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COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SECTOR

Egypt



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**NEAR EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA**

COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL SECTOR

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This Country Gender Assessment (CGA, or Assessment) responds to the requirements of FAO's Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030. The Assessment provides information and analysis on the gender dimensions of agriculture and the rural sector, aiming to support the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies, strategies and projects at country level, in line with national development priorities and FAO's mandate.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation	IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
AIP	Agriculture Innovation Project	IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ARC	Agricultural Research Centre	ILO	International Labour Organization
CAAES	Central Administration for Agricultural Extension Services	IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics	IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
CBE	Central Bank of Egypt	JFFLS	Junior Farmer Field Life Schools
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
CGA	Country Gender Assessment	MALR	Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation
CGA-ARS	Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector	MAP	Medicinal and Aromatic Plants
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus Disease	MENA	Middle East and North Africa
CPF	Country Programming Framework	MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey	MoIC	Ministry of International Cooperation
EGP	Egyptian pound	MoLD	Ministry of Local Development
ERF	Economic Research Forum	MoPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
FAO RNE	FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa	MoSS	Ministry of Social Solidarity
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
FFS	Farmer Field School	MWRI	Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation	NCW	National Council of Women
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
GEF	Global Environment Facility	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor	OWAP	Opportunities for Women in Agribusiness Project
GoE	Government of Egypt	PBDAC	Principal Bank of Development and Agriculture Credit
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas	PCUWA	Policy and Coordination Unit for Women in Agriculture
IDSC	Information and Decision Support Centre		

SADS	Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy	UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
SDS	Sustainable Development Strategy	UNPDF	United Nations Partnership for Development Framework
SFSD	Sawiris Foundation for Social Development	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
SGP	Small Grants Programme	USD	United States Dollar
SO	Specific Objective	VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
STAR	Sustainable Transformation for Agricultural Resilience	WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
STREAMS	Sustainable Transformation of Egypt's Aquaculture Market System	WEF	World Economic Forum
SWEET	Strengthening Women Entrepreneurs in Egypt	WEP	Women's Empowerment Principles
SWOT	Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats	WEPP	Women's Employment Promotion Programme
UN	United Nations	WFP	World Food Programme
		WBDC	Women's Business Development Centre
		WUA	Water Users Association

Executive summary



This Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector (CGA-ARS) in Egypt, conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2021, describes the specific roles and responsibilities that women and men perform in agriculture and documents the main gender inequalities that still affect the sector. In alignment with the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030, the Assessment aims to unveil the disparities that exist in relation to the access and control over agricultural assets and resources (such as land, water and technology), information and knowledge, services (financial and non-financial), decent employment opportunities and markets. The analysis also aims to assess rural women’s ability to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives, particularly in the context of rural organizations, communities and households.

The CGA is based on an extensive review of the existing literature (including studies, donor reports and online information), as well as consultations with government organizations and development partners, who provided valuable insights on their work on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Egyptian agriculture and rural sector.

The main findings of the Assessment confirm that, while women are active in most agricultural subsectors (including crops, livestock and fisheries), their contribution is severely constrained by their unequal access to productive assets and resources. Women’s access to agricultural support services (be it extension, financial or business development) is also very limited, as these services are rarely tailored to rural women’s specific needs and interests. This is mainly due to the fact that, despite a quite conducive policy and legal environment, women’s role in agriculture remains significantly undervalued by policy-makers, development practitioners and agricultural service providers. Despite their important contribution to agricultural production, women are still perceived as helpers rather than primary

workers and farmers. For instance, even when women work for wages in the agricultural sector, their identification cards indicate that they are “housewives”, while men in similar work situations are listed as “agricultural workers”.

The lack of access to agricultural support services translates into unequal access to information and training about innovative farming techniques, profitable agricultural activities and entrepreneurial opportunities. These disparities are exacerbated by other forms of gender-based discrimination that impose specific mobility constraints on women, limit their access to education, and require that they spend a disproportionate amount of time on domestic and care work compared to their male counterparts. While these tasks are important, especially to ensure the food and nutrition security of rural households, women’s contribution to the overall development of agriculture and the rural sector is not as significant as it could be if they had access to the same opportunities as men. Persisting gender-based constraints undermine women farmers’ productive and entrepreneurial potential, and explain why women in rural Egypt generally cultivate low-value subsistence crops, have a lower uptake of innovative agricultural practices and technologies, and are mainly concentrated in the less skilled and less lucrative nodes of agrifood value chains.

Ensuring that women have improved access and control over assets and resources increases agricultural productivity and production, with benefits that are likely to span generations and pay large dividends in the future. Therefore, addressing the challenges and obstacles that prevent women from realizing their full potential requires a gender-responsive, community-centred and integrated approach to strengthening agriculture and the rural sector – an approach that does not view agriculture and its subsectors as separate from rural development and from the empowerment of the people involved.

Based on the findings of the analysis and the consultations, the CGA also offers an exhaustive set of recommendations to FAO and its main counterpart, the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR), as well as to other relevant stakeholders, including government and development partners who have an interest and stake in agriculture and the rural sector. The recommendations point to concrete actions and solutions that can be put in place to overcome the gender-based constraints mentioned above and to enhance rural women's capacities to seize the opportunities emerging from agriculture and rural development.

In this context, the main recommendation to FAO is to ensure a more systematic integration of gender

dimensions in its next Country Programming Framework (CPF) and in all relevant field programmes implemented in Egypt, with a view to support MARL and complement the national Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy (SADS), which has a relatively marginal gender focus. The CGA also highlights the need for FAO to establish and maintain partnerships across sectors, engaging more systematically with institutions and organizations that have a specific mandate on gender equality, such as the National Council of Women (NCW) and UN Women. These partnerships are essential for the implementation of gender-transformative interventions that not only provide women with access to agricultural services and resources, but also contribute to address the stereotypes and norms that constrain the effective participation of women in the agricultural sector.



Trained staff from government laboratories and other relevant institutions during the standardized protocol for testing of MERS CoV.



1. Introduction



1.1 Background and objectives of the assessment

FAO recognizes the importance of gender equality as a goal in itself and as a means to achieve its mandate of a world free from hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Its commitment to promote gender equality stems from the intergovernmental mandate of the United Nations (UN) to promote and protect women's rights as fundamental human rights, as recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Since 2015, FAO has aligned its work to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which gender equality is very prominent, both in the form of a stand-alone goal (Goal 5) and as a cross-cutting theme. The fundamental pledge to 'leave no one behind', which is at the heart of the implementation of the SDGs, urges all partners, including FAO, to address the underlying causes of gender inequality and to work in a way that ensures equal opportunities for all.

In alignment with the priorities set by the Agenda 2030, the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030 provides the Organization with a corporate framework to orient its technical and normative work towards clear gender equality objectives relevant to its mandate (see Box 1). The Policy also identifies a number of minimum standards for gender mainstreaming, aimed to ensure that gender dimensions are adequately addressed in all organizational functions. One of these minimum standards require all FAO country offices to periodically undertake a Country Gender Assessment of the Agriculture and Rural Sector (CGA-ARS) to assess the specific roles and responsibilities that women and men perform in the agriculture and agrifood sector and to document the gender inequalities that persist, with particular attention to those related to access and control over agricultural assets and resources (land, water, technologies), information and knowledge, services (financial and non-financial), decent employment opportunities and markets.

Box 1: FAO gender equality objectives

- Women and men have equal voice and decision-making power in rural institutions and organizations to shape relevant legal frameworks, policies and programmes.
- Women and men have equal rights, access to and control over natural and productive resources, to contribute to and benefit from sustainable agriculture and rural development.
- Women and men have equal rights and access to services, markets and decent work, and equal control over the resulting income and benefits.
- Women's work burden is reduced by enhancing their access to technologies, practices and infrastructure, and by promoting an equitable distribution of responsibilities, including at household level.

Source: FAO, 2020c.

More specifically, the CGA-ARS has the following objectives:

- » to expand the evidence base on gender, agriculture, rural development, food security and nutrition at national level;
- » to inform FAO's country-level planning and facilitate the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive interventions in the agricultural sector, in line with national development priorities and FAO's mandate;
- » based on the analysis, to provide recommendations to FAO, the government and other development organizations, which can help to identify areas for synergy and collaboration;
- » to provide up-to-date information on the situation of women within the agricultural and rural sector in Egypt that can be used, among other things, as input for the periodic reporting on the CEDAW.

1.2 FAO priorities in Egypt and in the region

The FAO Representation office opened in Egypt in 1978. Since then, FAO has been supporting the Government of Egypt (GoE) through successive Country Programming Frameworks (CPF) that define the organization's assistance to the agriculture sector. The 2018–2022 CPF responds to three GoE priority areas, namely: improved agricultural productivity; increased degree of food security in strategic goods; and sustainable use of natural agricultural resources. These priority areas contribute to the realization of Egypt's targets related to 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular focus on SDG 2, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (FAO, 2018b).

FAO's CPF is aligned with a number of national strategies and plans, mainly the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030; the SADS 2030; the Executive Plan for Agricultural Development 2017–2022; and the National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (FAO, 2018b). Moreover, FAO's attention to gender equality is aligned with the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, which, among its objectives, also aims to increase the productivity of women working in the

agriculture sector through the expansion of their employment in agricultural value chains and the provision of finance and training (National Council for Women [NCW], 2017).

The commitment of the FAO Country Office to gender is also highlighted in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), currently under negotiation, which specifies that the collaboration with the GoE in fighting hunger will be based on recognizing and supporting the critical role women and youth play in providing food security and rural livelihoods. The MoU will define areas of support to be included in the collaboration, including policy and strategic advice, technical support and knowledge generation.

Finally, the FAO Egypt CPF is also in line with the regional priorities identified and endorsed by the last FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and North Africa, held in 2020, namely:

- » rural transformation and inclusive value chains;
- » food security and healthy diets for all;
- » greening agriculture;
- » building resilience to multiple shocks.

While the promotion of gender equality represents a cross-cutting theme for FAO's programme of work of the region, a specific programmatic area on rural youth employment and women's empowerment was also established, to coordinate and accelerate the work in contribution to the first regional priority on rural transformation and inclusive value chains.

FAO's main government counterpart in Egypt is the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR). Highlights of support provided by FAO to the agriculture sector and to the ministry in charge include the revision and updating of the SADS 2019–2020 and the preparation of its medium-term action plan, and the support for the planning of the 2019–2020 census of agriculture. In relation to the purpose of this study, it is important to highlight that FAO's support to Egypt also includes a number of gender-sensitive projects that aim to ensure that both men and women participate in and benefit from the interventions. An example worth mentioning is the capacity development programme on the production of vegetable seedlings targeted to women and the support provided for the establishment of the

Rural Women Association for Agricultural Business Development under the project Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) for Sustainable Improvement of Quality and Quantity of Horticultural Production of Small-Scale Farmers in Fayoum (2017–2020), funded by the European Union. Additionally, dairy and cheese manufacturing units were established to support groups of women in Northern Matrouh within the context of another European Union-funded project - Water Harvesting and Good Agriculture Practices for Improved Livelihood and Increased and Sustained Production in Matrouh Rain-fed Agricultural Areas (2017–2020). Finally, strengthening the role of rural women in improving the nutritional status at the household level was the focus of the project Improving Household Food and Nutrition Security in Egypt by Targeting Women and Youth (2012–2019), through which over 6 000 women were trained in nutrition-sensitive practices for food production, preservation and processing, and over 1 500 women were able to establish agrifood-based microprojects through a revolving fund (consultations with FAO Egypt, 2021).¹

1.3 Scope and methodology

The Egypt CGA was conducted from January to May 2021 under the coordination of FAO Egypt and the technical supervision of the Gender Expert of the FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (FAO RNE), in conformity with the Guide to prepare a Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector (unpublished).

The research included a desk review of FAO-relevant documentation, including the CPF, the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030, recent assessments and various project reports. Relevant national strategies, statistics and studies on the gender situation in Egypt were also reviewed, with particular focus on the condition of rural women and women engaged in agriculture. In addition, consultations were held with FAO (management and project staff) and representatives from stakeholder organizations, including the Government, donors, the UN and civil society organizations, to gather data, information and insights about the gender dynamics characterizing the agriculture and rural sector in Egypt. (See list of stakeholders interviewed in Annex 2.)

A set of guiding questions was prepared prior to each consultation and adapted to each stakeholder based on their profile. Interview questions revolved around the nature of the support provided to agriculture and the rural sector (programmes, projects, funding), the challenges in programme or project implementation (social norms, outreach, counterpart and partner capacity), information gaps and how these were addressed, expectations from the CGA, and the actual and potential areas of cooperation with FAO. (See the interview guide in Annex 1.)

The information collected from secondary sources and consultations was analysed to form the basis of this CGA report, which consists of five sections. Following this first section, which introduces the CGA's objectives, background, scope and methodology, Section 2 describes Egypt's agricultural and rural context, presenting the country's gender equality situation, including the institutional and policy setting. Section 3 is the core of the assessment and provides a detailed gender analysis of the Egyptian agriculture and rural sector, describing the roles that women and men play and highlighting the gender inequalities that persist in the different sub-sectors. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the main findings and provides a set of recommendations, targeted at FAO, the Government and other key stakeholders, to strengthen their work on gender equality and women's empowerment in the agriculture and rural sector.

¹ Achievements reported in projects' terminal reports (unpublished).



Women learning about water productivity and efficiency via a Farmer Field School in El-Menya governorate.

2. Country context

2.1 Egypt's agricultural and rural context

Agriculture is an important sector in Egypt's economy and is critical to food security in the country, despite the fact that the cultivated area represents only 4 percent of the total area of the country. Most of the agricultural area is located along the Nile River, its main branches and canals, and in the Nile Delta. The contribution of the agriculture sector to Egypt's gross domestic product (GDP) has declined over the years, standing at 14 percent in 2020 (Egypt Today, 2020a). Still, agriculture remains a source of livelihood for more than 57 percent of the population, employing close to 30 percent of the labour force (6.5 million individuals) (55 percent of employment in Upper Egypt) (Statista, 2020). Furthermore, **the agriculture sector is the leading sector of employment for women, employing over 45 percent of Egypt's female labour force** (USAID, 2021). Due to different climate conditions and economic dynamics in the various regions of the country, agricultural employment rates vary from region to region (Kassim *et al.*, 2018). For instance, agriculture accounts for a greater share of employment in the governorates of Upper Egypt, given the more traditional and labour-intensive agricultural practices applied, while the sector contributes more to the economy of Lower Egypt, where modern agricultural practices are used and productivity is higher.

