since a large percentage of women are working informally.
- There is a need to develop a set of basic and mandatory standards and conditions to be followed and applied in all companies when it comes to gender (similar to ISO standards and regulations).





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