

# Women Empowerment Through Human Capital Development and Career Advancement: Insights from the Egyptian Experience

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the evolving role of women through the lens of empowerment, defined as enhancing access to critical development components (health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation). It examines the impact of changing gender roles from two interconnected perspectives and focuses on Egypt. The first perspective analyzes the bidirectional relationship between women's empowerment and human capital/economic development. Drawing on evidence, Son (2010), posits that human capital development is crucial for economic growth. Empowerment fuels this by enabling women's contributions, while financial development can reduce gender inequality exacerbated by poverty and opportunity scarcity. Conversely, persistent discrimination impedes development, highlighting empowerment as a catalyst. The second perspective explores women attaining senior leadership roles in politics, management, and professions. It interrogates the goals of women's movements regarding social, economic, and political issues, and examines the effectiveness of civil society (both women and men) in advocating for shifts in gender relations and career advancement, central to gender equality politics.

Applying these perspectives to Egypt reveals significant challenges. Despite no formal prohibition on women's employment and recognition of their economic value, complex education and employment policies hinder advancement. Key findings indicate: (1) growing recognition over recent decades of the indispensable link between gender equality, empowerment, and human capital development; and (2) a fundamental clash where women's complex, multi-dimensional careers encounter predominantly male-defined, single-dimensional organizational practices. Consequently, Egyptian women remain challenged by gender inequalities. The paper concludes that developing human resource policies fostering work-life balance and implementing unbiased recruitment systems are critically important for improving women's employment opportunities and realizing their full potential within Egypt's development trajectory.

**Keywords:** Internal Audit Function, Internal Control Quality, Cyber Risk, Banking Sector, Organizational Governance

## Introduction

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The Women in Development (WID) movement emerged in the 1970s through liberal feminists pursuing equal rights and employment opportunities in developed countries, particularly in the United States (Tinker, 1990). WID was the first contemporary movement to correlate women's issues with development, demonstrating that women's disadvantages acted as impediments to economic growth (Razavi & Miller, 1995). WID served as the fountainhead for subsequent movements: Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD).

The Women and Development (WAD) approach emerged in the second half of the 1970s following the First World Conference on Women, organized by the United Nations in Mexico City in 1975. WAD moved beyond earlier findings: first, that development was a means for advancing women, and later, that development requires women's participation, not merely their status as recipients of aid. It developed a theoretical framework linking patriarchy and capitalism, advocating women-only development projects to free women from patriarchal dominance, arguing that such dominance would persist if women were involved in development alongside men within a patriarchal culture (Barriteau et al., 2000). Practically, WAD asserts a correlation between women's nature, knowledge, goals, responsibilities, and their work or roles in enhancing and developing their communities as economic agents in both public and domestic spheres (Rathgeber, 1990).

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach focuses on the social relationships between men and women, which systematically subordinate women (Moser, 1993). Unlike WID, GAD does not focus solely on women; rather, it emphasizes how communities assign different roles, responsibilities, and expectations to men and women. GAD is based on two frameworks: "gender roles" and "social relations analysis" (Razavi & Miller, 1995). GAD fundamentally redefines traditional gender role expectations. Women were traditionally expected to perform household management tasks, often termed maternity responsibilities (Razavi & Miller, 1995), while men were expected to be in charge of market production and paid work (Reeves, 2000). GAD has been criticized for overemphasizing social differences and neglecting the potential for changing roles (Reeves, 2000). Smart economics, an approach introduced by the World Bank, argues that gender equality is fundamental to economic development and that gender gaps in human capital and economic opportunities hinder efficient development (Chant & Sweetman, 2012).

This paper discusses women and development from two perspectives. The first examines women's empowerment and its relationship with human capital and economic development. The second focuses on women's empowerment

and career advancement. The Egyptian case will be explored, highlighting women's empowerment from both perspectives. It discusses conditions, policies, and enhancement procedures recommended for educational and employment equality to enable women to contribute effectively to the economy, ensuring their significant potential capital is not wasted.

**Women empowerment and human capital development:**

The topic of women's rights in the MENA region has been given great importance by researchers as it has been proven that women's effective participation in the economy and society is crucial to the region's progress (Khoury & Moghadam, 1995). But in reality, women in the MENA region are still opposed by gender discrimination that is hindering their willingness to reach their potential nor to reach the standards set by the global women's rights agenda even though there have been massive achievements in the areas of education and health but not yet in political participation, cultural expression nor access to equitable legal rights. Gender discrimination is not limited to the MENA region, as it can be found across the world, but it is much more obvious in the MENA region because of the efforts exerted to overcome it (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005). This resistance originally stems from the way the MENA countries have formed gender discrimination, which has been built upon the region's family laws (personal status laws) based on Shari'aa as they govern marriage, divorce, maintenance, paternity, the custody of children, and inheritance.