Egypt's agriculture is dominated by small farms relying on traditional cultivation practices (USAID, 2021). Eighty-five percent of those small farms are in Egypt's old lands (Kassim *et al.*, 2018). About 50 percent of farm plots are less than one feddan (0.42 ha), with the remainder being between one and

five feddans (0.42 to 2.1 ha). New lands² constitute about 15 percent of the cropped area and include both small farms and large commercial farms (Kassim *et al.*, 2018). Currently, most agriculture depends on irrigation water, and over 80 percent of Egypt's water supply is used in agriculture, which is a challenge given the water-stressed situation of the country (FAO, 2016). Mixed farming is common in rural Egypt, with farmers growing a variety of crops and raising a few head of livestock. Rural communities and households also earn livelihoods through small-scale fishing (selling fish or working in small-scale fisheries) and raising poultry (Curtis *et al.*, 2014). According to International Fund for Agricultural Development, or IFAD (2019b), rural households derive 42 percent of their average total income from non-farm sources, 25 percent from cultivation and 9 percent from livestock. The remainder comes from transfers, remittances and rents.

The poverty rate in rural Egypt is 32 percent, compared to 24.6 percent in urban areas. The multidimensional poverty rate in rural areas is also 2.2 times higher than in urban areas (ESCWA, 2018). Poverty is more pronounced in rural Upper Egypt, where the poverty rate is around 56.8 percent and where smallholder farming does not provide sufficient food security and income (Kassim *et al.*, 2018). According to the World Bank (2020), in case of a prolonged disruption of the economy resulting from the impacts of COVID-19, the country may experience a wave of inflation that will impede the government's fiscal ability to invest in people, further compounding the difficulties faced by Egypt's rural poor (World Bank, 2020). At the same time, the underperformance of key sectors of the economy is expected to lead to increased poverty overall.

² According to World Bank Group (2020), "Egypt's agricultural land can be classified into: 'Old land' comprising the lands of the Nile Valley and the Nile Delta, which have been irrigated and intensively cultivated since early civilizations in the area [...]. 'New land' includes lands that have been reclaimed [from the desert] relatively recently". The process of land reclamation is aimed at expanding available agricultural land.

As expected, rural women are the most disadvantaged. World Bank data indicates that **approximately 8 million rural women and girls are poor, including those who work in agriculture, and especially those who work as seasonal labourers, which is common among women** (Kandeel, 2017). The average daily wage for a seasonal farm worker in Egypt is USD 5 to USD 8; although it is usually lower for women than for men (ibid.).

Given the importance and size of Egypt's agricultural and rural sector, the 2014 Constitution dedicates two main articles to this sector (Article 29 on agriculture and Article 30 on fisheries), committing the State to work for rural development and to raise the standard of living of the rural population and those working in agriculture and fisheries (see Box 2).

Box 2: Agriculture and fisheries in the Egyptian Constitution 2014

Article 29: Agriculture

Agriculture is a basic component of the national economy.

The state commits to protecting and increasing land under cultivation, and incriminating encroachments thereon. It works on developing the countryside, raising the standard of living of its inhabitants and protecting it from agricultural risks, and works on developing agricultural and animal production, and encouraging industries based thereon.

The state commits to providing the requirements of agricultural and animal production and buying basic agricultural crops at appropriate prices to achieve a profit margin for farmers in agreement with agricultural unions, syndicates and agricultural associations. The state also commits to the allocation of a percentage of reclaimed lands to small farmers and youth graduates, and to the protection of farmers and agricultural workers against exploitation. All the foregoing will take place in the manner organized by law.

Article 30: Fisheries

The state commits to protecting fisheries, protecting and supporting fishermen, and empowering them to carry out their work without causing damages to eco-systems, in the manner organized by law.

Source: Arab Republic of Egypt Constitution, 2014

The operationalization of these constitutional articles requires investment in social and physical infrastructure, community services and human capital. Given the contributions women make in terms of productive and reproductive activities in rural areas,³ addressing the challenges and obstacles that prevent them from realizing their full potential is best served through an integrated approach aimed at strengthening agriculture and the rural sector, which does not look at agriculture and its subsectors as separate from rural development (Elmenofi *et al.*, 2013). Accordingly, the updated SADS views the development of the sector in a less fragmented manner than previous strategies and policies. Rather, the updated SADS reflects the perspectives of a wide

array of stakeholders at national and governorate levels, including farmers, private and public sector actors, civil society organizations, universities and agricultural research institutions (FAO, forthcoming). A major challenge to the implementation of the SADS at the national and local levels remains the lack of coherence with other sectoral policies affecting rural areas (health, education, irrigation, housing, etc.), as well as poor coordination among the various actors responsible for the implementation of its different components (Elmenofi *et al.*, 2014).

Recently, however, action has been taken to harmonize efforts between the government organizations, donors and UN agencies supporting

³ The reproductive role of women refers, but it is not limited to child bearing and rearing. It typically includes all domestic and care responsibilities, such as cleaning, cooking, producing and processing food for household consumption, caring for sick or elder family members. In rural areas, it often also includes fetching water and fuelwood.

agriculture and rural development. An notable example of improved integration is the 1 000 Villages project, under the umbrella of the national rural development programme, Hayat Karima (Decent Life).⁴ The project aims to improve the standard of living for citizens and reduce poverty rates by developing infrastructure and providing a plethora of basic services, including education and health services tailored to the needs of rural populations, including women, youth and people with disabilities. The project also includes components in waste recycling, irrigation, agriculture, veterinary services and microenterprise development. The first of three phases has already started in 143 rural communities. The project is set to cover a total of 12.5 million citizens – 23 percent of Egypt’s rural population (Daily News Egypt, 2020). Another example is the MALR/IFAD Sustainable Transformation for Agricultural Resilience in Upper Egypt (STAR) programme for Upper Egypt, which envisions providing a platform for donors working on similar initiatives to collaborate and focus implementation efforts on areas of comparative advantage. Furthermore, a governorate steering committee will be established in each target governorate to oversee implementation and facilitate linkages between stakeholders (IFAD, 2019a).

2.2 Overview of gender equality in Egypt

Since 2014, progress has been made in closing the gender gap on a number of fronts. In terms of representation in the political sphere, thanks to a constitutional amendment that reserves 25 percent of seats for women, **women’s representation in Parliament now stands at 27.4 percent**. In this context, Egypt ranked 67th out of 188 countries in the Inter-Parliamentary Union Index in 2021, in terms of the percentage of women in the national parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This marks an improvement from previous years, with Egypt moving up 6 ranks, when women’s representation in Parliament stood at 24.2 percent in 2019 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019).

Women’s representation in the executive branch of the Government has also increased. Currently, there are 8 female ministers and 19 deputy ministers. In addition, in 2014, a woman was appointed as the National Security Advisor to the President; and since 2017, a woman occupies the post of Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE). However, female

representation in leadership positions in local government is moving at slower pace. While the first female governor was appointed in February 2017, the number has not increased since then, despite the appointment of 22 female deputy governors.

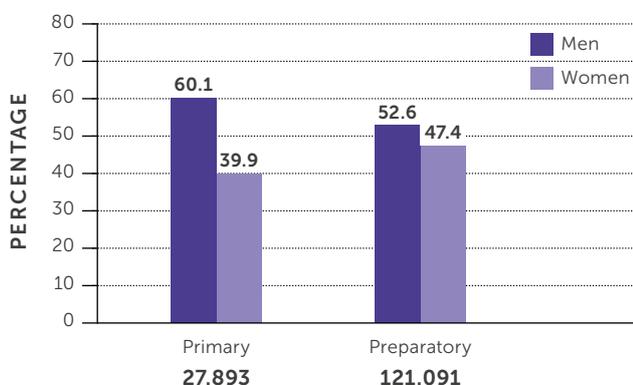
The judiciary branch has been the most resistant to women’s representation in leadership positions, despite the absence of any legal obstacles to their representation in all of its divisions. There are 430 female judges, representing less than 1 percent of all judges. Nevertheless, some headway has been made. For example, **for the first time, a female judge has been appointed to appear on the panel of judges in criminal courts**. In addition, since 2015, the Assistant to the Minister of Justice on Women and Children’ Affairs is a woman, and the Economic Court is presided by a female judge, appointed in 2018. In 2020, the Head of the Administrative Prosecution Authority appointed 11 women as heads of governorate-level offices of administrative prosecution. In addition, he issued a directive assigning a number of female administrative prosecutors to represent the prosecution before the disciplinary courts of the State Council (NCW, 2017). On 8 March 2021, marking International Women’s Day, the Egyptian Ministry of Justice released a statement announcing that President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi had directed it to coordinate with the heads of the Supreme Judicial Council and the State Council to recruit women in the State Council and the Public Prosecution Office (Egyptian Streets, 2021).

As for closing the gender gap in access to human capital endowments, such as education and health, disparities remain, reducing the developmental opportunities available to women and girls and, hence, their quality of life. This is especially true among poor women, rural women and disabled women. For example, data show that still 52.4 percent of school dropouts between 6 and 20 years old are women, compared to 46.6 percent for men (NCW, 2020). Also, according to the 2017 census, 30.8 percent of women are illiterate, compared to 21.2 percent of men (ibid.). Furthermore, while a comparison between the figures of the last two censuses shows a decline in female illiteracy from 37.3 percent to 30.8 percent, this is mainly due to the cohort effect and not to literacy programmes (World Bank, 2018). The situation is worse in rural areas. For instance, **illiteracy among women in rural areas is 38.8 percent. It is even higher in Upper Egypt, reaching 45 percent in Minya and 44 percent**

⁴ The selection of villages is based on the poverty map developed in 2008.

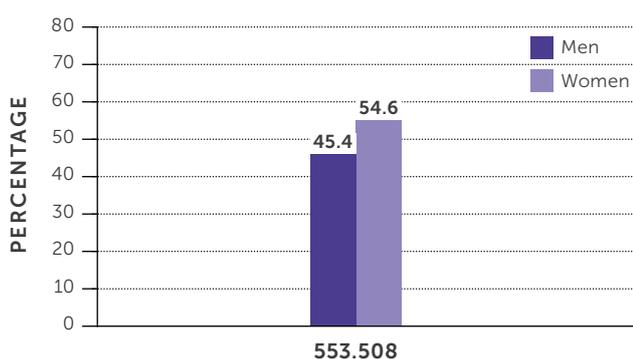
in Beni Suef. Although female illiteracy is particularly prevalent among older age groups, it is still high among the younger cohort, especially in rural areas where one in every five females between 15 and 29 years old is illiterate; however, national figures show that even though female illiteracy is still high, the rate of student dropouts is still lower than that of their male counterparts, and that females are the most successful students in secondary school (see figures 1 and 2). According to the 2017 census, the total head count of illiterate females aged 15 to 29 is 2 million, 75 percent of whom are in rural areas (ibid.).

Figure 1. Student dropouts between 2017/2018 and 2018/2019



Source: CAPMAS, 2019.

Figure 2. Number of successful students in secondary school in 2019/2020



Source: CAPMAS, 2019.

A snapshot of health-related data show that overall **women, especially those living in rural and less privileged areas, are less likely than men to be health literate and to have access to medical services** (Ministry of Health and Population, 2015). For example, the 2015 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) indicates that men are more aware of the

detriments of obesity and associated health problems, such as hypertension and diabetes than women. Also, while breast and cervical cancer are leading causes of cancer-related deaths among women, the DHS findings indicate that only 11 percent of women aged 15 to 59 years are aware of how to conduct a self-examination to detect signs of breast cancer, and, overall, only 2 percent of women between 15 and 59 years of age have ever had any form of clinical screening. As for pap smears to screen for cervical cancer, only 7 percent of women aged 15 to 59 years have ever heard of a pap smear and only 0.3 percent have ever had one. As expected, the proportion of women who know about breast examinations and pap smears is higher among urban women, women who have completed secondary or tertiary education, and women in the highest wealth quintile (ibid.). A recent UN Women report indicates that the share of rural women in Egypt with no health insurance (53.4 percent), while only slightly higher than their urban counterparts, is significantly higher than the share of men in rural areas with no health insurance (46.3 percent) (UN Women, 2018). Lastly, the higher rates of early marriage, combined with barriers to accessing contraception in rural areas, result in higher fertility rates among rural women than among urban women (3.5 births for rural woman, compared to 2.6 births for urban woman (Ministry of Health and Population, 2015).

Closing the gender gap in the economic sphere seems to be even more challenging. This is especially true where the private sector is concerned. This is reflected in women's limited participation in the labour force and to their higher unemployment rates compared to men. Official statistics reported in Table 1 indicate that **women's labour force participation is 23.1 percent – less than a quarter of the total work force, compared to almost 75 percent for males; and women's unemployment rate is 21.4 percent, compared to 6.8 percent for men** (NCW, 2020). In addition, women and youth make up a disproportionate share of those working in the informal sector, which, as everywhere, has the most serious decent work deficits. Furthermore, within the informal sector, women are often found in the lowest-paying informal occupations, in unsafe conditions, with no access to social protection and high exposure to harassment, including sexual harassment. In rural areas, over 71 percent of Egyptian women are reported to be working in unprotected informal work (compared to 13 percent of women in urban areas), and 70 percent of the rural women are reported to work without remuneration in family businesses (Hassanein, 2019).

Table 1. Snapshot about women's economic participation

	(%)
Labour force participation	23.1
Unemployment rate (2018)	21.4
Women owning private companies	16
Women holding bank accounts (2017)	27
Women benefitting from microfinance loans (2018)	51
Women benefitting from small enterprise loans (2018)	69
Women investors in stock exchange	30

Source: NCW, 2020.

Women's limited time availability directly impacts their ability to engage in paid work. In Egypt, **data suggest that women spend 12 times more time than men on unpaid care work** (Selwaness *et al.*, 2020). This is especially true for married women, who, according to the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey, spend 24 hours more each week on unpaid care work than unmarried women (Ibid.). The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have exacerbated this situation. Anecdotal evidence has shown that women have largely taken on the burden of caring for sick family members and providing more childcare and education due to closures related to COVID-19. This has further reduced women's ability to engage in paid work, thus reducing their incomes and increasing the gender gap in terms of livelihoods, with potentially long-term effects not only on women's earnings but on the economy as a whole (UN Women, 2020).

As to women's entrepreneurship in Egypt, women's limited access to finance, resources and technology constrains their ability to create and grow profitable businesses. As a result, **a considerable number of women-owned enterprises (56.1 percent) are necessity-driven rather than opportunity-driven – twice the proportion of male-owned necessity-driven enterprises** (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2019). According to a UN Women report (2019), **82 percent of women-owned businesses in Egypt operate in rural areas, compared to 62 percent of male-**

owned businesses, and most are micro-enterprises generating subsistence-level income (ibid.).

Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is of utmost importance in starting and growing businesses today. It allows businesses to understand and locate potential clients and promote products, and to increase sales by selling through online platforms (Federation of Egyptian Industries, 2019). In particular, the internet allows the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society, namely women and girls, to access information, set up businesses and access financial and government services (Ryan *et al.*, 2020). According to the Women Entrepreneurs Survey (WES) conducted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Egypt, women are less likely to be connected than their male counterparts, especially women living in rural areas and where female illiteracy is high. For instance, **76 percent of urban female survey respondents with higher education use mobile and smart phones in business operations, while only 2.5 percent of rural women use smart phones in business operations**. The women who do use mobile phones for business purposes, use them to communicate with customers and suppliers, to obtain information for making business decisions, and to promote and sell their products and services. Additionally, 39 percent of the respondents agreed that if they made better use of ICT, it would enable them to compete in markets more effectively. Recognising the importance of ICT, the GoE is working to build a digital society. A number of mega projects support the development of ICT in the country; however, only a few projects and organizations focus on integrating ICT into women-owned enterprises or on improving women's ICT skills (ibid.).

On a positive note, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology launched its Qodwa-Tech (Model Tech) project in 2019 to empower women and girls living in marginalized communities across all governorates through the use of ICT. The project provides training in electronic marketing as well as digital transformation services to support marketing initiatives and help women entrepreneurs and owners of handicraft businesses increase their sales (ICT for Women, n.d.). Similarly, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) implemented the project Improving Prospects for Digitally Enabled Livelihoods Among Marginalized Communities in Egypt (2016–2019), aiming to "create optimal conditions to enable young Egyptians, mainly women, to take advantage of the entrepreneurial and employment opportunities the digital economy offers" (IDRC, 2018).

In response to the economic constraints experienced by Egyptian women entrepreneurs, the GoE, with support from donors and UN organizations, is implementing various measures to support women's economic participation. These measures include amending existing laws, which (though not gender-specific) are relevant to many of the obstacles faced by women in business. The amended Companies Law 159/1981, which now allows for sole proprietor registrations as sole person companies, and the Civil Servants Law 81/2016, which grants female employees paid maternity leave for a maximum of three times, are great examples of the measures being taken to respond to the needs of women entrepreneurs and employees (World Bank, 2018). Other measures directly targeting women have also been taken. Examples include establishing the Business Facilitation Office for women at the Investors Service Centre, to facilitate the incorporation of women-owned businesses, and developing a unified definition of women-owned businesses. In addition, the GoE has launched a number of directives and initiatives addressing women's financial inclusion. The CBE has issued guidelines to banks to collect and report gender-disaggregated data in order to track the progress of women's financial inclusion. New mobile banking regulations have been issued to facilitate cashless payments, including issuing, without charge, prepaid cards and mobile wallets (Lexology, 2020) and allowing microfinance institutions to distribute loans and receive related payments through mobile wallets (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2019). These efforts will allow unbanked women to have access to financial services that enable them to sustain and grow their businesses without being held back by bank restrictions and requirements. Moreover, digital finance is an empowering tool for women who have time constraints and limited mobility. In the case of women who are juggling household and work-related responsibilities, cashless payment is a time-saving solution.

In support of the Government's financial inclusion efforts, a protocol was signed between the CBE and the NCW in 2017, which is part of an EGP 1.6 billion (approximately USD 89 760 000) microfinance initiative launched by the CBE to ensure bank funding for women's microprojects, especially in rural areas (further details provided in Section 3.8).

As to access to justice and protection against violence as well as social protection, these are constitutional rights which often remain out of the reach of women because of entrenched gender norms, institutional biases, and the absence of effective mechanisms to enforce women's rights. **Women's lack of economic resources and legal literacy further obstruct their access to justice**, as many women cannot cover the costs involved in filing a lawsuit, much less the costs involved in prolonged cases, and many women, especially in rural areas, do not possess even basic knowledge of their legal rights. The latter is especially true with regard to **inheritance rights, particularly in rural areas where customs dictate that land and property remain within the control of male family members**. In an effort to protect women's inheritance rights, in 2017 the Egyptian parliament passed a new inheritance law, imposing stricter sentences on those who deprive women of their inheritance (see further details in Section 3.7).

Female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage constitute forms of violence against women (VAW) that continue to prevail in the country. According to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2020 publication, the prevalence of both is higher in rural areas, especially among the poorest households and among the less educated. Despite criminalization of FGM in 2008, the majority of rural women are in favour of continuing the practice (UN Women, 2018). **In Upper Egypt, prevalence rates of FGM are estimated to be around 90 percent in rural areas and around 75 percent in urban governorates**⁵ (Ministry of Health and Population, 2014). Furthermore, in some governorates of Upper Egypt (Luxor, Qena, Aswan, Sohag, Beni Suef and Menoufiya), the practice remains nearly universal (UNICEF, 2020). To combat this practice, Egypt's parliament has recently approved a bill that will toughen penalties on FGM crimes, increasing the maximum and minimum prison sentences imposed (Ahram Online, 2021). As for early or forced marriage, rates continue to be higher in rural than in urban areas. The latest population census indicates that **13 percent of rural women under 20 have been married or are married – almost twice the rate of early marriages among urban women, at 7 percent** (CAPMAS, 2017). Early marriage is especially common in rural Upper Egypt, where it is estimated that more

⁵ Urban governorates include Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Suez, which have no rural populations. Rural areas refer to the rural subdivision in the other 23 governorates of Egypt.

than 20 percent of women have experienced forced early marriages (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2018). Underage marriages are often forced and are not registered, leaving the women and their children unprotected and deprived of their legitimate right to alimony and child support in case of abandonment, or inheritance and pension in case of death (National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, n.d.).

Until recently, social protection in Egypt was biased towards urban areas, despite the fact that the majority of the poor and vulnerable are located in rural areas. Furthermore, women typically have less access to social protection than men (Ministry of Health and Population, 2014), and they are especially at risk in cases of widowhood, divorce, abandonment and disability. The GoE has taken steps to address the fragmentation and deficiencies of the social protection system, including increasingly focusing on rural areas Egypt (ESCWA, 2020). In 2011, the NCW launched the Citizenship Initiative, also known as the National ID Programme, which is supported by multiple donors. To date, about 9 million women nationwide have received identity cards enabling them to apply for the first time for social protection schemes and services provided by governmental and non-governmental entities. In 2018, the government issued a free life insurance policy, called Aman, to 50 000 women who are heads of households and to the neediest and vulnerable women (UNDP, 2018). In addition, the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programmes, implemented by the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) are designed to strengthen the social safety net for poor households. By making women the recipients of the cash transfer, the programme acknowledges and values the role of unpaid women caretakers. So far, the programmes cover approximately 2.5 million households (see Table 2 for more data about women benefitting from social protection programs). The beneficiaries of the

Takaful conditional cash transfer include households with school-age children, while those of the Karama non-conditional cash transfer include the elderly (above age 65) and the disabled.

These cash transfer programmes are complemented by Forsa, an economic inclusion programme which includes time-bound, multi-dimensional interventions targeting prospective micro-entrepreneurs. Forsa covers safety nets, education, financial education and savings, access to capital and life skills mentoring or coaching (World Bank, 2018). Also worth mentioning, because of their relevance to poor rural households, are the 'School Meals' and the '1 000 Days of Life' programmes. The first is an in-kind transfer programme targeting children in kindergartens and primary schools based on a poverty map, and the second is an initiative launched by the WFP to prevent malnutrition among vulnerable pregnant and lactating women and children under 3 years of age in Sohag, Qena and Assiut governorates, offering food assistance through cash-based transfers on the condition of having regular check-ups. In addition, the GoE has adopted a national comprehensive reform of the healthcare and social insurance systems. The new law under the healthcare system reforms was adopted in 2017 and mandates health insurance for all citizens, with contribution from both employers and employees, covering workers and their dependents, thus giving women access to the healthcare they need, regardless of their working status (ESCWA, 2020). The new social insurance law (Law 148 of 2019), which went into effect in January 2020, covers population segments that were previously not covered, such as temporary and seasonal workers, domestic workers, small-scale agricultural tenants, and property owners. The insurance covers: (1) old age, disability, and death, including an "end-of-service bonus"; (2) work injuries; (3) disease; and (4) unemployment (Iskander, 2019). The monthly contribution for the insurance is calculated based

Table 2. Women benefitting from social protection programs

Female heads of households (2020)	18.0%
Women benefitting from social protection programs (2018)	89.0%
Increase in cash transfer budget (through 'Takaful' and 'Karama' programs)	235.0%
Women benefitting from bread and flour subsidiary (2018)	38 million
Women benefitting from food ration cards (2018)	34 million
Women benefitting from healthcare support (2018)	10 million

Source: NCW, 2020.

on an employee's total salary, excluding exempted allowances for transportation, travel, meals and accommodation, provided the total does not exceed 25 percent of the total salary. The law will introduce unemployment insurance for those who become unemployed during their coverage period if they have contributed to the social insurance system for at least one year. The law will increase pensions annually by up to 15 percent, based on the inflation rate (Deloitte, 2019). For easier communication with the beneficiaries, the MoSS signed an agreement with Telecom Egypt in January 2021. According to the agreement, Telecom Egypt will provide 3.5 million mobile SIMs to the beneficiaries of the Takaful and Karama programme, including a bundle of minutes, text messages and megabytes per month at a nominal cost. The company will also support the Ministry by providing over 2 600 landlines for its social services units, in addition to a bundle of text messages and minutes for its hotline numbers, to be used to communicate and follow-up with programme beneficiaries (Telecom Egypt, 2021).

Although these changes are an important step forward, some aspects require further review and upgrading. For instance, a recent study on social protection schemes in rural Egypt indicates that the high contribution rates of these programs discourage rural workers with lower salaries from enrolling (ESCWA, 2020). The study also notes that the multiple sources of income of rural households are problematic to the implementation of contributory social protection schemes, as some of these are informal income sources, which might go unreported or underreported. These hindrances to adequate access to the social protection schemes are greater for rural women, most of whom work informally and for wages that are lower than those of men. With regard to unemployment insurance, the study notes that while the reformed social insurance system (Law 148 of 2019) covers groups that were not previously included, Article 85 of the law stipulates that unemployment insurance is not extended to informal workers engaged in occasional, temporary, seasonal and agricultural work. This reduces the chances for rural women and women farmers to benefit from the new measures. Finally, with regard to the new health insurance scheme, the study directs attention to implementation challenges, including the enrolment of informally employed individuals, the verification of their declared income, the identification of the rural poor who are eligible for subsidized healthcare, and for women in particular, the provision of healthcare for those living far from healthcare facilities.

2.3 Institutional and policy framework in relation to gender equality

The political will to advance women's empowerment is reflected in several constitutional articles (articles 8 [Social solidarity], 9 [Equal opportunity], 11 [The place of women, motherhood and childhood] and 53 [Equality in public rights and duties]) and in legislative reforms, such as the Investment Law, the Bankruptcy Law, the Sexual Harassment Law, and a new Inheritance Law. Additionally, the GoE has allocated financial resources to promote women's participation and leadership in the public sphere. According to the NCW's latest fact sheet (April 2020), the GoE dedicated EGP 242 billion (approximately USD 15.4 billion) to the Women Agenda covering the period from July 2018 to December 2019.

Furthermore, the development and adoption in 2017 of Egypt's **National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030** envisions women as active participants in the development of their society within a political, economic, social, legislative and normative environment that enables their effective engagement with the public sphere and allows them to benefit without discrimination from the opportunities and dividends of development. The formulation of the strategy considered to the need to empower women in the public sphere while protecting the most vulnerable, including the poor, women living in rural areas, the elderly and the disabled. The strategy has four pillars (Political empowerment and leadership promotion; Economic empowerment; Social empowerment; Protection) and two cross-cutting themes (legislation and culture). Interestingly, it adopts 34 SDG indicators to monitor its implementation (see Annex 3, which details the indicators of the strategy).

The implementation of the strategy is monitored by the Egyptian National Observatory for Women and its specialized unit, Women on Boards Observatory, established under the umbrella of the NCW. Furthermore, as confirmed by the NCW, CAPMAS and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) are also involved in collecting data related to the SDG indicators of the strategy.

The NCW, established by Presidential Decree No. 90 of 2000 and strengthened by virtue of Law No. 30 of 2018, is the primary government body dedicated to addressing women's issues in the country. The NCW reports directly to the President, and its mandate includes monitoring and promoting national

policies and development programmes for women's empowerment and enabling women's participation in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The NCW's mandate also includes monitoring Egypt's performance and compliance with its international commitments related to gender and inclusive development and representing Egypt in related fora.

The National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030 is aligned with the SDS, responding specifically to the social justice pillar and its key performance indicators, and with the SDGs, specifically SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

To ensure the coherence of actions targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, UN agencies coordinate with the NCW under the framework of the United Nations Partnership Development Framework (UNPDF). Bilateral donor-funded activities relating to gender equality and women's empowerment are also coordinated with the NCW, with the Ministry of International Cooperation (MoIC) and with the MoPED. It is worth noting that FAO does not yet have a partnership with the NCW, which is a missed opportunity as the support of small farmers, including women and youth, is a constitutional right and an objective of the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030.

The SADS, developed in 2009 and updated in 2020/2021 by the MALR with FAO support, establishes the framework for the development of agriculture and the rural sector. And, while the vision of the SADS does not mention closing the gender gap in agriculture or the empowerment of rural women, the importance of the role of women is recognized as critical to the fulfilment of its SO 3: Improving the living standards of the rural inhabitants, and reducing poverty rates in the rural areas (FAO, forthcoming). Furthermore, the SADS also recognizes the need to promote rural women's economic participation through SO 6: Creation of job opportunities for youth and women. In this context, the aim is to create 2 million new jobs by 2030. To achieve these objectives, the SADS proposes the formulation of a number of national programmes to be implemented during the lifetime of the strategy. One of these national programmes, Developing Human Capacity in Agriculture, targets youth and women specifically (ibid.).

The National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction, developed in 2011 by the Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Centre, does not mention gender nor women's empowerment, except implicitly, in the broad context of "vulnerable groups", under the understanding that the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security can disproportionately affect women and girls, as a result of gender-based discrimination. However, deliberate attention to the adaptation and capacity-building needs of rural women working in agriculture is notably absent from this strategy (IDSC and UNDP, 2011).



