

Economic empowerment of Moroccan women beyond the drive for compassion

By Bouchra Rahmouni

Summary

The Covid-19 health crisis exposed the limitations of our world-society. As a matter of fact, millennium challenges are impossible to face without women, and so are the pandemic's impacts and the revolutionary upheaval it has and will continue to generate. On Women's Rights Day, one can only pause to reflect on the central role of Moroccan women in driving economic development. Many strides have been made on gender-equality in Morocco, including the 2011 Constitution, calling for parity and the fight against all forms of discrimination. The Royal Vision consistently prioritizes the interests of women, reflecting staunch commitment to women's empowerment at all levels. It is therefore essential to provide all appropriate instruments to support this ambition, notably a gender equality code for the labor market, with advanced regionalization as a main pillar of action and principal framework for women to flourish as active members of society and the economy.

« How can we hope to achieve progress and prosperity when women, making up one half of society, are denied their rights? »¹.

Leaders, decision-makers, experts, men and women, all agree on one fact: we cannot meet the challenges of the millennium without women, nor can we overcome the impact of Covid-19 and the revolutionary upheavals it has and will continue

1. Discours de Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI, le 20 août 1999, à l'occasion de la célébration du 46ème anniversaire de la Révolution du Roi et du Peuple.

to generate well into 2023. "Women make up one half of society. Alongside men, women have invariably contributed to the development of societies when transformation factors enabled them to put their potential to work"². A number of studies reveal a paradox in this respect: inclusion of Moroccan women substantially lags that of men, despite reforms, demographic trends and economic advances in the country.

2. K. El Aynaoui, A. Ibourk, T.Ghazi, "Moroccan Women's Economic Empowerment in the Time of Covid-19 and Before: Understanding for Action," Policy Center for the New South, July 16, 2020.

According to High Commission for Planning projections³, the demographic proportion of women will continue to exceed that of men: Morocco have 50.2% women and 49.8% men in 2021. Nevertheless, despite demographic trends, over half the population is vulnerable and faces considerable hardship, even though Morocco has promoted gender equality for over two decades.

I. Women's participation rate: legislation and facts.

The economic significance of gender inequality in Morocco must be highlighted. From a regional perspective, MENA countries (North Africa and the Middle East), including Morocco, have one of the lowest worldwide female labor force participation rates, ranging from 20% to 30%⁴. Women's labor force participation rate between 1999 and 2019 was extremely low (between 21% and 30%), compared to that of men, fluctuating between 71% and 79%. Place of dwelling is also a factor. In urban areas, from 1999 to 2019, female activity rates hovered around 20%, compared to 78% for males.

In rural areas, for the same period, female participation rates ranged from 30 to 40%, versus 68% for men. Furthermore, the 2019 employment rate for women stood at around 18.6%, compared to 65.5% for men.

Globally, according to the World Bank (WB) "Women, Business and the Law 2020" report⁵, Morocco scored 75.6 out of 100, above the global average of 75.2 and well ahead of the MENA region average of 49.6. The World Bank uses eight indicators to measure legal gender discrepancies across various working-life milestones, specifically: mobility, work, compensation, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and retirement. Morocco scored 100 on mobility, labor, and entrepreneurship indicators (see Figure 1). The legal framework for the empowerment of Moroccan women is strong, with laws fostering freedom of movement, labor market access and entrepreneurship. A number of institutions (HCP, WDI, DEPF (Ministry of Finance, Directorate of Financial Studies and Forecasting), CE-BSG (Center of Excellence for Gender Responsive Budgeting) and UN Women⁶) agree that equal inclusion of women in the Moroccan labor market should boost GDP figures 25% to 37%.

Figure 1 - Indicators to legally assess gender differences

	Indicators	Score
Morocco	Mobility	100
	Work	100
	Compensation	50
	Marriage	60
	Parenthood	80
	Entrepreneurship	100
	Assets	40
	Retirement	75

Source : World Bank. 2020. Women, Business and the Law 2020. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32639> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO." .

