

Promoting Women Economic Integration



Context

To create jobs for men and women in the Southern Mediterranean (MED) economies, promoting entrepreneurship and SME growth is essential. The region's low level of female participation in economic activity (both in the absolute and relatively to other developing economies) has negative macro-economic and social impact.

EBESM approach

Studies show a strong correlation between women's economic participation and a country's economic growth and well-being, so supporting women's economic participation brings disproportional micro, meso and macroeconomic dividends.

The MED Region, through enhanced policy framework and legal and regulatory improvements, can generate a stronger role for women in economic and social development.

Such a strategy is also instrumental in reaching Sustainable Development Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".

Target groups

EBESM's strategic approach has focused on a well-defined sub-group: women entrepreneurs with no university education, coming from a low to low-middle income category, mostly driven by economic necessity to become entrepreneurs.

Based on studies, notably from the OECD, UNIDO and the ILO, they are the clear majority, representing around 3/4 of all women entrepreneurs in the MED region. This target therefore represents a meaningful "proxy" group for analysis of economic and social development and for poverty reduction.

By targeting this category of women, EBESM is building on, and complementing, the work carried out by other international organisations such as the UfM/UNIDO, OECD, UN Women, the Arab League, etc. on women's economic integration. This group has not been, to date, the focus of empirical investigation, and EBESM is the first to produce a regional study (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia) targeting this group on a person-to-person interview basis.

Based on a majority of responses, the survey provides numerous important results. The most remarkable finding is that close to 90% of all interviewed women entrepreneurs have expressed a strong determination to persevere in their businesses, whereas only about a third indicate profitability.

Clearly, assisting in providing a more enabling environment, or at least a level playing field for women in their country, would do much to keep them economically active.

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How did EBESM work?

Specialised National Working Groups for women's economic integration

The first step was the creation of working groups, closely coordinating with SBA coordinators and under their supervision. Members, from Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and public institutions, include political leaders and influential members of women entrepreneurs or employers' associations.

Field Surveys

To examine policy impact, empirical evidence was necessary. From November 2016 to January 2017, EBESM carried out a field-survey on a one-to-one interview basis in seven MED countries, namely Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. The surveys presented quantitative and qualitative evidence of obstacles and challenges faced by women to develop their businesses, and proposed ways to improve gender-based policies' effectiveness.

Country Reports

These reports describe the ecosystem and policy framework that support women entrepreneurs and identify good practices that could be shared with neighbouring countries. Both the surveys and the reports offer recommendations to policy makers, including specific targeting of women entrepreneurs.

Regional Report

The regional "Arab Women Entrepreneurship" Report¹ provides comparison across the region, identifying successes and hindering factors. The two most important areas of recommendations concern the provision of i) business management training and ii) access to capital. Their implementation will strongly support capacity of women to persevere and to play a greater economic and social role. This report will also serve CSOs as a tool in their policy advocacy role.

Regional Focus Groups

In March 2017, EBESM held two large focus group meetings: one for the Mashrek (Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon), and one for the Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco), gathering six representatives from each country. Through South-South debate, they examined findings and discussed recommendations to help improve country policies.

Seminars at sub-regional level

Three workshops were organised at a sub-regional level: (a) Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco; (b) Egypt, Lebanon; (c) Jordan, Palestine. They focused on instruments to improve policies and led to country-specific actionable recommendations and action plans. The objectives of these workshops were to:

- Present and discuss findings, practices and policies included in the regional report
- Set up a public-private dialogue platform as well as identify actions to support women entrepreneurship



Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) platform and Action Plans

To ensure sustainability, a Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) platform was established for each country, to enhance policies favourable to women entrepreneurs. These national PPD platforms should be integrated with other existing platforms and mechanisms such as the UfM/UNIDO, OECD, UN Women, the Arab League, etc.

As well, small scale actions plans were developed for a participatory approach to promote woman economic integration.

In summary:

- Women entrepreneurship activity has proven to be a critical cross-thematic issue, allowing strong interaction with EBESM A2F and SBA components. It has facilitated faster and broader adoption of policies designed and supported by EBESM in partner countries.
- Analyses show that targeting "non-university educated women entrepreneurs" is a high-yield approach in terms of impact, and a lever to achieve applicable policy improvements.
- The situation of rural women requires a context-specific approach, and should not underestimate the difficulty of serving their needs in a cost-effective manner.

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