

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP: RURAL WOMEN IN TUNISIA

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Abstract

This paper addresses an important literature gap concerning female entrepreneurship within rural communities in North Africa, particularly in Tunisia. This article is an overview of previous findings on the topic and specifically on the matter of environmental settings' impacts on women's efforts in rural entrepreneurship. The purpose of this overview is to provide a clearer picture on the situation of female entrepreneurship in rural areas, and the various obstacles that help explain both the work patterns and the home conditioning model. These obstacles include personal aspects as well as economic and demographic elements which may help in the development of assessment tools that aims to provide a more detailed approach to this subject. The exploration of these elements helps with the investigation of the impact of government support policies as well as the social and cultural effects on female entrepreneurship in the Tunisian countryside.

Keywords: *Female entrepreneurship, rural areas, Social and cultural effects, North Africa Tunisia*

JEL classification: *O1, R0, GE11*

LCC: *S560*

Introduction

Tunisia is part of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. It has a population of about 12 million and is considered to be the only democracy in the Arab world (the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2017 ranked Tunisia at 69 out of 167 countries just below Indonesia and above Singapore (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018). In recent decades, Tunisia has been viewed as a model in terms of women's rights. The country has made major changes to the constitutional, legislative and political framework that promotes gender equality and eliminates gender discrimination (Chambers & Cummings, 2014). Many see the new constitution promulgated in January 2014 as an indication that Tunisia has renewed its constitutional commitment not only to maintain its gains in matters of gender equality but also to promote it, by guaranteeing Tunisian women a full and equal position in the society. In addition, in 2016, Tunisia officially adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among which the goal five which promotes to- achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls - is widely seen as a cornerstone of the SDGs. However, despite this progress, Tunisia still faces significant challenges in terms of gender equality as it remains a patriarchal society and the gender-based discrimination continues to be present in the public as well as the private sectors. Although women benefit from a level of education similar to that of men, this is not reflected in the labor market: women represent only a quarter of the active population and face an unemployment rate of two. times that of men. The current government has been in place recently, although the cabinet of ministers has changed several times since then. While agriculture has played an important role in Tunisia's development since its independence, the country has experienced substantial structural change over the past two decades. Services and

industry make by far the largest contributions to GDP (AfDB, 2017). However, the agricultural sector is still considered an important source of income in rural areas: it contributes 11 percent of GDP (AfDB, 2017) and agricultural products represent about 6 percent of the country's export earnings. The most important agricultural export commodities are olive oil, dates, and macaroni (FAO, 2017). The industry contributes about 36 percent of GDP and services the remaining 53 percent (AfDB, 2017).

Female entrepreneurship meets the requirements of justice and equity by allowing women to benefit from the same opportunities as men, to create and develop their business. Investing in women is one of the most effective ways to increase equality and promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Although Tunisia has always been considered one of the most advanced Arab countries in terms of women's rights thanks to the family law of 1956, followed by the modification of labor laws, the penal code, nationality, etc. who promoted women's rights in Tunisia; and despite the legislative reforms that have brought equality between women and men from a family, economic and political point of view, it is still the lack of support, the sexual prejudices, the range of skills to be mastered, the family restrictions and the lack of legitimacy that dominate the female entrepreneurial world in Tunisia. There is also no systematic approach to integrating value chains, despite the fact that feminization brings distinctive skills to the board of directors and contributes positively to good governance, providing competitive advantages. The entrepreneurial culture is not well established in Tunisian families, especially with regard to women (Haddada, 2016).

The entry of women into the labor market has been favored by several factors that can be noted, specifically, the political will of Tunisia. Tunisia is a country in northern Africa, bordered to the north and east by the Mediterranean Sea, and bordering Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. More than 30% of the area of the territory is occupied by the Sahara Desert, the rest being made up of mountainous regions and fertile plains.

Tunisia gained independence in 1956 after French colonization. It has a diverse economy, which includes agriculture, mining, tourism and industry. Almost all (10,780,000 in 2012) of Tunisians are of Muslim faith (98%). The average annual population growth rate is around 1%, the Synthetic Fertility Index went from 7.15 in 1966 to 2.2 in 2012 (World Bank, 2012).

According to previous findings on the subject, we note that the economic empowerment of women has a strong impact reflected on several levels, the most important are social and rural development, women's rights and empowerment, and Economic growth. As it is illustrated in the created model in Figure 1.