Family laws in MENA countries are based on Shari'aa, except for Turkey and Tunisia, as their family laws are based on secular sources (An-Naim, 2002). Since the early 1980s, Middle Eastern women scholars, educators, and activists have started reforming family laws. The movement started in 1981 with women professors and other professionals who organized public protests against the Algerian government for its decision to issue a very conservative family law. Afterwards, they started communicating with Moroccan and Tunisian scholars and activists, and that resulted in forming the network of anti-fundamentalist North African women and men led by the Moroccan feminist sociologist Fatima Mernissi by the late 1980s. At the same time, a new rational strategy has been developed in Egypt and Iran, aiming at criticizing family laws and gaining women's rights. This strategy adopted an integration of international standards, norms of human rights, and a reading of Islam, which has been believed by the Islamic feminist activists it is egalitarian at heart. They articulated that the parts of Sharia forming family laws were interpretations developed by men whose beliefs originated from the patriarchal traditions of the era (Mir-Hosseini, 1996).

**Promoting women's capabilities and opportunities:**

Human capital can be defined as how the person is capable of and how efficient he/she is in transforming the available inputs into productive outputs, and there are theoretical and empirical proofs that these capabilities can be developed through education. Human capital development has a significant role and a direct effect on economic growth. From a macroeconomic point of view, human capital is considered to be a key factor of production in the economy-wide production function. From a

microeconomic point of view, human capital is perceived as the part of education that promotes the person's productivity and income while being an important part of the organization's production (Son, 2010).

For the previous six decades, governments have started to initiate development policies considering the need to identify basic human needs and to formulate participatory approaches to achieve development goals. Governments have relied more on NGOs as partners to execute the development process in both developed and developing countries. NGOs work at the grassroots level with low-income people and micro-entrepreneurs. Fostering empowerment has been an attractive subject for several NGOs working with women. Throughout the four decades 1950-1990, many gains have been earned by women, but still gender gaps exist. According to UNDP Human Development Reports (1995), noticeable progress in women's well-being has taken place, encompassing increased women's life expectancy in all regions; increased girls' enrollment in primary school in the majority of regions; decreased total fertility rates; and increased women's access to contraception. However, the number of illiterate women is still double that of men worldwide. The welfare model of development being utilized by governments, donors, and NGOs categorizes women as recipients of these benefits rather than as independent economic participants in their own right because women's roles as housewives and mothers have dominated development thinking. Empowerment as a developmental tool is needed to enable women to defy their current norms and conditions. Empowerment can be defined from different perspectives, so it has to be evaluated and measured according to the context being discussed. In the context of women and human capital development, the empowerment definition must predicate the expansion of choices for women and increase women's ability to pursue their own choices. The activities that expand women's choices, such as increasing women's employability, should support their abilities to make decisions and to choose, for example, when to get married or to have children. Strengthening women's ability to choose can widen their opportunities. For example, schooling for girls is increasing their ability to have a say in their families and at the same time widens the range of job offers available to them. However, due to social, cultural, and institutional reasons, choices that are open for women and their ability to exercise choice are always constrained. The UNDP Human Development Reports (1995) empirical data has illustrated that it has been easier to widen women's capabilities such as fostering their human capital through improving their access to primary education and better health care than to widen their opportunities especially the economic opportunities for example wages for employed women which are about two-thirds those of men globally.

### **Women empowerment, economic development, and gender inequality:**

There is a bidirectional relationship between women's empowerment and economic development. Development is entitled to narrow down the inequality gap between men and women, and on the other hand, women's empowerment accelerates development. Regarding labour force participation, women are less likely to work and earn the same as men. Women are more likely to be in poverty than men, even if they work, because they spend double their time on housework, five times as much time on

child care, and half as much time on market work than men do (Berniell et al, 2011).

As stated above, there is a bidirectional relationship between women's empowerment and economic development. On one hand, some policymakers and social scientists conclude that when poverty declines, gender equality improves. Policymakers design the conditions that help enhance economic growth and prosperity for both genders, but without identifying certain strategies aimed at alleviating women's conditions. On the other hand, the second relationship is supported by many policymakers. For example, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, in 2005 argued that achieving gender equality increases efficiency and is a prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that included eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education, and narrowing down the gender gap in education. These goals were intended to be achieved by 2015, but according to the Human Development Report (2016), it is stated that the gender inequality index for the Arab States was 53.5%, and for Egypt was 56.5%. Gender inequality is more obvious among the poor on both levels: within and across countries. For very high-development countries, the gender inequality index is 17.4%; for high-development countries, it is 29.1%; for medium human-development countries, it is 49.1%; and for low human-development countries, it is 59%. From the figures above, the relationship between economic development and women's empowerment is obvious. The more the country develops, the less the gender inequality; or we can say that women's empowerment follows naturally.