Exercises by women in the sugar beet Farmer Field School in Al-Minya, Egypt.

3. Gender analysis of agriculture and the rural sector

3.1 Gender and agricultural labour

In addition to their role as wives, mothers and caregivers, rural Egyptian women are active participants in all farming activities, although this is often not recognized by their families or communities. Though there might be regional differences in the distribution of gender roles in farming activities (in many areas, women are mostly responsible for livestock, while men are mostly responsible for growing crops), these differences are gradually being eroded because of the inability of rural households to survive on farming alone and the scarcity of jobs, let alone decent jobs, available to rural residents. In many governorates of Upper Egypt, but also in the Delta, men have migrated in search of off-farm work, leaving the women behind to undertake the farming tasks that were traditionally performed by the men. In fact, according to the Agricultural Research Center (personal communication, 2021), with the exception of a few governorates and areas where animal farming or tourism, rather than crop farming, are the mainstay of livelihoods (Aswan, Marsa Matrouh, Sinai, and Siwa and the oases in general), women plough, irrigate, cultivate and fertilize the land. They also harvest the crops and are engaged in post-harvest activities.

A good example of how norms can change to women's advantage is what happened in Egypt with the newly reclaimed lands in the Nile Valley and Red Sea region, where sizeable investments have been made in commercial agriculture, providing opportunities for women to be hired for tasks they do not traditionally perform in the old lands, including ploughing, irrigating and fertilizing the land, in addition to applying modern techniques for harvesting and

post-harvest activities. A study conducted by the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in 2017, confirms that the high demand for women's labour in the new lands, combined with the fact that settlers have not known each other for long, leads to less rigid social norms concerning the roles of women and men in agriculture.

Although the relaxation of rigid social norms has generated some positive changes, women's participation in agriculture is still significantly governed by gender norms. **Women and girls hold a disproportionate share of informal and seasonal labour, as employers seek them out because they are paid less than men** and they are considered more suited to undertaking certain tasks that require nimble fingers, such as peeling, cutting and sorting. Men, on the other hand, continue to undertake activities related to operating and maintaining machinery and other agriculture processes (Entrust Development and Management Consultants, 2011). Moreover, as part-time work is more common in agriculture than in other sectors, 38 percent of women in agriculture work only part of the year, compared to only 5 percent of women in non-agricultural occupations (UN Women, 2018).

The gender pay gap is more pronounced in rural areas than in urban areas. Only 39 percent of rural women work for cash, compared to 57 percent of men, and the percentage of women working for their families for no wage is 40 percent, compared to 7 percent of men (Mostafa and Hassan, 2018). Accordingly, poverty is more pronounced among women than among men, by 2.3 percent in urban areas and by 4.8 percent in rural areas (AlAzzawi, 2015).

Much has been written about the invisible role of women in agriculture and related activities, which is related to the fact that they do not own land and are not members of agricultural cooperatives. However, as noted by Keo *et al.* (2019), the Economic Research Forum (ERF) study, Rural Women in Egypt: Opportunities and Vulnerabilities, elaborated different definitions of employment to better capture and describe women's employment in agriculture.⁶ These include an "added market" definition which describes those individuals who work on a family enterprise, or farm crops or tend livestock that are sold on the market. Similarly, they also include an "added extended" definition of employment, which refers to individuals who work on a family enterprise, or farm crops or tend livestock only for household consumption. By using these two definitions, it is possible to measure whether market-oriented work and subsistence work are underreported. The findings of the study revealed that, when using the "added market" definition, rural women's employment rate more than doubled (35 percent) compared to the standard market definition (16 percent), although this was not the case for urban women. Moreover, when using the "added extended" definition measuring subsistence work, rural women experienced small increases in their employment rate (43 percent) compared to the standard extended definition (40 percent). **The findings of the study confirm that a significant share of rural women's informal and unpaid work is of a commercial nature, with labour outcomes that go underreported and undervalued.** Another interesting finding, from the ICARDA study – Women, Decent Work and Empowerment in Rural Egypt, is that, even when working for wages, women's occupation on their IDs is often listed as "housewife", while men working in similar conditions are listed as "agricultural worker" on their IDs (Najjar *et al.*, 2017). This bias against recognizing women's work in the sector further contributes to their invisibility.

Ignoring women's contribution to agriculture and related activities undermines not only their socio-economic empowerment, but the development of agriculture and the rural sector, which heavily rely on women's work. As described so far, and as highlighted by the consultations with stakeholders conducted for this assessment, women play a key role in the agriculture sector, but the value added of their participation is constrained by a number of factors that limit their productivity and

efficiency as economic agents, with implications on the performance of the overall sector. Access to information about innovative farming techniques, high value crops and markets elude women not only because of their high rate of illiteracy, but also because of the paucity of extension and training services tailored to their needs and possibilities. Their limited access to financial and social capital, their unequal access to organizations and networks, exacerbated by mobility constraints and the disproportionate amount of time women spend on domestic and care work, contribute to explain why women tend to cultivate low-value subsistence crops when farming their own land, and, when working as wage labourers, they only have access to the less-lucrative nodes of the value chains. In fact, according to a recent ILO study on Egypt's agribusiness sector, this is one of the six lowest paying sectors for women (ILO, 2020).

3.2 Gender, food security and nutrition

Food security and nutrition are social, economic and public health concerns for the GoE, given a growing population reaching almost 104 million in 2021, 60 percent of whom are under the age of 30, combined with the economic repercussions of COVID-19 (World Population Review, 2021).

Egypt ranks 55th out of 113 countries in the 2019 Global Food Security Index (The Economist Group, 2019). Chronic food insecurity is concentrated in rural Upper Egypt, with 74.3 percent of households being chronically food insecure (FAO, 2020a). Accordingly, the GoE increased investment funds for the agriculture and irrigation sector in the new fiscal year 2020/21 by 2 percent, with the aim of strengthening food security and rationalizing food imports, which are two of the development outcomes of the SADS (Samir, 2020). Yet, while the SADS recognizes the importance of supporting rural women, it falls short of acknowledging the critical role they play in the four pillars of food security: availability, accessibility, utilization and stability (García, 2013).

A number of UN agencies and donors are supporting the GoE by implementing projects aimed at improving the performance of agriculture and the rural sector to create a food-secure environment. FAO, IFAD and the World Food Programme (WFP) are the main UN organizations supporting the

⁶ The market definition only includes those engaged in an activity for the purposes of market exchange. The extended definition of employment adds those involved in the production or processing of primary commodities for own household consumption (i.e. subsistence labor) (Keo *et al.*, 2019).

Table 3. The burden of malnutrition

	Males (%)	Female (%)
Stunting <i>Children under the age of 5 years (2014)</i>	23.6	20.8
Wasting <i>Children under the age of 5 years (2014)</i>	9.4	9.5
Overweight <i>Children under the age of 5 years (2014)</i>	16.3	15.0
Underweight <i>Children and adolescents between the age of 5 and 19 years (2016)</i>	15.8	12.6
Overweight <i>Children and adolescents between the age of 5 and 19 years (2016)</i>	35.8	37.2
Obesity <i>Children and adolescents between the age of 5 and 19 years (2016)</i>	15.7	19.1
Underweight <i>Adults aged above 18 years (2016)</i>	1.8	1.1
Overweight <i>Adults aged above 18 years (2016)</i>	57.2	69.5
Obesity <i>Adults aged above 18 years (2016)</i>	22.7	41.1
Raised blood pressure <i>Adults aged above 18 years (2016)</i>	24.8	25.0
Diabetes <i>Adults aged above 18 years (2016)</i>	17.6	19.8

Source: Development Initiatives, 2021

GoE's efforts to increase food production and raise awareness regarding health and nutrition. Other donors supporting the agriculture sector include the USAID, GIZ and the Agence Française de Développement.

In all these projects, women and youth are targeted because of the disproportionate impact of malnutrition on these groups. As shown in Table 3, females bear a greater share of the burden of malnutrition than men. For example, women have higher rates of hypertension and diabetes than men, and according to the Egypt Global Nutrition Report, in 2016, obesity affected more adolescent and adult women than men (Development Initiatives, 2020). Additionally, anaemia affected 28.5 percent of women in 2016. Among pregnant women, 22.6 percent were found to suffer from anaemia, which is considered one of the leading causes of anaemia in infants and children (ibid.; UNICEF).

However, the agricultural projects implemented by the GoE and supported by various agencies and donors, also focus on women and youth because

of the role they play in relation to food security and nutrition. Prevailing gender norms, in fact, assign women and girls primary responsibilities in household and care work, which, especially in rural areas, include cultivating food for household consumption or buying it at the market; processing food; cooking and preparing meals for the family; and taking care of those with special feeding and health needs, including infants, children and family members living with disabilities. In this context, an example worth mentioning is FAO's project, Improving Household Food and Nutrition Security in Egypt by Targeting Women and Youth. The project's main objective was to improve nutritional status and outcomes at the household level in Upper Egypt, particularly those of women and children. Between May 2012 and July 2019, the project targeted villages with high rates of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition in the governorates of Aswan, Assiut, Beni Suef, Fayoum and Sohag, building capacities and strengthening food production and behaviours related to health and nutrition, establishing a revolving fund for food-based microprojects as well as a participatory monitoring and evaluation system. The project, which engaged

multiple stakeholders and implementing partners in its management and follow up, reached all its targets. It facilitated the establishment of 1 581 microprojects through the revolving fund, and improved the skills of 6 685 women in food production, preparation, preservation and processing, as well as the agricultural knowledge and entrepreneurial skills of 703 youth through the Junior Farmer Field Life Schools (JFFLS). A number of dissemination events were organized, lessons learned were discussed and recommendations for scaling up the project in other areas and possibly creating a school meals programme with a wider scope were proffered (FAO, 2020b).

3.3 Gender roles in crop cultivation

Cropping patterns do not differ greatly across Egypt's governorates, especially where the old lands are concerned; although some crops seem to dominate in certain governorates, such as pomegranate in Assiut, onions and garlic in Beni Suef and sugar beet in Kafr El Sheikh (Entrust Development and Management Consultants, 2011). However, the most common crops that small farmers cultivate are wheat, clover, corn, rice and vegetables (namely tomatoes and potatoes), with fruit, sugar cane and cotton being less commonly cultivated (Keo, *et al.*, 2019). As for other agricultural activities, crop cultivation is also often organized along gender lines, within households and communities. Male farmers tend to cultivate strategic crops such as maize, cotton, wheat and rice, and the bulk of extension services are provided for these crops. On the other hand, women tend to cultivate vegetables and fruit crops, which are considered less strategic and therefore receive limited extension services (Abdel Aal, 2004). According to the Agricultural Research Center, or ARC, (personal communication, 2021), because women have limited **access to information, services and finance, women-headed households tend to choose to cultivate low-value crops**. Furthermore, women's limited membership in cooperatives means that most of them are deprived of the extension services provided by these entities.

3.4 Gender roles in livestock and animal production

Small-scale livestock farming is an important subsector in the rural economy, supplementing the livelihoods of rural households and contributing to food security. According to data from the ERF, 29 percent of rural households own livestock, mostly poultry (86 percent), but also cows (29 percent), donkeys (28 percent), buffalos (16 percent) and other animals, including goats (9 percent) and sheep

(6 percent) (Keo, *et al.*, 2019). Most farmers who raise livestock have an integrated system in which they grow fodder crops to feed the animals and use the animal manure as fertilizer (ILO, 2020). Generally, it is the **women who are the primary caretakers of livestock and they are also responsible for milking and processing dairy products**. According to ERF calculations, based on the 2018 Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey, rural women are over twice as likely (24 percent) to be primary caretakers of livestock than rural men (10 percent) (Keo *et al.*, 2019). Women are responsible for all aspects of animal husbandry, except herding and marketing. With specific reference to animal health, the woman is in close contact with the animal and, therefore, she is usually the first one to notice health issues, such as in lack of appetite, less vitality and reduced productivity. The ERF report further notes that women in older age groups are more likely to tend livestock (28 percent of women aged 30 to 39, and 33 percent of women aged 40 to 59 tend livestock (*Ibid.*)). A probable explanation for this is that by the time the women have reached that age, their children have grown and they have more time to care for the animals.

Milk and dairy are mainly produced for household consumption, and surplus is sold by the women to family members or at the local market. A 2018 report by FAO describing the different dimensions of livestock farming places households at the "extensive"/non-commercial system of poultry and bovine production (FAO, 2018a). This system is characterized by low inputs, low outputs and informality (*ibid.*). The "extensive" production system is a major component of the livelihoods of rural populations, yet an ERF study concludes that current livestock rearing patterns are unlikely to elevate women and their families out of poverty. Accordingly, developing policies and programmes that support women's access to improved extension and advisory services, animal health services and quality inputs (such as better breeds and feed) would benefit rural households and communities (Keo *et al.*, 2019).

Domestic poultry raising is a source of income that is dominated primarily by women (Lambert and Radwan, 2010). According to a USAID report citing a 2008 FAO assessment, apart from using the poultry and eggs for household consumption, the sale of these assets is estimated to contribute about 44.5 percent to household income, which is used to purchase food and to pay for school fees and materials (*ibid.*). The FAO assessment explains why raising poultry is of particular importance to women. The primary reasons are that it is a relatively inexpensive activity (where kitchen leftovers and

broken seeds can be used as feed), it does not depend on land ownership, and it is a cheaper source of animal protein compared to livestock. Poultry is also consumed on special occasions, such as weddings, births and funerals, and the manure is used as a fertilizer for crop production (ibid.).

Although household poultry-raising is an activity that is undertaken by women, the decisions regarding purchasing chicks and feed are often made by men, as they ultimately control the household income and expenditures. **Also, in certain parts of Upper Egypt where traditions are still strictly enforced, women do not enjoy the same mobility as their counterparts in the Delta, therefore limiting access to markets.** This further limits women's ability to benefit from this activity. As men are mainly those responsible for marketing the products, they are more likely to control the revenues of the sales, despite the fact that most of the production work was provided by women (ibid.).

