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Do formal and informal institutions help promote gender equality in Egypt

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**Do formal and informal institutions help promote gender
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Introduction (I)

Gender equality and women empowerment are key factor to achieve economic development and inclusive economic growth.

- In the late 20th century, economic literature began addressing gender dimension.
- The early work of Gary Becker explored family dynamics, labor markets and social norms and their impacts on women's role in the society, socially and economically (Becker, 1985; Kabeer, 1999; Kabeer 2012).

Introduction (II)

- Understanding key drivers of gender equality and women empowerment is required for policy- making, to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Institutions – formal and informal - can be regarded as key drivers of gender equality and economic growth.
- key element in assessing gender equality is to look for the underlying institutional factors.

Objectives

In the light of the institutional factors, the objectives of the chapter is to:

1. Overview women's economic, political, and social roles.
2. Present how formal and informal institutions influence women's roles.
3. Identify the potential policies to promote gender equality in Egypt.

Gender Equality in Egypt (I)

- Egypt was able to enhance women's access to education and health services and to nearly close the gender gap in these dimensions. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2023); Egypt's score for educational attainment is 0.94.
- Yet, Egypt is ranked 134 among 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index of 2023.
- Educational Paradox!

Gender Equality in Egypt (II)

- In addition to the limited access to economic opportunities, women in Egypt have low participation in political life, with a political empowerment score of 0.175 (Global Gender Gap report, 2023).
- Out of the total number of parliament members, the share of females increased from 9% in 1979 to only 15% in 2015 (Egyptian National Observatory of Women, 2023).
- Besides, women face as well other challenges as vulnerability to violence, poverty and limited access to internet

Formal institutions and gender roles: do laws and regulations help promote gender equality in Egypt? (I)

- Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, women struggled to find a way to convey their political and economic perspectives.
- Since Egypt became a republic in 1952, women started to gain better access to social and economic opportunities.
- Women gained the right to:
 - Vote in 1956.
 - Equal education access.
 - Employment in the public sector

Formal institutions and gender roles: do laws and regulations help promote gender equality in Egypt? (II)

- During the 60's and the 70's, the war and the huge waves of capitalism and modernization had heavy tolls on women's conditions.
 - Only women with high levels of education were able to find jobs in the private sector.
 - Women who succeeded to have jobs in the private sector had to face longer working hours.
 - This era witnessed many men migrating as well to Gulf countries to seek better income obliging women to become responsible for their roles and their husbands'

Formal institutions and gender roles: do laws and regulations help promote gender equality in Egypt? (III)

- Based on the political and economic contexts, the proximity of legislations to gender equality is affected.
- To assess how these legislations have an impact on women, Christopherson et al. (2022) propose investigating four main groups of laws:
 - Constitutional law and civil rights
 - Family laws
 - Criminal code
 - Property and labor laws.

1. Constitutional law and civil rights:

- Returning to the Egyptian constitutions across the past century, the 1956 constitution highlighted the non-discrimination among the Egyptian citizens based on their sex compared to constitution of 1923.
- With no advancement on women's status in the constitutions of 1971 and 2012, the constitution of 2014 includes some articles enhancing women's status in Egypt:
 - Article 6: Egyptian citizenship
 - Article 11: gender-based violence
 - Article 19: extension of compulsory education

2. Family laws:

- In Egypt, it's governed by Islamic Sharia'. Therefore, it does not really fall in the scope of our discussion on the formal institutions.
- Yet, it's important to highlight that Egypt legislation has been attempting as well to accord women more equal rights:
 - Raising marriage age to 18 years old to fight child marriages.
 - Giving alternatives to obtain divorce such as filing a divorce demand at family courts or a Khul' demand.

3. Criminal code laws:

- In February 2022, an amendment was proposed to Article 242 of Penal Code No. 58 of 1937 to criminalize DV with no evidence of being enacted.

4. Labor and property laws:

- The key guideline for working women is to be able to achieve balance between their professional and family lives. As a result, women are discouraged from working night hours or in risky professions such as mining.
- Fortifying the model of women caregivers, the Egyptian labor law does not allow a paternity leave.
- While for the property laws, women are free to own and manage assets.

Informal institutions and gender roles: how do perceptions about women's value affect their role in Egypt? (I)

- Literature on gender questions in Egypt has revealed that laws and regulations are not the main deterrent for women's active participation in the society.
- Informal institutions play a more pivotal role (Nazier and Ramadan, 2018).
- Informal institutions - reflected in norms and traditions - are formed by several factors including education, media, religious discourse, and values imported from other cultures (Christopherson et al., 2022).