Former World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, addressing the Fourth UN Conference on Women, said that "Education for girls has a catalytic effect on every dimension of development: lower child and maternal mortality rates; increased educational attainment by daughters and sons; higher productivity; and improved environmental management. Together, these can mean faster economic growth and, equally important, wider distribution of the fruits of growth....More education for girls will also enable more and more women to attain leadership positions at all levels of society: from health clinics in the villages to parliaments in the capitals. This, in turn, will change the way societies will deal with problems and raise the quality of global decision making." (Duflo, 2012).

### **Women's empowerment and career advancement:**

Despite the preponderance of research that the most successful organizations are the ones that are enhancing and developing the skills of their female employees, the majority of the organizations are still male-dominated (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). A very consistent pattern in today's large organizations shows that as women go up the corporate ladder, they vanish. As illustrated in the following diagram, at the new hires level in the majority of the organizations worldwide more than fifty percent of the employees are female and the number declines as they go up the organization until the percentage declines to not more than 3-4 % at the CEO level, Sherwin, (2014).

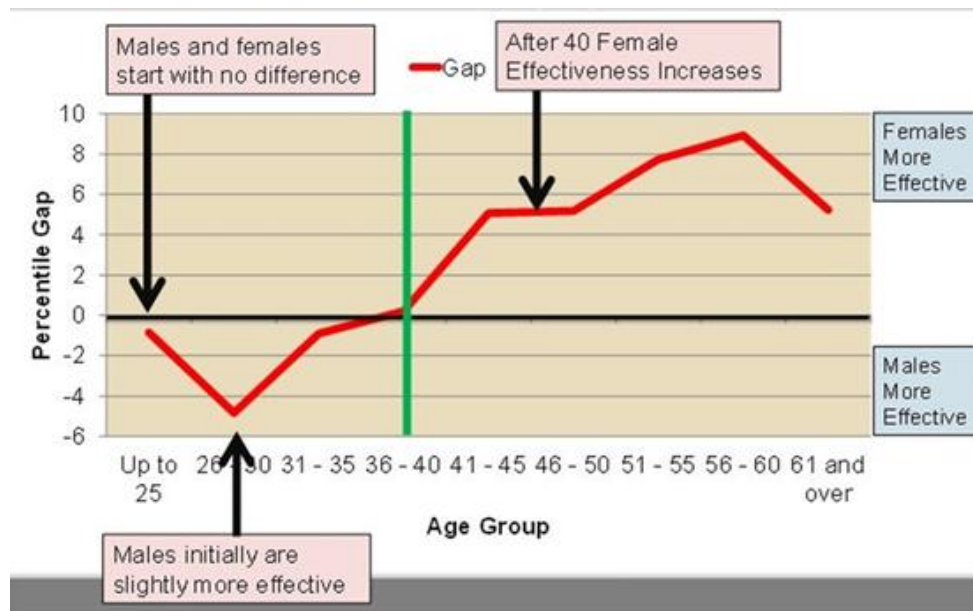
Figure 1: The Gender Gap in Leadership: Representation of Women in the Workforce

Leadership Level	Percentage of Women
New Hires	53% (reference)
Supervisors	37%
Managers	30%
Vice Presidents	26%
Senior Execs	14%
CEOs	0%

**Source:** Zenger Folkman (2009)

The chart highlights a steep decline in female representation in leadership roles, despite women making up the majority of entry-level positions. This suggests systemic barriers to advancement for women in the workplace.

Figure 2: Gender Gap in Leadership Effectiveness by Age



Source: Zenger Folkman

These percentages have been so ambiguous and mysterious as we review the feedback data collected by The Leadership Consultancy Zenger Folkman about 45000 leaders from 450,000 subordinates covering a wide variety of sectors. From this feedback data, a report comparing men and women leadership effectiveness showed that on an aggregate basis, women's leadership effectiveness was more than that of men. On an age basis, it was concluded that at the beginning of their careers, there was little perceived difference, and then men's effectiveness slightly increases. Afterwards, with

their growing maturity, women's effectiveness proves to exceed their men counterparts (Graph 2) (Sherwin, 2014).