Despite the fact that Tunisian women play an active role in the economic development of the country and it being a role model compared to the MENA region, plus the promising achievements of Tunisian women in the developed economies, relatively little research has been conducted on this model and on the factors facilitating this success in the region.

How can we best study the interplay between theoretical socio-economic notions and the reality lived by women entrepreneurship? What kind of methodologies can provide the means for policymakers, scientists to address questions concerning the future of female entrepreneurship in developing economies?

In this paper, we turn our attention to these challenges in recognition of how fundamentally important these questions are and to gather all possible recommendations which represent a reflection for reality lived by female entrepreneurship in developing countries.

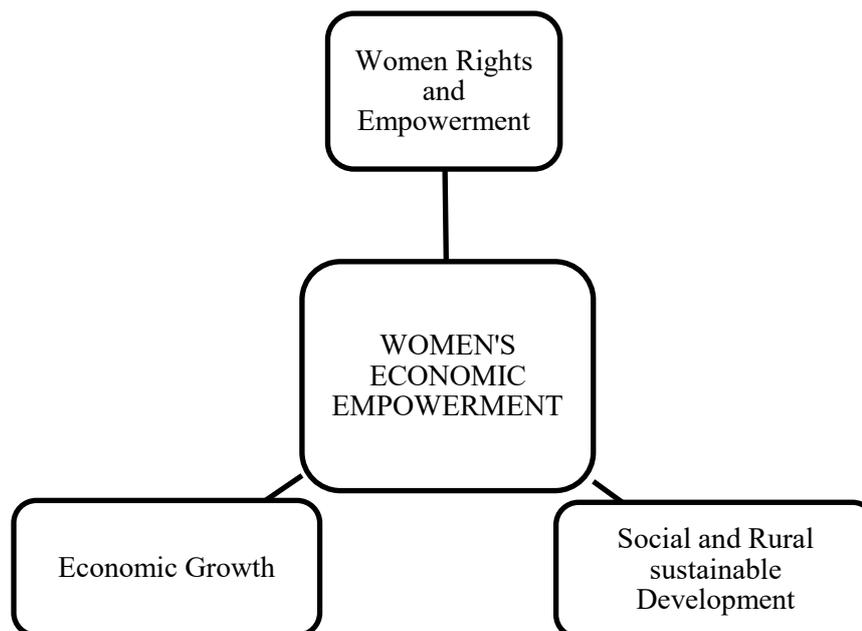


Figure1: The impact of women's economic empowerment

Source: (own creation),2020

In hope, this work brings emphasis on what should developing countries focus on and start with in order to ameliorate the integration of female entrepreneurship in the adopted economic system.

Review of literature women's labor force participation in Tunisia

Since January 14, 2011, Tunisia's economic transition has been characterized by uncertainty and the risks engendered by the domestic environment and the international context. On the macroeconomic level, these constraints have resulted in weak growth and a deterioration in the budgetary and external account balances. In 2013, the economic growth rate reached 2.6%, compared to 3.5% for 2012. Public finances recorded an increase in the budget deficit which reached 6.3% of GDP following lower revenues than expected and a rapid increase in compensation expenses. In Tunisia, several studies have shown that a set of dysfunctions affects the place and role of women as an economically active actor. The difficulties linked to its economic development are certainly not recent, but they are gaining considerable importance, in particular following the change which affected the political and socio-economic contexts after the popular revolution of January 2011 (Sarfaraz, Faghieh, & Majd, 2014). Tunisia is currently faced with the problem of nearly 200,000 unemployed graduates, a continuous supply of 80,000 new graduates each year and a business sector largely made up of small traditional businesses. Entrepreneurship both in terms of creating new projects and modernizing existing businesses through innovation is essential to meet these challenges. Recently Tunisia admits many programs for the Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development. The aim of these projects is to provide updated information and services for entrepreneurs in the agricultural and agri-food sector (agripreneurs) in Tunisia. and support the development of agricultural entrepreneurship capacities, start-ups and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) in the agriculture and agri-food sector, also integrating information and communication technologies (ICT) to identify the main strategic recommendations for developing female entrepreneurship and encouraging businesses to offer decent jobs to women.