1. Education

- More educated girls are more likely not to fall into poverty, not to get married early, and have better health outcomes.
- Yet, the existing educational processes have spread stereotypes that boys need to be educated more than girls.
- The World Value Survey (WVS) shows that around 31% (strongly) agree that university is more important to boys than girls in 2022.
- Unsurprisingly, El-Halawany (2009) has revealed that higher levels of education do not exactly contribute to empowering women.

2. Media

- As the media repeats specific messages over and over through drama, movies..etc, norms and traditions become more rooted in Egyptian culture.
- Focusing on negative images of women develops more traditional and discriminatory behaviors against them.

3. Religious discourse

- Many norms were falsely attributed to religion in Egypt (Abbott and Teti, 2016).
- Diwan (2013) has discussed that religiosity was often mis-interpreted in Egypt.
- Mostafa (2003) has found that there is no significant difference in the women's behavior regarding labor force participation between Muslims and Christians.
- These beliefs are formed directly by the traditions and norms of the society regardless of the religion.

4. *Colonization heritage*

- Countries that have been colonized for a length of time frequently acquire a set of laws and conventions from their colonizer.
- Under the English colonization for 70 years, women's role was very limited. Consequently, this mindset was mirrored in the policies undertaken in Egypt under their rule.
- As an example, we can mention that Cromer banned the girls from being enrolled in public schools and he has made many statements about the general ignorance of women (Baring, 2010; Esmeir, 2011).

Policies and Strategies to promote gender equality (I)

- The government has deployed several policies to promote gender equality:
 1. Egypt has applied gender mainstreaming in the Government Plan since 2002.
 2. According to the National Council of Women (2020), during the period 2015/2016-2019-2020; 14% of the National budget is directly allocated to gender equality problems.
 3. A major milestone is the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women, which was released in 2017, recognized as Women's Year.
 4. the government has also launched a gender mainstreaming model called the Closing Gender Gap Accelerator in cooperation with the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Have these efforts effectively improved the status of women in Egypt?

- The indicator of Business, and the Law (WBL) developed by the World Bank evaluates the legal framework to determine whether it enables or restricts women's participation.
- Egypt had a relatively low total score of 29.4 in 1971. In line with the literature, the score declined further, reaching a low of 26.9 in 1996, reflecting the deterioration of women's status during that period.
- However, since 1997, Egypt's score has steadily improved, reaching 50.6 in 2024.

- Focusing on Cairo, the main business hub of Egypt, Egypt's overall score drops to 37.5, which is below both the global average of 64.2 and the MENA regional average of 38.6.
- Furthermore, in the supportive frameworks (de facto) score, Egypt records a lower score of 26.7, compared to the global average of 39.5, but slightly above the MENA average of 24.9.
- In conclusion, it is essential for the government to work toward better alignment between legal frameworks and their enforcement to bridge the gap between de jure rights and de facto realities for women in Egypt.

Concluding remarks

- Formal institutions, represented by laws and regulations, show a relative inclination towards gender equality with the existence of some defects that still need to be defeated.
- The main issue appears to be the dominant norms and traditions conveying incorrect messages about women's roles in the Egyptian society.

Policy Recommendations

1. Educational reforms

- **Incorporate Female Role Models:** Integrate examples of powerful Egyptian women into the curriculum to challenge stereotypes and highlight women's societal contributions.
- **Balanced Teaching Staff:** Ensure gender balance among educators and equip them with knowledge on gender issues to convey positive messages to students.

2. Media reforms

- **Diverse Representation of Women:** Showcase women's achievements in fields like science and sports in media, talk shows, and drama to challenge gender stereotypes.
- **Regulate Advertising:** Prevent objectification of women and avoid limiting portrayals to beauty or household roles.
- **Empowerment Through Social Media:** Use social media to amplify women's voices and influence policymakers.

3. Religious discourse reforms

- **Promote Inclusive Values:** Correct misinterpretations of religious values to support gender equality in both Islam and Christianity.
- **Encourage Gender-Equal Family Norms:** Foster egalitarian views at the family level to promote gender equality in future generations.

4. Infrastructure investment

- **Improve Safety and Accessibility:** Invest in safe, accessible transportation and local facilities (e.g., schools) to support women's mobility and participation in education and work.
- **Prioritize Infrastructure for Women:** Focus on infrastructure projects that enable women to engage fully in public life and the labor market.

5. Political reforms

- **Increase Women's Representation:** Promote gender mainstreaming by including more women in leadership and decision-making roles.
- **Leverage Women's Expertise:** Incorporate insights from women specialists to ensure policies address women's specific needs and challenges.

Thank you for your attention