3. High Commission for Planning, Total population projections for Morocco by age and gender 2014-2050.

4. According to a study conducted by the Directorate of Financial Studies and Forecasting (DEPF), in partnership with the Center of Excellence for Gender Responsive Budgeting (CE-BSG) and UN Women on the "Economic Costs of Gender Inequality in the Moroccan Labor Market".

5. World Bank. 2020. Women, Business and the Law 2020. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32639> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

6. GDP growth could reach 24.8% to 30.2% (WDI data) and 28.7% to 37.4% (HCP employment survey data).

Gender equality in Morocco requires action on a number of fronts. Human and social development depend on the inclusion of women. Economic inclusion of women is a telling indicator, as it is a structural aspect of society. In a constructivist perspective, the issue of female social inclusion leads to the broader debate of women’s access to the same opportunities as men, particularly in education and professional training.

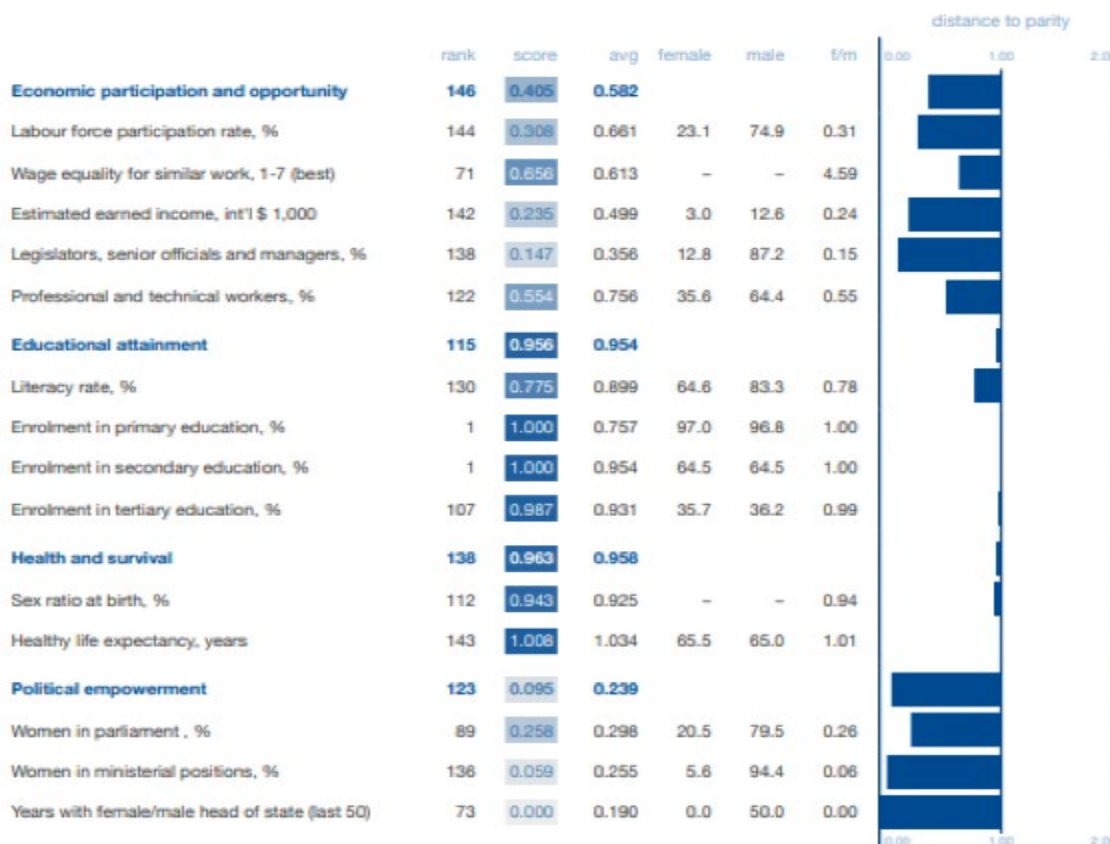
II. Education: a cornerstone of social cohesion

Beyond these variables, the path to equality and parity clearly hinges on education. Morocco ranks 143rd in the World Economic Forum 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, based on the following categories: “economic inclusion and access to opportunities”, “educational achievement”, and “health and survival”.