3.5 Gender roles in fisheries and aquaculture

Another subsector of agriculture is that of fisheries and related activities. While capture fishing in marine and fresh waters was a traditional activity in Egypt, aquaculture has been gaining momentum over the past years and now accounts for most of the fish produced in Egypt for domestic consumption, export and processing. Fish is reported to account for 25.3 percent of the average protein intake of households in Egypt (World Fish Centre, 2021). The growth of this subsector has triggered an expansion of fish markets and employment across the aquaculture value chain (Murphy *et al.*, 2020). In this subsector, as in the other agricultural subsectors, there is a gender-based division of labour that leaves women at a disadvantage. Data from 2011 indicates that the aquaculture value chain generates 19.56 full-time-equivalent jobs per 100 tons of fish produced (ibid.). According to FAO, aquaculture provides jobs for about 750 000 men, women and children who are directly employed, in addition to 12 000 workers who are engaged during harvesting, and others working in fish processing, transport, retailing and boat and net manufacturing (FAO, 1996). **While fish catching, feeding and marketing are tasks that are usually undertaken by men, women contribute about 52 percent of the labour in fish processing and net-making, and carry out 42 percent of net maintenance and repair** (ibid.).

In addition, women sell fish informally and without licenses in markets and on street corners, often in adverse environmental and security conditions. A 2020 study conducted in three Delta governorates on gender-based market constraints in informal fish retailing confirms that women are at a disadvantage in terms of sales, profit and access to services, and that market relations differ significantly between women and men. For instance, more women retailers report paying higher prices per kilogram to creditors and receiving shorter repayment periods (Murphy *et al.*, 2020). The study also concludes that the burden of care responsibilities that women shoulder limit the size and profitability of their enterprises, and as a result, their bargaining power. The study therefore recommends: a) the design and implementation of value chain interventions that strengthen the bargaining power of women retailers in key spaces of transactions and their access to both assets and financial markets; and, b) the implementation of consultations with both women and men retailers, as well as community stakeholders, to ensure that women have a say in policy and technology-related interventions (ibid.).

Fisher communities are found in upper Egyptian governorates as well as in the Delta. While fishing is predominantly a male activity, there are also fisherwomen in certain governorates of the Delta. Fisherwomen, or "prairie fishers", as they are called, go into the waters fully clothed and without proper equipment. The MoSS and the General Authority For Fish Resources Development are currently implementing the Mubadarat Bar el Amman (Safe Shore) initiative⁷ in the governorate of Kafr El Sheikh, targeting 1 100 female fishers. The EGP 150 million (approximately USD 1.5 million) initiative is funded by the Tahya Masr (Long Live Egypt) fund. Through this initiative, informal fishers are provided with proper gear and formally registered with the MoSS so that they can benefit from social services and protection programmes, including the Universal Health Insurance Program, which is gradually being rolled out throughout the country (MoSS Women Department, personal communication, 2021).

In addition, because of its potential contribution to the national economy and to the achievement of social and job-creation objectives, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) funded the STREAMS Project 2015–2019. This project focused on five governorates (Kafr el Sheikh, Sharkia, Behera, Fayoum and Menia) facilitating the establishment of

⁷ The English name is a transliteration of the project name, for which we could not locate an official translation.

an aquaculture innovation platform and providing capacity-building support to the main aquaculture organizations and local community development associations (CDAs) (Nasr-Allah *et al.*, 2019). Although the project did create jobs, this benefitted mostly males across all stages of the value chain, with practically no women being hired in the hatcheries, feed mills and fish farms surveyed. The exception was in the stage of fish retailing, where a significant number of jobs were created for women.

3.6 Gender roles in water resources for agricultural use

Water is indispensable for all productive activities in all agricultural subsectors, and the agriculture sector, as a whole, utilizes more than 85 percent of Egypt's share of Nile water. The country is water stressed and the National Water Resources Plan 2017 recognizes the need for Egypt to "*safeguard its water resources in the future both with respect to quantity and quality*" (MWRI Planning Sector, 2005). Given the recognized role that women play in the provision, management and safeguarding of water both on and off farm, the plan recognizes the need to mainstream women's concerns and needs in agriculture and water policies. Accordingly, the plan includes a section titled "gender issues", which stipulates that men and women must have equal opportunities with regard to participating in decision-making bodies dealing with water resources and irrigation management accessing information and communication about water resources management; and derive equal benefits from effective and efficient water resources management (Ibrahim, 2016). In addition, since 2001, a Gender Focal Point was appointed to the Central Department of Irrigation Advisory Services (IAS) of the MWRI, by Ministerial Decree No. 465. The mandate of this individual is to coordinate and communicate with IAS departments and MWRI's training centres and project personnel to promote equal participation of men and women in irrigation and drainage management, facilitating the exchange of information and experiences among the Ministry's staff about gender equality. In addition, the Gender Focal Point is responsible for building the capacities of MWRI staff and of farmers regarding gender issues, collecting and analysing data regarding women's participation in the management of irrigation systems and suggesting strategies to increase their participation, supporting the development of the MWRI's gender policy, and providing support to rural women leaders to more effectively participate in irrigation and drainage activities (*ibid.*). **However, to date, these ambitions remain largely unattended. Although**

the participation of women in farming activities has increased due to the migration of men, their role in decision-making and in the governance of water resources remains marginal (FAO, 2020a).

Here again, gender and social norms come into play, with women's contributions to irrigation being ignored or undervalued by landowners (usually family or community members), irrigation engineers and extension agents. For example, according to the report *Women, Irrigation and Social Norms in Egypt*, in Kafr Sheikh, although 87 percent of survey respondents reported that women handle the irrigation of their family lands, male farmers and ARC researchers still denied women's involvement in this traditionally masculine activity (Najjar *et al.*, 2019).

The Minya Gender Responsive Water Assessment Report, prepared by FAO Egypt's country office, emphasizes the importance of land ownership as a precondition for optimizing women's participation in water and irrigation management. The rationale for this is that since women do not own or control their land, they are rarely perceived as irrigators or as rightful members of Water User Associations (WUAs) (FAO, 2020a). Consultations with a representative of the MWRI confirmed that despite the efforts of the Ministry and the establishment of a quota for women in WUAs, their participation is not on a par with that of men due to a number of reasons, including the issue of land ownership but also because of other challenges such as women's limited mobility and their time constraints due to their multiple responsibilities.

3.7 Women's entitlements and access to land

According to FAO, **only 2 percent of Egyptian women own land (FAO, 2015), and only 5.2 percent of the total agricultural land is owned by women** (*ibid.*), (as compared to 7 percent in the Arab world (Arab Women Organization, 2020). Depriving women of land ownership and of other productive assets puts them at a disadvantage in terms of accessing economic opportunities and securing their families' livelihoods. Furthermore, research indicates that having limited access to assets reduces women's bargaining power, their access to information regarding agricultural technologies and innovations, and their access to better employment opportunities, all of which are key factors behind the gender-unequal outcomes in rural employment markets (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010).

Women's lack of access to land is largely due to patriarchal and gendered constructions of land

ownership, which prevail in most of Egypt. These include cultural and normative reasons which discourage the transfer of land outside the family when the woman gets married, as this would amount to a loss of capital for the family of origin. Women are often reticent to insist on obtaining their rightful inheritance of land for fear of family reprisal and social stigma. And women are only marginally aware of their rights to inherit land, especially in rural areas.

In an attempt to reverse this trend and increase women's opportunity to own land, the government stipulated a 20 percent quota for female university graduates to own land in reclaimed areas (so-called "new lands"). The experiment has had mixed success. In the case of the Salam Canal reclamation project, most women had handed over the management of their lands to male relatives, finding it too difficult to survive in a rough environment without access to basic resources and services, including public resources such as irrigation and drinking water. On the other hand, in the case of the Mubarak reclaimed land scheme in the Western Desert, female landownership is reported to have significantly empowered some women enabling them to gain knowledge and skills, assume new roles and responsibilities and overcome hardships (Rap and Jaskolski, 2019). Other than the obvious economic empowerment resulting from financial gains, women reported having greater freedom of mobility and activity in public life, which in turn has allowed them to become successful entrepreneurs and purchase more land. Women also mentioned having greater opportunity to speak their minds and make decisions (Najjar, 2013).

While the new lands might provide an opportunity for women to own land and have a greater voice in natural resource management, in part due to being far from their communities and families and the social control they impose, ownership of land by itself is not sufficient to improve women's position in the agriculture sector (ibid.). In fact, a 2009 study conducted by R. Pellizzoli confirms that access to assets is not sufficient to improve rural women's economic and social situation, if they do not gain at the same time the relevant information and tools necessary to optimally utilize those assets (Pellizzoli, 2009).

The NCW has also been active in advocating for women's land rights, specifically, proposing legislation to protect women against being deprived from their inheritance. In 2017, the 1943 Inheritance Law was amended to impose stricter sanctions on those who impede persons' access to their inheritance rights. The amendment makes the

obstruction to inheritance a crime punishable by a jail sentence of no less than 6 months and a fine of up to EGP 100 000, or approximately USD 6 300. This was followed by the NCW-led Tarq El Abwab (Knocking on Doors) campaign to inform women of their legitimate right to obtain and control their inheritance. However, implementation of the law remains a challenge, especially in rural areas where women continue to believe that inherited land and assets, including in certain cases livestock, should be handed over to their brothers or other male relatives. In a best-case scenario, the woman is just financially compensated for the inherited asset.

In this context, several projects have been implemented to strengthen women's access to their rightful inheritance. The European Union-funded project, Empowering Women through Claiming their Inheritance, was implemented by CARE in the Upper Egypt governorates of Sohag and Assuit prior to the amending of the law (from 2013 to 2016). The overall objective of the project was to provide women with greater access to, and control over, economic rights, resources and opportunities. The project established community committees, comprised of respected members of the community, natural leaders and attorneys, who were responsible for determining a fair amount of money that a woman would receive from her family in compensation for land or assets she should normally inherit but agrees not to claim (CARE International, personal communication, 2021). The project evaluation indicates that 82 percent of the respondents were able to restore their inheritance, 42 percent with the help of the mediation committees and 22 percent through awareness-raising activities targeting male counterparts (CARE, 2013). The project evaluation further revealed that for around 90 percent of the respondents, gaining access to their inheritance contributed to a positive change in their lives and those of their families (ibid.).

3.8 Gender and access to extension services and rural finance

In spite of their important role in agriculture, women are largely cut off from essential agricultural support systems, namely, extension, business development and financial services. There are a number of reasons for this, as will be explained in this section, but **lack of support for women farmers stemming from the lack of recognition of their role in food production is at the heart of this problem**. Some efforts are being made to improve women's access to these key services, but the gender gap in this regard is still very large.

A 2017 study on agricultural extension in Egypt indicates that the present extension system is understaffed and that workers lack the appropriate education and technical skills needed to undertake their job efficiently (Abdel-Gawad, 2017). **There is no gender orientation or capacity development for the extension workers at large, which means that most of the staff is not equipped to respond to female farmers' specific needs and constraints.** In addition, female extension agents represent only 3.3 percent of agricultural extension workers (Abdel Aal, 2004). Poor working conditions, lack of transport and accommodation facilities also limit the outreach of female extension agents to remote areas. This is a problematic as, due to restrictive gender roles, women may be discouraged or may not feel comfortable to interact with men outside their family or community network.

In order to fill some of the gaps in the current the extension system, FAO is piloting the farmer field school (FFS) approach in Egypt through a number of projects, in collaboration with MALR, MoSS, IFAD and a number of NGOs. This tested approach, based on peer-to-peer learning, has shown, in Egypt as well as in other countries, to be particularly effective in reaching out to female farmers and improve their access to agricultural information and knowledge. In collaboration with the NGO Life Vision, FAO has also supported the establishment of women-led FFSs, specifically aimed to strengthen women's capacities in water management and irrigation. Based on these successful experiences, the Embassy of Canada allocated funds to FAO for the establishment of women-led FFSs and farm business schools (a similar approach to FFS, implemented by FAO to support farmer's uptake of basic business and marketing skills) in Minya Governorate, with the aim of strengthening women's uptake of sustainable agricultural practices as well as the establishment of micro agribusinesses that comply with market demands and food safety and nutrition standards.

On another front, but with the same purpose, the GoE is working to digitize the agriculture sector in order to give farmers, and especially rural women and youth, greater access to information and services, and ultimately to market and entrepreneurial opportunities. According to the Digital Agriculture Maps report by GSMA (2020), the rise in smartphone penetration in emerging markets can provide access to information about important topics such as agricultural best practices, market prices and weather forecasts through mobile-based advisory services (GSMA, 2020). The MALR requested support from FAO to digitize its extension service model,

and, together with the ARC, technical content is to be digitized so that it can be disseminated through mobile applications (FAO, 2019a). However, infrastructure and ICT technologies are still very limited in Egypt. Connectivity is a challenge, with 2G and feature phones being widely used, making it difficult to disseminate information through mobile applications. Furthermore, literacy levels among rural women are low, further limiting their access to information, even when it is available, as well the use of digital tools, unless they are designed specifically for users with a low literacy level. Therefore, particular emphasis is required on how to break down the barriers that small farmers, women farmers in particular, face in access to and use of information.

Credit and microcredit elude female farmers, mainly because rural financial institutions, including the main provider of agricultural credit, the Principal Bank of Development and Agriculture Credit (PBDAC), do not recognize women as active economic agents, and most agricultural credit schemes rely on land or property as a collateral in the loan contract. In addition, information about the existence and use of these financial services is not readily available to women (Fletschner and Kenney, 2011). In order to remedy this situation, the CBE and the NCW are advocating for the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) model, implemented by CARE International and UN Women in Upper Egypt, to be scaled up nationwide. The model enables groups of rural women to save for business or personal purposes and to participate in the local as well as the broader economy in different value chains and markets through micro-enterprises (UN Women, 2019). Accordingly, a protocol was signed with BLOM Bank, which will extend access to microfinance services to projects targeting rural women, by providing digital financial services using the VSLA model. The plan will target 3 million women over five years. Additionally, as part of the Government's financial inclusion efforts, a MoU was signed between the CBE and the Bank of Alexandria (a member of the Italian banking group Intesa San Paolo) by virtue of which the bank provides financial and non-financial services (namely, financial literacy and numeracy) to women in business, with a focus on rural areas.