The general socio-economic context is exposed, with the main structural failures of the Tunisian economy. Next, Tunisia has a natural population growth rate of 1 percent, less than the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) average (1.8 percent) and a literacy rate of 80 percent. However, Tunisia is experiencing structural failures which have worsened over the years and which affect whole sections of Tunisian society, in particular the following:

1. a poverty rate of 15 percent which has not been resolved quickly enough despite years of economic growth exceeding 5 percent;
2. an unemployment rate of 15.5 per cent, which affects mainly young people (35 per cent), graduates of higher education (26 per cent) and women (22 per cent), with regional disparity high (over 40 percent unemployment among young people in the Center-West and the South);
3. significant regional disparities in terms of public and private investment, infrastructure and human capital. These disparities affect the geographic concentration of companies: 74 percent of SMEs are located in the Northeast and the Center-East. In addition, the current economic situation is difficult. Since 2009, the Tunisian economy has experienced weak growth due to the consequences of the global crises, the revolution, but above all to the breathlessness of the development model which has not undergone fundamental changes since the 1970s.

In 2013, the share of the agricultural sector in the country's total production was 10.9 percent, that of the industrial sector was 32.9 percent and that of the services sector was 56.2 percent, including services. merchant (wholesale and retail) and non-merchant (INS, 2014). This speaks to the major role of the industrial and service sectors in generating wealth for the country. The majority of jobs are concentrated in these two sectors. In 2013, 51.2 percent of the employed labor force worked in the service sector, and 33.4 percent in the industry sector (INS, 2014).

The current state of the economy is characterized by an increasing contribution from the informal economy, estimated at 30 percent in 2008 (OECD, 2012) and 53 percent in 2018 (World Bank, 2018). Almost one million people worked outside the formal economy in 2013 (37.3 percent of jobs in the private sector) (Cheikh, 2013). The sectors most affected are construction, agriculture, trade, services and industry.

Female entrepreneurship in Tunisia is an opportunity for women. Indeed, only 13 percent of employed women are self-employed or own their own business, whereas this rate is multiplied by 2 for men. In addition to this situation:

- first, a low participation rate of only 26 percent for women, compared to 70 percent for men;
- second, an unemployment rate 1.7 times higher compared to men: 2.6 percent for women, against 12.5 percent for men (OECD, 2018).

This problem of economic integration is deeper for women in the interior regions of Tunisia. In 2011, the unemployment rate for women in the North-West was 27.2 percent, in the Center-West 45.9 percent, in the South-east 48.3 percent and in the South-west 54.5 percent. hundred (ONEQ, 2013). According to the 2012 national report of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 9 percent of the population aged 18 to 64 in Tunisia is involved in entrepreneurial activity (Khefacha, Belkacem, & Mansouri, 2012). However, men are three times more involved in the entrepreneurial experience than women. This gap widens even more among established entrepreneurs (the male-female ratio is 4.5) than among emerging entrepreneurs (the male-female ratio is 2.62). It is therefore essential to encourage female entrepreneurship in the creation and growth phases.

Women's participation in the informal sector

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) and as part of the national development assessment Women entrepreneurship in Tunisia, women are less present in small businesses in the informal sector, which represent 22% of workers (INS, 2014). In addition, the proportion of self-employed women (self-employed, employers or partners) in small businesses in the informal sector is lower than that of men: 50.3% women against 69.3% men. Workers (INS, 2014). The proportion of women among the self-employed in the informal small business sector is 16.7%, compared to 22% of all workers.

Rural women devote 77.6% of the time per day to unpaid housework (child and elderly care, home care, cooking, shopping, fetching water, farm work ...), on the other hand, housework occupies only 9.4% of men's time (Unesco, 2015). This unpaid domestic work contributes to the product gross interior of 64 percent. The lack of codification of the products and services that rural women provide without remuneration in the official statistics is a kind of statistical exclusion. This exclusion contributes to confining rural women to housework and informal enterprises, which increases the dispersion of their abilities and capacities and reduces the organizational possibilities in economic structures (Mubarak, 2019). In fact, The Tunisian rural scene, especially when the issue of rural women is presented, is characterized by the congruence between structuralism, marginalization, poverty in the situation and the feminization dilemma in terms of the importance of rural women working in the agricultural sector, which is considered one of the pillars of the Tunisian economy. Mainly as unpaid aids in family farming, or as seasonal workers with low wages and in an informal setting, without social security coverage.