On educational achievement, Morocco ranks 115th. The report indicates that 64.6% of women are literate, 97% enrolled in elementary school, 64.5% had access to secondary education, and 35.7% had access to post-secondary education (See Table 1 - Morocco Country Profile).

The same report ranked Morocco 12th in the MENA region. Activity, employment and education rates are telling and point to two major ideas that potentially contribute to the inclusion of women as major actors in development. Mentalities and mores need to shift and enabling frameworks need to be established. While the 2011 Constitution promotes parity, 10 years later much remains to be done on society’s structural foundations, with education foremost among them.

Table 1 - Morocco Country Fact Sheet - Global Gender Gap Report



Source: World Economic Forum

III. The 2011 Constitution: a plea for structural change

The 2011 Constitution voices strong commitment to the empowerment of Moroccan women at all levels. The Preamble and Articles 6 and 19 uphold the principle of equality and parity. Building on the 1962, 1970, 1972, 1992 and 1996 constitutions, which stipulated that women and men have equal political rights, the 2011 constitution enshrines the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination. The Preamble thus emphasizes:

1. Equal opportunities;
2. Protection and promotion of human rights; and
3. The fight against all discrimination based on sex, color, beliefs, culture, social or regional origin, language, handicap or any other individual attribute.

Article 6 of the Constitution states that “*public authorities shall strive to establish conditions conducive to the effective exercise of the freedom and equality of citizens, as well as their participation in political, economic, cultural and social life*”. Article 19, in turn, expressly enshrines the principle of equality and parity:

*“Men and women enjoy equal civil, political, social, cultural and environmental rights and freedoms, as set out in this Title and in other provisions of the Constitution, as well as in international conventions and agreements duly ratified by Morocco, in compliance with provisions of the Constitution and the constants of the Kingdom and its laws. **The State strives to achieve gender parity. An Authority for parity and the fight against all forms of discrimination is created for this purpose**”.*

Promoting this commitment in accordance with 2011 Constitution requirements is to be achieved via programs such as the National Integrated Program for Economic Empowerment as well as citizen initiatives. In accordance with a Royal Vision strongly focused on women’s interests and empowerment, a code for gender equality in the Moroccan labor market is expected. This code will primarily emphasize female entrepreneurship and specify guidelines and undertakings defining and framing female entrepreneurship. This code aims to set out a vision for high-impact female entrepreneurship. Promoting female entrepreneurship calls for a broad and coherent ecosystem that favors seamless, high added value support.

IV. Entrepreneurship: Scope for action towards women’s inclusion

There is a multitude of tools to promote and encourage female entrepreneurship. Social networks and events that encourage women to make their voices heard are an avenue. Collaborative applications can be created to promote mutual assistance, experience sharing, and access guides for women seeking to launch an entrepreneurial venture. Other initiatives aimed at developing female entrepreneurship include:

- Creating a collective to raise funds as needed;
- Setting up incubators to support gender equality start-ups;
- Promoting mentoring, “give-back” culture, “success stories” and leveraging digital technology to take advantage of open access resources; and last
- Extending self-entrepreneur status to the informal sector.

Beyond the issue of women’s entrepreneurship, we need to think about formalizing informal jobs. The International Labor Organization (ILO)⁷, estimates current global female employment rates at around 49%. The rate for men is 75%, a 26 percentage point difference. Further, also according to the ILO, the informal economy accounted for over 60% of global working population in 2018⁸. This is compounded by global regional disparities: “Countries with larger informal economies combined with full lockdown measures suffer the most from pandemic impacts. The share of informal economy workers severely affected by lockdown ranges from 89% in Latin America and Arab countries, to 83% in Africa, 73% in Asia-Pacific and 64% in Europe and Central Asia⁹. In Morocco, the HCP national employment survey shows that the informal sector accounted for 59,2%¹⁰ of the labor market in 2015. Development of self-employed status would not only boost female economic activity but also provide a springboard for the inclusion of women. For this purpose, it is necessary to:

7. International Labour Organization, « A global gap » - Published in December 2017 · Updated in March 2018 <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women>

8. International Labour Organization, Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture, 2018. https://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_626831.pdf

9. UN Info, Covid-19 further impoverishes already vulnerable informal workers (ILO), 7 May 2020. <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/05/1068372>

10. High Commission for Planning and the World Bank, “The labor market in Morocco: challenges and opportunities,” November 2017.