3.9 Gender and migration

Migration from rural areas has become an important livelihood strategy for many small-scale farmers who find it difficult to make a living for their families from the proceeds of their landholdings. In most cases, male farmers migrate, leaving the women to care for the farm. This changes the role of women

in agriculture through two main channels: first, the loss of male family labour, compensated by the flow of remittances that migrant men may send to their families; and, second, the opportunities for women to take on new roles in agriculture, including in the paid employment opportunities that commercial agriculture has started to provide. The impact of migration on the family members left behind is mixed. On one hand, it can ease household budget constraints, increase children's schooling and improve their health because of the additional financial resources. On the other hand, according to evidence from the region and from Egypt, women's workload is intensified as they undertake traditionally male farming tasks (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010). This may also decrease their engagement in paid activities (Assaad, 2010). In these situations, women become the de facto heads of households, although, if asked, they would define themselves as helpers. In the fisher village of Shakshouk in Fayoum, for example, the majority of women are now engaged in economic activities, such as selling fish and shrimp shells and raising poultry for sale, whereas most of them never did so in the past (Tewfik *et al.*, 2019). However, this de facto empowerment is reversed upon the return of their husbands, and the decision-making powers of women are reduced more than those of women in households that never experienced migration. In fact, **research has shown that attitudes about gender roles are more socially conservative in households that have experienced migration than among those that have not, because of the reinforcement of traditional gender norms** (GIZ, 2014). According to a study by Binzel and Assaad (2009), this could be interpreted in light of the dominant pattern of migration from Egypt, which is mostly directed to more socially conservative destination countries, where migrants can be influenced by the cultural norms of the host country. In the case of internal migration, it could be attributed to returning migrants asserting the male prerogative after a period of absence (*ibid.*).

3.10 Women's working conditions in agricultural value chains

A rigid gender-based division of labour exists in the agriculture sector and in related value chains, with women farmers and workers performing distinct tasks in production and harvesting processes.

Women are usually found in the upstream nodes of agricultural value chains and are therefore engaged

in tasks requiring less technical specialization, hired under precarious contracts, at lower pay compared to men, and exposed to poor working conditions, including exposure to harmful pesticides and chemicals, long working hours and absence of toilet facilities, as well as various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment (UN Women, 2018).

Horticulture in particular is a major source of employment for women, however female employment is usually concentrated in labour-intensive activities that require manual dexterity, such as harvesting, sieving, grading and sorting perishable horticultural products, such as medicinal and aromatic plants (Entrust Development and Management Consultants, 2011).

A 2015 FAO study of the medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) value chain in Fayoum concludes that there is a need to better include women in rural development programmes through targeted socio-economic initiatives and women-friendly work policies and practices. It also concludes that increasing the enrolment of women in agri-food-related faculties and programmes is a key step towards engaging women in highly-skilled jobs in agricultural value chains, and, thus, to improve the overall performance of the value chain. Although this study focused on one agricultural value chain and one governorate, these conclusions apply to all value chains (North South Consultants Exchange, 2015).

While horticulture holds high profitability, maintaining consistent productivity levels is a challenge, mainly because of the high turnover rates and absenteeism primarily among women employees, especially married women, due to their disproportionate share of domestic and care responsibilities. Such high turnover and absenteeism are associated, for the employers, with higher costs and lower productivity levels, and may therefore discourage the employment of female workers. It is in this context that the business case for improving the working conditions of women was made by UN Women in 2015, providing the rationale for implementing the Women's Employment Promotion Programme (WEPP) funded by USAID. Ten agribusiness firms participated in the programme, which was implemented in three governorates: Giza, Beni Suef and Minya. Programme interventions were based on the adoption of the Women's

⁸ The WEPPs are a set of principles established by UN Global Compact and UN Women which guide businesses regarding how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace.

Empowerment Principles (WEPPs)⁸, which provided a road map for the companies to take actions to improve working conditions for women. Examples include investing in employees' health, enforcing strict rules on sexual harassment and adopting a zero-tolerance anti-harassment policy, establishing grievance mechanisms, establishing labour committees to bridge previous communication gaps between company management and employees, supporting access to childcare and instituting flexible work arrangements. The participating companies reported improved workforce and organizational outcomes, as described in Box 3 (UN Women, 2018).

Box 3. Benefits of gender-sensitive workplaces

- Improved retention rate and reduced absenteeism.
- Reduced costs linked to recruitment and introduction of new employees.
- Improved communication between employees and management resulted in increased women workers' satisfaction rate and motivation.
- Improved productivity and higher performance.
- Enhanced corporate reputation in the surrounding communities and compliance with international markets expectations.

Source: UN Women Egypt, 2018

The final evaluation of the project concluded that "the WEPP model has large potential for scale-up and sustainability" (Fathi, 2018). Consultations with UN Women and USAID confirmed this conclusion, and in this context, USAID has launched a call for proposals to fund the Women's Economic and Social Empowerment Activity to promote women's access to economic opportunities in Egypt through three integrated and mutually reinforcing objectives: Goal 1: Improve the work environment for women in the private sector economy; Goal 2: Expand women's financial inclusion; Goal 3: Reduce the socioeconomic impacts of violence against women (Fund for NGOs, 2020).

3.11 Gender and climate change

The impact of climate change on farm yields, including crop losses and reduced livestock productivity, is significant. Southern Egypt, where poverty is concentrated, is the most vulnerable region, but the Delta is also witnessing changes in temperature and sea levels. The WFP forecasts that Upper Egypt could lose up to 30 percent of its food production by 2050, as climate change brings more extreme weather and other threats; and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) predicts a reduction in the productivity of two major crops, wheat and maize, by 15 and 19 percent, respectively, by 2050 (IUCN, n.d.). In addition, climate change affects disease transmission, especially as new insect-borne animal diseases have emerged and livestock productivity and immunity decreases due to reduced productivity of fodder crops and competition for land and water resources between fodder and cereal crops (ibid.).

The impact of climate change on small farmers is significant and is gender-differentiated. According to the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), published by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2014, women are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because they shoulder an enormous but imprecisely recorded portion of responsibility for subsistence agriculture, which can be expected to be adversely affected by climate change and overexploited soil (IPCC, 2014). Furthermore, global shocks such as COVID-19 and financial crises, as well a downward trend in the national economy, may cause job losses in the formal sector, causing men to compete for jobs in the informal sector that were previously undertaken by women, increasing women's vulnerability. Additionally, the ability of women farmers to adapt and respond to the impacts of climate change is limited compared to men, mainly because of their restricted access to productive resources, technology and financial services and to their high rates of illiteracy and their limited mobility. As a result, women tend to opt for short-term coping strategies that have long-term negative implications for their own well-being and health and that of their households and communities. Despite this disadvantage, Egypt's National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change makes limited reference to women and their role in climate change adaptation, and there are no resources allocated for activities specifically targeting women.

In response to this situation, for the past two decades, the Small Grants Programme (SGP), funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) has been supporting the implementation of projects focused on protecting agricultural land from degradation and conserving irrigation water. The projects are implemented by the GoE, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and civil society organizations in urban and rural areas. The concerns and participation of women and youth are an integral component of the projects. This is achieved through consultation with groups of women and youth organized by civil society organizations representing their interests, and through targeted capacity development measures.

3.12 Women's representation in rural organizations

Farmer organizations, namely cooperatives, farmer unions and producer associations, are essential institutions for the empowerment of farmers and the alleviation of poverty. They can help farmers gain skills, access inputs, form enterprises and process and market their products to generate higher incomes. The members of these organizations usually have greater bargaining power and are able to negotiate better prices and terms than non-members. However, worldwide, the involvement and leadership of men and women in farmer organizations is unequal. According to an expert paper published by UN Women, entitled *The Role of Farmers' Organizations in Empowering and Promoting the Leadership of Rural Women*, women comprise between 30 and 50 percent of the membership of farmer organizations worldwide, although they perform up to 80 percent of farming tasks. Moreover, there are few women in leadership positions in farmer organizations (Penunia, 2011). In Egypt, the situation is no different; **women's membership in cooperatives, unions and producer associations is limited to landholders, thus excluding most women farmers.**

Field project implementation has demonstrated the benefits of organization and aggregation for rural women and women farmers. Examples include the VSLA model, which has shown that, **when women come together, they can overcome many of the obstacles they face within their work and life environments and contribute to the welfare of their households and communities.** Another project that demonstrated this was the joint UN project, Pro-poor Horticulture Value Chains in Upper Egypt

(also called Salasel), implemented in Upper Egypt by UNDP, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), ILO and UN Women, which established women's cooperatives that created and supported income-generating activities to ensure decent employment for women. The cooperatives are reported to have improved the position of their members in both export and domestic markets (UN Women, 2014).

The findings of an assessment of the horticulture value chain in Upper Egypt indicate that farmer organizations are very beneficial to male and female small-scale farmers because of the variety of services provided to their members; but also, in the case of women farmers, because they experience more independence in work-related decision-making and having better control over their farm proceeds as members of such organizations. The report concludes that farmer organizations contribute to greater empowerment for women small farmers (Entrust Development and Management Consultants, 2011).

The law governing agricultural cooperatives (Law 204/2014) was amended in 2014 to allow cooperatives to establish shareholding companies and carry out profit-seeking projects, which could have opened up a window of opportunity for women. The GoE requested FAO's assistance to help cooperatives take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new law. FAO provided this assistance through the project *Enhancing the Agricultural Cooperatives System in Egypt*, implemented in 2016–2017. However, the impacts reported by the project do not mention changes in the gender disparities in the governance, participation and membership of cooperatives (FAO, 2019b). In 2019, FAO Egypt published the report, *Review of the Agrifood Cooperative Sector*, which recommends enhancing women's membership and promotion to higher levels within cooperatives, instituting affirmative action for women in cooperatives' by-laws and economic activities, and implementing social and economic projects targeting women (Ghonem, 2019).



Women participants of the food processing training session in El-Menya governorate, showing the dried tomatoes they produced.

4. Stakeholder analysis



A number of international organizations, including UN agencies and national organizations such as ministries, universities and research centres, are engaged in rural development, and agricultural development in particular. These organizations can help promote rural women’s empowerment. This section provides a snapshot of the main organizations involved in these efforts and some of the programmes they are implementing.

4.1 Government

The government entities primarily involved in rural women’s development are the MALR, the MWRI, the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD), the MoSS and the NCW. These entities lead the work on agricultural and rural development through their various offices and departments. All these ministries have women’s departments, units or focal points that coordinate the activities on women’s empowerment, and that promote collaboration with the NCW and MoPED, to ensure that Egypt’s gender equality objectives and targets are met.

4.1.1 National Council of Women (NCW)

The NCW is the owner of the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, and can thus be considered the most important stakeholder organization that FAO should engage with in order to fulfil its gender commitments and ensure that its programming framework is in line with the national strategy. The NCW’s mandate focuses on ensuring that women’s rights, as stipulated by the 2014 Constitution, are observed and that national plans and public policies are gender-responsive so that no woman is left behind. The NCW represents Egypt in all national, regional and international fora regarding women, and reports on Egypt’s progress in fulfilling its commitments to safeguarding women’s rights and promoting women’s empowerment and representation in the political, economic and social spheres. In each of these spheres, the NCW, advised by its expert committees, implements advocacy and public awareness actions (including

recommending gender-responsive legislation) and implements direct activities through its governorate branches, equal opportunity units, and network of civil society partners. The Rural Women Committee is one such expert committee that is tasked with reviewing national plans and ensuring that the concerns and interests of rural women are reflected in those plans (NCW, 2021). As to women’s economic empowerment, the Women Business Development Centre (WBDC) provides women with the skills to establish, run and sustain small- and medium-sized enterprises. Services provided include training, business counselling, access to e-marketing websites, information about investment opportunities and workshops and seminars for knowledge-sharing and networking. The NCW reports directly to the President of Egypt and is regulated by Law 30 of 2018, which replaced Presidential Decree No. 90/2000. The new law consolidated the NCW’s organizational mandate while positioning the women’s agenda at the centre of Egypt’s inclusive and sustainable development efforts.

Two important NCW initiatives deserve particular mention. In July 2020, the NCW launched the platform Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator, together with the MoIC and the World Economic Forum (WEF). This platform facilitates private-public collaboration, focusing on policies and programmes for women’s empowerment and the elimination of the gender gap. Specifically, the platform aims to increase women’s participation in the labour market, encourage their appointment in leadership roles, and bridge the wage gap. The accelerator’s action

plan focuses on the most promising sectors in Egypt, which includes the agriculture and food processing sectors (Moneim, 2020). In March 2021, the project Women's Empowerment and Financial and Economic Inclusion in Rural Egypt: COVID-19 Response, was approved for implementation by the NCW, the CBE, the European Union, the Embassy of the Netherlands and UN Women. The aim of the project is to eliminate violence and economically empower more than 120 000 women living in rural communities in the Minya, Beni Suef, Assiut and Sohag governorates by increasing their digital and financial literacy and digitizing the VSLA model. By increasing women's resilience and financial inclusion, the project also aims at mitigating COVID-19 implications on women's economic empowerment (Egypt Today, 2021). This project also aligns with the National Programme for Digital Village Savings and Loans Associations, led by the NCW and the CBE.

In view of the key role of the NCW in advancing the status of women in the agriculture sector, FAO should consider developing a partnership agreement with the council by virtue of which it could provide various forms of support. These might include developing the capacity of the NCW's rural committee and its governorate branches so that they can better support the NCW's efforts to relay the concerns and challenges facing rural women and women farmers to concerned authorities.

4.1.2 Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR)

The MALR is responsible for all agricultural matters. The Ministry's mandate stipulates establishing agricultural policy, planning horizontal land expansion through land reclamation and studying methods of providing agricultural inputs to farmers and raising their efficiency

through the optimal economic exploitation of lands, livestock and water. Three of the Ministry's departments are of critical importance to women in agriculture: the Central Administration for Agricultural Extension Services (CAAES), which is the national extension organization, serving farmers through its extension staff at governorate, district and village levels; the ARC, incorporated under the CAAES, which is the research and development arm of the Ministry and which generates and disseminates of knowledge regarding agricultural technologies, crop varieties and agronomic practices; and the Policy and Coordination Unit for Women in Agriculture (PCUWA), which is tasked with coordinating with the various departments and institutes of the Ministry to integrate issues of concern to women into the

MALR's programmes and policies. Each of these three departments requires additional support, which FAO is well positioned to provide. Specifically, FAO can support the capacity development of CAAES extension workers and the PCUWA staff to serve rural women and women farmers. As for the ARC, FAO's collaboration on research projects can enhance the knowledge base on women in agriculture, especially regarding topics which are in particular need of further research, such as women and fisheries.

4.1.3 Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (MWRI)

The MWRI manages water resource projects at the state level and monitors all water resources in Egypt. Similar to the MALR, the Ministry's mandate clearly includes the implementation of projects that would allow for horizontal expansion through land reclamation. In addition, the MWRI is charged with developing irrigation systems that allow maximum efficiency. Presently, many women head up departments within the Ministry that were traditionally managed by men. Furthermore, in 2002, a ministerial decree established the Gender Equity Unit within the Ministry in order to mainstream gender within the Ministry and in community development activities (North South Consultants Exchange, 2011). The unit deals with issues of discrimination against women and works to build the capacity of MWRI employees about gender equality. Additionally, a gender focal point position was established at the Central Department of Irrigation Advisory Services in 2001. The gender focal point is responsible for coordinating gender mainstreaming processes in all MWRI activities, while building the capacities of Ministry field workers to support the participation of women in WUAs. The focal point also contributes to policy-making processes to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed. Consultations with Ministry representatives indicated that there are a number of potential areas of collaboration with FAO. These include the dissemination of successful stories about women and WUAs, implementing awareness training on how to maximize the role of women in water management at the household and farm levels, and reviewing the Ministry's National Water Resources Plan and its M&E indicators to ensure that implementation is considerate of gender issues and that the gender objectives of the plan are adequately reflected in the Ministry's Monitoring Framework.