There are some initiatives to integrate women-owned businesses into value chains, but women are generally not informed and are not targeted for capacity building. "There is no organized approach to integrating value chains, despite some national, but also international initiatives organizations (such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union, the International Labor Organization, etc.); However, these initiatives remain isolated and not regular. These women express the need for more support in certain areas. Due to the social and economic situation in Tunisia, rural women in Tunisia are considered to be one of the vulnerable groups in Tunisian society as they are still taken hostage by a male culture nourished by traditional educational strategies which confine women to the reproductive role and family affairs, without recognizing them as the main breadwinner within the family and an important participant in the gross domestic product. In fact, 85% of rural property contracts belong to men. Despite the work of women in family property, the practice of agricultural activity as wages or aids and their fundamental contribution to food security and the provision of food at the family and national levels, about 60% of rural women suffer from hunger and malnutrition season (Ministry of Women's Affairs, Family and Children, 2016).

Horizon recommendations

An interview was carried out with the head of women entrepreneurs at the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family and Children (MFFE) on the situation of female entrepreneurship and in particular of rural women and what are the initiatives of governments and authorities national and international to find a solution to the problems that hinder female entrepreneurship. Among the recommendations proposed are the removal of barriers such as time constraints due to family responsibilities, discriminatory inheritance laws that result in lack of access to financial institutions and greater opportunities for women to undertake strengthening institutional

capacities to better understand the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. and improve the provision of support.

The following table demonstrate the fundamental actions and must present independent variable to the process of establishment of an entrepreneurial project and for the personality of an entrepreneur. thereby, the strategic improvement to the provision support of female entrepreneurship development.

Table1: strategic and legal conditions for female entrepreneurship development (FED)

	variable	Conditions for female entrepreneurship development
1	Customer Relation	Legal and regulatory systems sensitive to gender.
2	Achievement Motivation	Access to gender-sensitive business development support services.
3	Entrepreneurial Commitment	Market access and technology.
4	Grab Opportunities	Representation and participation of women entrepreneur in political dialogue.
5	Achievement Motivation	Political leadership and coordination to strengthen federalism.
6	Entrepreneurial Commitment	Access to gender-sensitive financial services.

Source: Results of the National evaluation of women's entrepreneurship development (2012-2016) ILO and National Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs (CNFCE); own creation

As part of the activities of the National Plan for Female Entrepreneurship conducted by the Ministry of Women, Family, and Children (MFFE), as well as for capacity building at the regional level, training on women's entrepreneurship was organized with the United Nation women support for executives and project managers is to strengthen the knowledge of the process of women's entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment; the knowledge of support structures, support corporate finance procedures and useful information on entrepreneurship; and to make a clear set of determinate definition of missions, skills requirements and constraints related to positions held by women in relation to female entrepreneurship; and offers an updated presentation of recommendations and proposals for the design of a Regional Skills Management Model for Women's Entrepreneurship such as:

- Provide for simplified and standard procedures (registration, taxation, CNSS ...) allowing women in the informal economy to move more easily into the formal economy, with a minimum of costs and deadlines, and a tax scale.
- Make women in the informal economy aware of the benefits of moving to the formal economy Medium-term.
- Make women aware of their economic rights and the remedies available to them.
- Awareness of equality issues in inheritance.
- Ensure the proper enforcement of property rights for women (including by encouraging registration on behalf of both spouses of property owned jointly by the couple)
- Organize regional forums for female entrepreneurship: Focus the event on meetings between local and regional structures;
- Facilitate access to information in these forums and facilitate contacts with all organizations.

- Promote the entrepreneurial successes of rural women:
 - Share success stories via media, social media and counseling programs to allow women to get referrals
 - Create a TV show, radio show, website and use social media to improve female entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Additional efforts are needed to encourage Tunisian women on entrepreneurship such as:

- Entrepreneurship and financial inclusion;
- Decision-making;
- Women's leadership and participation in public life;
- Social norms and the legal framework.

These action efforts will reduce the unemployment rate for women Graduates of higher education through self-employment; Create jobs in women-owned businesses; Help reduce regional disparities by developing projects that implement them. Women in the regions; Helps reduce poverty and exclusion through Promote income-generating activities and include women from poor communities in the economy; Reduce the burden of the informal economy by training and educating new women entrepreneurship.

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