- Raise awareness among female population;
- Popularize the concept of female entrepreneurs; and
- Demystify female entrepreneurship.

V. The regional dimension to promoting equality and inclusion of women

Advanced regionalization, enshrined in Article 1 of the 2011 Constitution, stating that “The Kingdom’s territorial organization is decentralized and is based on advanced regionalization”, is the key framework for women to thrive as active citizens at all levels of society. Regions, understood as territories equipped with all available digital and technology tools, are an opportunity to implement support mechanisms for the economic empowerment of women.

Challenges facing by women vary from one region to the other. Regions - as ecosystems reflecting the country - are therefore key economic and social development levers for Morocco. ‘Local’ management enables quicker and more efficient response to stakeholder needs. This is particularly relevant as rural and urban women activity rates often differ. So, to gain better practical insight into the status of women, social public policy assessment tools need be deployed at territorial level to accurately estimate female inclusiveness and social and economic impacts. It is also important to allocate decision-making roles in territorial diagnoses processes to women.

VI. Women’s leadership: changing the narrative to counter the drive for compassion

To break free from being driven by compassion for women today, we need to change the narrative on leadership from masculine to feminine along 5 key characteristics, namely:

1. Human management: Empathy and emotional intelligence;
2. Goal-orientation: Cooperation and multi-level collaboration;
3. Horizontal leadership: Participatory and equitable action;
4. Integrity in business; society; professional group;
5. Work-life balance.

Clearly, the transition from one leadership model to another can only be achieved through shock. It is essential to view the shock of parity as a shock of growth.

Conclusion and recommendations

In light of a number of variables allowing us to assess the current situation of women in Morocco, we must formulate a response to energize all institutional components of an ecosystem capable of attaining greater equality for women in society. It is crucial to act on four fundamental areas, namely:

- **Mindset:** Change mentalities and mores to better understand, adapt and practice inclusion.
- **Framework:** Can be structured around Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2030, African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, the 2011 Constitution, inclusion empowerment plan, the Center of Excellence for Gender Responsive Budgeting, advanced regionalization, and at this stage of the reflection, a potential framework to come in the code of gender equality in Moroccan labor markets.
- **Support:** through mentoring, “give-back” culture, “success stories” and the promotion digital tools to take advantage of open access resources.
- **Assessment of social public policies at territorial level** to properly measure social and economic impact and beneficiary satisfaction. Still at this level, it is advisable to allocate prominent decision-making roles to women in regional performance and feedback processes.

Men and women must therefore work with each other for better inclusion of women. One must not lose sight of the fact that Morocco fits into a global context and that according to the World Economic Forum, parity will not be achieved before the year 2277¹¹. Globally, the report¹² highlights a 2% increase in women in positions of responsibility numbers, however, female workforce participation is stagnant and financial disparities are on the rise. While widening pre-existing gaps, the Covid-19 health crisis may offer opportunities to improve female access to employment via digital and technological channels.

11. World Economic Forum, “A woman would have to be born in the year 2255 to get equal pay at work”, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/12/global-economic-gender-gap-equality-women-parity-pay/>

12. Global Gender Gap Report 2020 – Key Findings - P6. - Global Gender Gap Index : http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

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About the Policy Center for the New South

The Policy Center for the New South: A public good for strengthening public policy. The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank tasked with the mission of contributing to the improvement of international, economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and Africa as integral parts of the Global South.

The PCNS advocates the concept of an open, responsible and proactive « new South »; a South that defines its own narratives, as well as the mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, within the framework of an open relationship with the rest of the world. Through its work, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give experts from the South a voice in the geopolitical developments that concern them. This positioning, based on dialogue and partnerships, consists in cultivating African expertise and excellence, capable of contributing to the diagnosis and solutions to African challenges.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.



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