4.1.4 Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS)

Social protection and economic empowerment go hand in hand. Social protection policies can help develop and expand access to labour markets and help poor households meet basic needs. The mandate

of the MoSS is to deliver social protection to Egypt's most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens, mainly the poor, the elderly, the handicapped, rural women, women-headed households and former convicts.

Since 2018/2019, the Ministry has been focused mainly on vulnerable and rural populations and is offering a wide range of services aimed at protecting and empowering women (MoSS, 2019). The economic empowerment programme portfolio of the Ministry includes funding for 61 500 microprojects, amounting to a total of EGP 373 million (nearly USD 24 million), and for providing professional and artisanal training to 22 500 women in ten of the poorest governorates in the country (ibid.).

In recent years, the MoSS has been keen to change its direction towards development and economic empowerment rather than only focusing on social protection. A number of agreements have been signed with donors and international organizations to implement microprojects for women in rural areas. In November 2019, the MoSS, PepsiCo and CARE Egypt launched a USD 3.7 million, three-year programme called She Feeds the World. The programme is expected to benefit around 390 000 female small-scale farmers and their families in the governorates of Beheira, Giza, Minya and Beni Suef. The programme will provide training on good agricultural practices to help increase crop yields and income as well as farming inputs and resources that are usually inaccessible to women farmers. The programme also aims to improve the nutritional well-being of 100 000 households by promoting improved nutritional education, private and public-sector engagement to strengthen services for improved nutrition outcomes; water conservation and replenishment in the community around PepsiCo's facility, (Daily News Egypt, 2019; CARE, 2020).

There are a number of potential areas of collaboration between FAO and the MoSS. One of them is the previously mentioned initiative addressing the fisher women in the Delta (see Section 3.1.4.). Another is to conduct research on how women engaged in occasional, temporary, seasonal and agricultural work can be included in and benefit from the reformed social protection scheme.

4.1.5 Ministry of Local Development (MoLD)

The mandate of the MoLD is to coordinate the development of local government, enhance local resource utilization and support local job creation in all Egyptian governorates. The MoLD coordinates with other ministries and with governorates to identify projects and implement initiatives aimed at

improving the social and economic conditions of rural residents. An important sector of the Ministry is the General Secretariat for Local Administration, which reports to the Supreme Council for Local Administration, headed up by the Prime Minister. The Secretariat coordinates among the various governorates and ministries, ensuring that public authorities at governorate, district and village level are performing their duties as well as monitoring the implementation of national programmes.

Considering its mandate, the Ministry's engagement in the design of interventions aimed at women's economic empowerment is strongly advisable, as local authorities represent a key entry points to implement activities at the field level. The Ministry is implementing a number of projects targeting youth and women. These projects are supported by donors and development partners including GIZ, UNDP and the World Bank. The Ministry has equal opportunity units within its administrative structure and in all governorates. In order to determine how FAO can add value to the Ministry's efforts, particularly in terms of capacity development and enhancing the Ministry's understanding of the issues facing rural women and women in agriculture, it is advised that an assessment of the Ministry's capacity be carried out.

4.1.7 Ministry of Manpower (MoM)

The mandate of the MoM is to formulate national employment policies and ensure that public and private sector entities comply with labour legislation. Labour regulations have a significant impact on the engagement of women in the formal sector. Although some of the regulations were introduced to protect women, they tend to work against women's employment in the private sector as companies prefer to avoid the costs involved in complying with those regulations, such as costs of maternity leave, childcare provision and restricted working hours. Revisions to the labour law are currently under discussion. These revisions must balance gender-differentiated regulations that take into account women's care responsibilities and reproductive functions with their equal right and ability to work and have fruitful careers. In this context, according to the report Women, Business and the Law 2020, Egypt scored 0 and 20 out of 100 in legal differences between men and women related to pay and parenthood, respectively, thus confirming the need to revise the Labour Law with a gender-sensitive lens, particularly with regard to working mothers. The MoM is an important stakeholder in ensuring that the legislation, policies and measures necessary to making the formal private sector more attractive to female workers are in place, while dismantling

employers' reservations regarding hiring women, as well as ensuring that women working in the informal sector have access to same opportunities and protections as women in formal jobs and businesses.

4.2 Civil society

The main organizations supporting agriculture and rural development are the agricultural cooperatives, under the supervision of the MALR, and the NGOs, under the supervision of the MoSS. A recent study on cooperatives in the agrifood sector puts the total number of agricultural cooperatives at 6 412 (Ghonem, 2019). The objective of local agricultural cooperatives is to support their members through enhanced access to quality services, improved market opportunities and increased participation in rural development efforts. However, the governance and performance of these organizations is often weak, and their tasks remain often limited to providing their member with access to some form of credit or inputs. Despite these limitations in terms of their capacity, finance and governance, agricultural cooperatives have extensive experience, outreach and coverage of villages and, thus, have significant potential to serve farmers, especially small farmers, if their capacities are strengthened. These important organizations, however, do not serve most women farmers as owning land is a requirement for membership. This is unfortunate given the consensus among most stakeholders that women tend to thrive collectively (CARE, USAID (ERAS Project), UN Women and Nawaya NGO; personal communication; 2021). A similar situation exists with producer organisations and WUAs, where women's voices are absent because they do not possess land titles.

There are around 45 000 civil society organizations in Egypt that offer a diverse range of services, including education and literacy, health, childcare and family

guidance, as well as acting as advocates for the rights of disadvantaged populations, including women, youth and persons with disabilities. This sector includes different types of civil society organizations, including large and well-resourced Egyptian and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foundations. These include the Om Habibeh Foundation, the Egypt Foundation for Integrated Development (Al Niddaa) – an offshoot of the UNDP-supported Egyptian Network for Integrated Development project, the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development (SFSD), DROSOS Foundation, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, CARE Egypt, Plan International, Life Vision, Nawaya and several large microfinance NGOs. The sector also comprises a multitude of smaller community-based organizations that have less resources and are less organized than their larger organizations. Many of these community-based organizations are working with larger NGOs in the implementation of agricultural and rural development projects, most of which are donor funded. Some of these projects target women exclusively, while in others gender is mainstreamed. In both cases, the engagement of men, boys and communities is perceived as critical to effectuating transformative sustainable change.

In this context, the collaboration between FAO, the MALR, the MWRI and Life Vision in implementing women's FFSs in Minya on sugar beet production is an interesting model that is reported to have improved crop yield while giving women the opportunity to learn about optimal water and fertilizer usage. Consideration should be given to replicating this model in other governorates, together with Life Vision and other NGOs, as a means to develop the capacities of both the NGOs involved and the beneficiaries, as well as being an effective exercise in partnership between concerned government entities, civil society organizations and the UN.



A meeting for the establishment of a Women Farmers Association in Fayoum.

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5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

As illustrated throughout this Assessment, women are very active in agriculture, especially in some regions in Egypt. However, a rigid gender division of labour in relation to both agricultural tasks and household care and domestic responsibilities, often relegate women to a subordinate position. The analysis of the agricultural labour market and agrifood value chains shows, for example, that women mostly provide unpaid contributions to family farms and businesses. Even when hired, they usually work under precarious contracts, at lower pay compared to men, and under poorer working conditions.

Despite progress in recent decades, women are not yet recognized, and often do not perceive themselves, as farmers or agricultural labourers. They are mostly considered as helpers and contributing family members. For this reason, women tend to remain invisible to policy- and decision-makers, service providers and rural organizations operating in the agriculture sector. This invisibility is a key reason explaining why agricultural support services (be it extension, financial, social protection or business development) are so rarely attuned to women's specific roles and needs, and why rural women remain so under-served when it comes to agricultural training, innovative practices and technologies, and market information.

The underlying factor behind this invisibility and marginalization can be grouped under three main categories:

- a) **gendered cultural and social norms;**
- b) **gendered structural barriers; and**
- c) **gendered institutional biases.**

Regarding **gendered cultural and social norms**, patriarchal and discriminatory values and attitudes continue to prevail in rural Egypt (in Upper Egypt in particular) representing a major challenge to women's empowerment and to a more equal share between men and women in the dividends of development. Based on these social norms, women face a number of specific and additional constraints compared to their male counterparts, including time and mobility constraints, which prevent them from participating and benefitting equally from the opportunities in the agriculture and rural sector.

The subordination of women's role and position to that of men is also perpetuated by **gendered structural barriers**. In rural areas, the absence of childcare facilities, inadequate transport and infrastructure and the distance to healthcare facilities are among the structural barriers that make it more difficult for women to balance remunerative activities with their household and care responsibilities. Women in Egypt tend to spend 12 times the amount of time their male counterparts spend on unpaid care work. In this context, it is not surprising that over 71 percent of Egyptian women in rural areas are reported to be working in unprotected informal jobs (most of them working without pay in family businesses), compared to 13 percent of women in urban areas. Seasonal work is also more prevalent among women and girls working in agriculture, 38 percent of whom work only part of the year, compared to only 5 percent of women in non-agricultural occupations. According to a recent ILO study on Egypt's agribusiness sector, agriculture is one of the six lowest-paying sectors for women, who are employed at lower wages and in the less lucrative nodes of agrifood value chains. Moreover, because of the largely informal nature of women's work in agriculture, most of them are not eligible for social protection and health insurance schemes.

A study on social protection schemes in rural Egypt notes that only a small segment of women will benefit from these schemes, as Article 85 of Law 148/2019 stipulates that unemployment insurance is not extended to informal workers engaged in occasional, temporary, seasonal or agricultural work, which includes the majority of working women in rural areas (ESCWA, 2020). The study also directs attention to the challenges the Government faces in implementing its new health insurance scheme, including how to enrol informally employed individuals and verify their declared income, and how to identify the rural poor who are eligible for subsidized healthcare.

The **institutional bias against women** in agriculture is manifested in a number of areas, including in the governance of the organizations involved in the sector; the policies related to agriculture, irrigation and rural development; and the range of services provided to farmers and how they are delivered. As mentioned above, women are also significantly under-served by all the various types of agricultural service providers. While this can be partly explained by the overall lack of services in rural areas, a key reason for this gender gap is the obliviousness of the extension system and of rural financial institutions to the specific conditions and needs of rural women.

Since these three categories of gender-based constraints are strictly intertwined, an integrated approach is needed to improve the situation of women in agriculture and the rural sector. This includes legal reforms, the introduction of gender-responsive social safety nets, integration of women in the governance of farmers' organizations and support for the establishment of women's farmer associations, gender-responsive extension services, and mechanisms to improve women's access to information and labour markets (FAO, IFAD and ILO, 2010). Moreover, there is a strong need to implement projects and programmes adopting a gender-transformative approach, which can tackle and hopefully transform the gendered and discriminatory social norms at the core of the inequalities in the agriculture sector.

Based on these conclusions, the CGA offers the following set of recommendations to FAO, other UN agencies and development organizations, and the Government, which are built on the findings of this Assessment and the insights gathered through the extensive consultations with key stakeholders and informants.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 FAO

Knowledge generation and dissemination

- » Ensure a more systematic integration of gender dimensions in the next Country Programming Framework (CPF) and all relevant field programmes implemented by FAO, with a view to complement the SADS, which has a relatively weak gender focus, and to reflect the objectives foreseen in the memorandum of understanding currently under negotiation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in support of women and youth. In order to achieve these objectives, additional capacity should be allocated to the FAO country office, including having one full-time gender officer and resources for training and research.
- » Conduct a comparative study to generate policy-relevant knowledge on women's decent employment in agriculture, as planned in the current CPF.
- » Conduct and support the dissemination of gender-related research on specific topics related to agricultural and rural development, climate change and water that would benefit from further research. The need for such research was expressed during conversations with stakeholders, especially civil society organizations, including Nawayya and Life Vision. The research topics mentioned were: (i) a compilation of the lessons learned from gender-responsive farmer field schools (FFSs); (ii) assessing how other countries have reformed their agricultural cooperative systems to more effectively address the challenges faced by small-scale farmers, especially women farmers, and to make their voices heard (a need expressed by CARE Egypt); and (iii) a gender analysis of the fisheries sector. Such research would make it possible for decision-makers and development partners to develop an evidence-based road map for reforming the sector. In this context, collaborating with the Agricultural Research Center (ARC) and other partners on research projects should be envisaged.

Capacity development

- » To support the improvement of extension services overall and enhance the gender-responsiveness of extension services, provide refresher training for current staff of the Central Administration for Agricultural Extension Services (CAAES)

and implement tailored capacity-development programmes for female extension agents, as well as gender orientation for all extension workers. The existing curricula of extension services should also be reviewed to ensure that it reflects advances in the field and effectively responds to rural women's specific needs and interests.

Resource mobilization

- » Mobilize financial and technical resources from donors that have a strong gender agenda and interest in agriculture and the rural sector, such as Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the European Union and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS). Among the projects that FAO Egypt and the partners could build upon, it is worth mentioning the following: Opportunities for Women in Agribusiness Project (OWAP) and Strengthening Women Entrepreneurs in Egypt (SWEET), implemented by GAC; Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), being implemented during 2021–2027 by the European Union, which has a strong gender component; and Empowering Women in Fayoum Rural Areas (EWFRA), targeting unemployed women and girls and promoting women's empowerment and economic development and improved socio-economic status of rural families; and the Joint Rural Development Programme, which aims to improve the quality of life of rural communities through the sustainable management of local resources, the latter two implemented by the AICS together with the European Union.

Partnerships

- » Collaborate with the National Council for Women (NCW) to develop and publish a policy paper on improving women's access to and management of land and other productive assets. This is in line with FAO's role as custodian of two of the indicators of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), related to the percentage of people with land ownership disaggregated by sex and the legal framework guaranteeing land ownership.
- » Partner with the NCW to support activities targeting rural women. This could include supporting activities within the Closing the Gender Gap Accelerator, aimed at increasing women's participation in the labour market and supporting the NCW committee working on the revival of

Egyptian cotton and developing the capacities of women along the cotton value chain (NCW, personal communication, 2021). The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is also implementing a project on Egyptian cotton together with the Ministry of Trade and the MALR. It is important that FAO investigate where its assistance to the NCW can add value to existing efforts.

Programme/project development and implementation

- » Replicate the women's FFS project, implemented in Minya by FAO, the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR), the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (MWRI) and Life Vision, in other governorates, including the Delta, as the project has successfully achieved its objectives as well as constituting a good partnership practice between concerned government entities, civil society and the UN. Implementing the project in different regional rural contexts would provide insights for future programming related to women in agriculture.

Policy advocacy

- » Provide policy advice and support to the Government by generating proposals for institutional arrangements and gender-sensitive agriculture policies that address the empowerment of rural women, in compliance with Article 14 of CEDAW, and enhance the participation of rural women in agriculture, land and water governance. In this context, involving the NCW and MoPED in policy conversations with the MALR can provide the additional leverage required for FAO advice and support to be operationalised.

5.2.2 UN agencies and development organizations

Knowledge generation and dissemination

- » Develop case studies documenting good practices from other countries in the region and beyond, explaining how relevant stakeholders managed to address similar constraints related to women's participation in agriculture and the rural sector and in natural resource management. FAO programme officers in the Egypt country office and other stakeholders consulted indicated that these case studies would constitute a useful resource to inform the design of country-level programmes and projects.

- » Discuss with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) how to make use of their data sets to generate sex-disaggregated data. IFPRI has generated complete data sets as part of their evaluation of the Takaful and Karama programmes and the agricultural transformation project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and is in the process of analysing them. IFPRI indicated that a possible area of collaboration with FAO and other development partners is the extrapolation of lessons learnt on how to strengthen the position of women from the data collected.
- » Support the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in documenting the lessons learnt and results achieved under the Sustainable Transformation for Agricultural Resilience (STAR) project, and gauge to what extent the project can become a model for integrated programming for agricultural and rural development. Since gender disparities in the rural sector are complex and interrelated, these must be addressed through integrated programming involving complementary measures. Similarly, lessons learnt from the 1 000 Villages project under the umbrella of the Hayah Karima programme need to be documented and assessed for future programming.

Capacity development

- » Implement a capacity assessment of equal opportunity units and gender focal points in MALR, MWRI, MoSS and MoLD, and develop gender training focusing on the interlinkages between women, agriculture and rural development. In this context, review and support the revision of the MWRI's National Water Resources Plan and M&E framework and indicators to ensure gender sensitivity is included as an area in which expert support would add value.
- » Implement capacity-development programmes targeting rural women to strengthen their role in climate action and natural resource management (including water management) at household and community levels.

Partnerships

- » Collaborate with UN Women and other partners to design and implement gender-transformative interventions that address the stereotypes and norms that constrain women's effective

participation in the sector (e.g. men and women's access to and control of land and agricultural assets, gendered division of labour and gender roles in rural households and communities). Another possible area of collaboration with UN Women and USAID could be to support the scaling up of the WEPP, targeting agribusinesses in other geographical areas. (The WEPP initiative was implemented in Upper Egypt. It would be worth considering assessing whether different lessons could be learnt from implementation in the Delta.)

Programme/project development and implementation

- » Develop projects and programmes to enhance the role of rural women in climate action (including adaptation measures) and natural resource management. This can be organized in collaboration with the UNDP/GEF programme and the NCW, with the engagement of the Equal Opportunity Units (EOUs) or women's departments of the concerned ministries. In this context, as mentioned during consultations with FAO, UN agencies and development organizations should support rural women's involvement in the formulation of policies related to climate action and natural resource management in Egypt. Ensuring that sufficient funds for gender-focused actions are allocated as part of the implementation of National Adaptation Plans at governorate and local level, should also be a key responsibility of FAO and other development partners.
- » Develop a project to promote women's decent work in the fishery and aquaculture subsectors. According to the MoSS and other stakeholders consulted during the Assessment, the aquaculture value chain has potential not only to provide nutritious food but also to generate substantial employment. Currently, however, men hold most of the jobs in both subsectors, while jobs for women are limited to retail and seasonal work. The final report of the STREAMS project, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), concludes that boosting employment generation for women across the entire aquaculture value chain could contribute to the attainment of SDGs related to gender equality (SDG 5) and decent employment (SDG 8). In addition, lessons learnt from the collaboration between USAID and UN Women on the Women's Employment Promotion Programme (WEPP), in terms of creating safe and women-friendly workplaces, can provide a useful reference for the design of a similar initiative promoting women's

work along the value chains of the fishery and aquaculture subsectors. Consultations should be held with USAID, UN Women and the SDC regarding the lessons learnt from their support of the STREAMS and WEPP projects.

- » In consultation with the MoSS, consider leveraging the Ministry's network of NGOs and community-based organizations to replicate the experience of community kitchens such as Baladini and El Dawar. Baladini is a community kitchen, established by Nawaya in 2014, run by women farmers who create and market their own artisanal brands of fresh and traditional foods. El Dawar is a similar initiative of the Cairo-based NGO, Dawar for Arts and Development. It is a social enterprise located in the low-income neighbourhood of Ezbet Khairallah that employs and empowers female Syrian refugees and other women from the neighbourhood, also in the production and sale of food products.
- » Apply a nutrition and food security lens, as well as a gender lens, to programmes and projects, thereby contributing to building synergy between SDG2 and SDG 5, Zero Hunger and Gender Equality.

5.2.3 Government

Knowledge generation and dissemination

- » Generate sex-disaggregated data related to agriculture and its subsectors. Sex-disaggregated data are needed to fill critical gaps in knowledge and improve policy decision-making. FAO and partners could support the MALR in establishing a system for collecting sex-disaggregated and gender-relevant data and a monitoring and information system that can capture disaggregated data for key sectors. According to several stakeholders interviewed, the scarcity and poor quality of existing data on women's involvement in agriculture and its subsectors is a real constraint. Most organizations report that they collect their own data, on an ad-hoc basis, when planning and designing interventions, given the absence of a centralized database. During consultations with UN Women, this topic was mentioned as a potential area of collaboration with the MALR and FAO. This would include reviewing the tools for the census of agriculture and providing training to improve the skills of MALR statisticians and researchers in collecting, tabulating, analysing and using sex-disaggregated agricultural data (UN Women,

personal communication, 2021). Similarly, as the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) collects and updates nationally representative data, the Government might coordinate with the CAPMAS Gender Statistics Unit to see where revisions can be made to existing instruments to yield important data regarding the condition of rural women and women in agriculture. In this context, it is important to mention that a national review of gender statistics was undertaken with the support of UN Women and the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS 21) as part of Egypt's plan to develop a national strategy for the development of statistics. The report, which is yet to be published, seeks to identify gender data gaps for monitoring the gender-specific indicators of the SDGs and the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women (Egyptian Centre for Public Opinion Research, personal communication, 2021).

- » Implement awareness-raising campaigns to give visibility to rural women's roles in agriculture and to expose the discriminatory social norms that limit their potential.

Capacity development

- » In order to strengthen extension services, which lack sufficient qualified staff, train young female and male university graduates performing their community service as extension workers to work alongside CAAES staff.

Partnerships

- » Discuss with UN organizations and donors, such as UNIDO, UN Women, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and USAID, their willingness to support programmes that focus on the introduction and dissemination of agricultural technologies that are labour- and time-saving and can, thus, ease women's workloads while enhancing agricultural efficiency and productivity.

Programme/project development and implementation

- » Support the establishment of women's cooperatives and farmer associations. Evidence from studies reviewed for this CGA and consultations with stakeholders indicate that such entities have been beneficial to women, contributing to their empowerment and self-confidence.

- » Replicate the approach of the FAO project, Improving Household Food and Nutrition Security in Egypt by Targeting Women and Youth, extending it to other geographical areas, and link to it a school meals programme. In this context, the previously mentioned study on social protection in rural Egypt, conducted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2020, also recommended extending the school meals programme to include secondary school students. According to the study, the programme only covers 30 percent of pupils in public schools and, at the secondary level, only those students who are considered high achievers.
- » Consider reinstating an agriculture extension programme for television or through digital solutions so as to provide information in a manner that is highly accessible to small-scale farmers, especially women who may have a lower level of literacy in addition to time and mobility constraints. Gender-sensitive capsule programmes can be developed with the support of partners. This would also respond to the recommendation of the GSMA in the Digital Agriculture Maps report regarding the need to break down the barriers that prevent small-scale farmers from accessing and using information in rural areas.

Policy advocacy

- » Review the requirements for membership in cooperatives, producer associations and water user associations to enhance women's voice and participation. Women who are farming land that is in the name of their husbands or other male relatives should be included in these organizations and their concerns and interests should be represented and addressed in the programmes and services provided by the organizations. This was also a recommendation of the FAO study, Review of the Agrifood Cooperative Sector (Ghonem, 2019).
- » Increase the financial and technical resources allocated by the public sector to supporting women in agriculture. These resources should be employed in extension services, microfinance schemes and marketing opportunities for women as women have very limited access to these key agricultural services.
- » Include female agricultural workers engaged in occasional, temporary or seasonal work in the reformed social protection scheme or develop a social protection programme for this particular group of women.

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مثال
لرف بالراس
المروقب
اسرال
سلاله البوط
التربيه
نوع العال
النظاف
تكيل الوتر
التحصيه

A facilitator leading a Farm Field School session for women.

Annex 1.

Interview guide



COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE RURAL SECTOR IN EGYPT

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is the mission and mandate of your organization?
2. Can you please give me a brief background on your organization?
3. In what way does the... funding and/or TA support women in agriculture and farming?
4. How do your actual programmes address issues pertaining to access and control over agricultural assets and resources (land, water, technologies), information and knowledge, services (financial and non-financial), decent employment opportunities and markets?
5. What are the policy changes needed to strengthen women's role in high-value agriculture and agribusinesses? And how do you advocate for these policies?
6. How do you convey your gender/women empowerment message to communities and local partners?
7. What are the data and information gaps related to women in agriculture and farming? And how do your programmes address these?
8. How does your partnership strategy ensure that you reach out to the target populations of women engaged in the sector? Who are your partners at the national, governorate and village levels?
9. In what way would a potential collaboration with FAO add value to your efforts in support of women farmers and the role of rural women in sustaining livelihoods?

Annex 2.

List of stakeholders, organizations and people involved in the interviews

FAO

Gender Team

Valentina Franchi
Omnia Rizk
Maggie Refaat

Projects

Laura De Matteis
Ahmed Shoeb
Waleed Abou El Hassan
Omneya Al Desoki
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Management

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UN Organizations

UN Women

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UNIDO

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GAC

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European Union

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Laura Thabet

LIFE VISION

Mona Wissa
Maged Ramzy

CARE EGYPT

Viviane Thabet
Marwa Hussein

AgriLady

Hilary Barry

Government

NCW

Naglaa El Adly
Sherweet Attia

MOSS

Amina Tarraf
Atef Shabrawy

MALR (ARC)

Mervat Sedky

MWRI

Rabab Gaber Hassan
Mahmoud Mostafa Mahmoud El Sayly

Business Associations

Am Cham

Sylvia Menassa

Annex 3.

Indicators of the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030

Pillar 1. Political Empowerment and Leadership Promotion

Impact Indicators	Year	Current value (%)	Target value by 2030 (%)
Percentage of female voters	2014	44.0	50.0
Percentage of women parliamentarians	2016	15.0	35.0
Percentage of women on local councils	2014	25.0	35.0
Percentage of women in judicial bodies	2015	0.5	25.0
Percentage of women in public posts	2016	5.0	17.0
Percentage of women in senior management posts	2016	19.0	27.0

Pillar 2. Economic Empowerment

Impact Indicators	Year	Current value (%)	Target value by 2030 (%)
Percentage of breadwinning women below poverty line	2015	26.3	9.0
Percentage of female participation in the workforce	2016	24.2	35.0
Unemployment rate among women	2015	24.0	16.0
Percentage of women in administrative jobs	2016	6.0	12.0
Percentage of women in professional jobs	2016	38.0	48.0
Ratio of female estimated earned income to male estimated earned income	2016	29.0	58.0
Percentage of small enterprises managed/owned by women	2015	22.5	50.0
Percentage of microfinance targeting women	2015	45.0	53.0
Percentage of women with bank accounts	2015	9.0	18.0
Percentage of breadwinning women below poverty line	2015	26.3	9.0

Pillar 3. Social Empowerment

Impact Indicators	Year	Current value	Target value by 2030
Female illiteracy rate (above 10 years old)	2014	27.0%	12.0%
Female illiteracy rate (20–29 years old)	2014	12.0%	0.0%
Percentage of married women who use contraceptive methods	2014	59.0%	72.0%
Total fertility rate (child/woman)	2014	3.5	2.4
Percentage of pregnant women who received prenatal care	2014	83.0%	92.0%
Percentage of pregnant women who delivered via caesarean section	2014	52.0%	34.0%
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100 000 living babies)	2014	52.0	26.0
Life expectancy at birth	2013	71.3	76.0
Average number of years women live in good health	2016	63	71.4 (94%)
Percentage of disabled women employed in the government sector	2015	<1%	3%
Number of retirement homes	2014	171	1 400

Pillar 4. Protection

Impact Indicators	Year	Current value (%)	Target value by 2030 (%)
Percentage of women aged 20–29 who married before the age of 18	2014	18.0	1.0
Percentage of married women/women who have been married before, aged 20–29, who had children before the age of 20	2014	24.0	0.0
Percentage of women who were subjected to harassment during the previous year	2015	13.0	0.0
Percentage of ever married women aged 15–49 who have undergone circumcision	2014	92.0	55.0
Percentage of girls under 19 years old who are expected to undergo circumcision	2014	56.0	10.0
Percentage of women who have been subject to physical violence from their husbands	2014	25.2	0.0
Percentage of women who have been subject to psychological violence from their husbands	2014	18.8	0.0
Percentage of women who have been subject to sexual violence from their husbands	2014	4.1	0.0

COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT SERIES

NEAR EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

The FAO Country Gender Assessment series provides updated insights, based on available sex-disaggregated data, on the main gender dimensions of the agriculture and rural sector by country. In alignment with the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030, the Assessment describes women’s and men’s specific roles and opportunities in agriculture, and explores the impact of existing gender inequalities on both women’s empowerment and rural development. Through a detailed analysis of the various sub-sectors, the policy framework and the main national stakeholders, it offers concrete recommendations to the government, FAO and other relevant partners for strengthening the integration of gender equality dimensions in agricultural and rural development policies and programmes.

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