Based on these findings a further research was conducted by the same consultancy to investigate the reasons for the phenomenon of vanishing females as they move up the career ladder. Three answers from the females themselves clarified this phenomenon:

- 1- "I don't want the role": When faced with the dilemma of balancing the family commitments (especially motherhood) and the leadership opportunities offered by the organization, women find the greater titles not so appealing to them. Women prioritize their families over their jobs and work responsibilities.
- 2- "I can't succeed in the role": women always have the belief that they can't succeed in more demanding leadership roles. The explanations for this belief can stem from:
  - The scarcity of successful female role models at the highest managerial ranks creates the fear of failure.
  - Men's superior capabilities in communicating and networking that enhance their opportunities towards development and leveraging their careers, which makes them identified and chosen for higher-ranked jobs more than their female counterparts.
  - The disappointing perception is that women must exert a double effort as that exerted by men to be perceived as qualified as them.
- 3- "I can't have the role": either for formal barriers from the organization itself that its promotion procedures favour men, or for informal barriers such as the dominating belief that men are more effective than women (which was completely refuted by the feedback illustrated above, Graph 2). Another informal barrier is the inappropriateness of the working conditions characterizing most of the higher positions, such as relocations or working hours (Sherwin, 2014).

There is a gender stereotype that females are not suitable for higher managerial roles as they are seen as more suited to a supportive, nurturing role, such as motherhood, than the decision-making role of management (Heilman, 2001). When a woman is offered and accepts a leading role, she is pressured to overperform and to exert unconditional efforts to deliver, because if she does something wrong, they will say, "Ah, you see women!" and this is not the case with men. When a male leader fails to do something or even is a complete failure, no generalizations are made, and men are never accused of being failures (Ganesan S., 2016). The gender typing of management roles leads to biased decisions against women's selection when it comes to promotion, placement, or training decisions (Schein, 2001). Gender stereotyping is affecting women's performance evaluation when they are at a managerial level. Researchers suggested that there was a degree of inconsistency between the attributes needed for the managerial position holder and the attributes ascribed to women (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which justifies the reason behind the lower performance ratings received by women holding line managerial positions than their men counterparts or females working at staff jobs (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Gender stereotypes and misconceptions, rather than women's real qualifications and abilities, created the impediments for women's career advancement guided by the "think manager-think man" perspective. The International Labor Organization reported in 2004 that biases

against managerial women in organizations worldwide act as powerful obstacles to their career advancement.

Although the ranks of women in organizations have remarkably gone up during the past few decades, the organizations are still male-dominated. This trend vies for dominance despite the research evidence that the most successful organizations are the ones that are concerned with developing talents and encouraging their female employees (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Women's career progress differs from that of men due to developmental differences, as well as organizational and societal factors (Betz, 1993). Oneil et al. (2008) identified four interrelated models that characterize the current situation of research on women's careers. Accompanied by every model, there is an ambivalence showing the seeming incompatibilities between the research on women and careers and the contemporary organizations' reality.

Model 1: "Women's careers comprise more than 'work'; they are embedded in women's larger life contexts."

For modern women, research found that work and private life are closely interrelated (Jacobson & Aaltio-Marjosola, 2001). Women managers, especially those having families, experience the so-called "second shift syndrome," where their first shift is in the workplace and they continue on the second shift at home. The burden of juggling work-related goals with family responsibilities is considered problematic for some women. Women who find themselves in this circumstance are also called "dual career women," where they are urged to perform properly at work and at home. In order to balance between professional development and personal life may seem to be very difficult for some women in many ways. Some of them are met with inadequate support from their respective families to pursue their career advancement goals. Women's careers and life responsibilities go up and down according to life stage changing patterns. Women's careers pass through three related phases: idealistic achievement, pragmatic endurance, and reinventive contribution. Although the basic issues at each phase differ, it was found that women in all three phases were seeking success in both their careers and their private lives (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). The ABC model of careers developed by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) proposed that authenticity, balance, and challenge rotate in priority over time based on women's career and life circumstances. In early career phases, engaging in challenging work is the prominent focus; in mid-career, a balance between career and relational concerns prevails; and in late career, authenticity and being true to oneself is the main concern (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Ambivalence 1: "Organizational realities demand the separation of career and life." In spite of the fact that modern women are always seeking success both professionally and personally, we can conclude that organizational realities don't conform to their career preferences and personal choices. Unlike men, women do not focus on the singular goal of professional advancement but struggle to "do it all" and come up with more creative ways to reap professional success. Research reports that female managers continue to accept the challenge of the "double burden" of family and work. They have to be successful equally at home and at work. In the home environment, they need to assume the manifold tasks of wife and homemaker and struggle to become equals with men in the workplace at the same time. Organizational realities are still



following the old trend in which male laborers who display complete availability were the norm and require a separate professional and personal life (Burke, 1999). White (1995) found in her study about a group of extremely successful females in the United Kingdom that the majority of 48 high-career females either remained childless for the sake of their professional success or adjusted their personal responsibilities according to their career requirements. She concluded that having a successful career life posed a detriment to women seeking dual roles of professional and personal responsibilities.

Model 2: "Families and careers are central to women's lives."

Lots of literature discussing work-family conflict and work-life balance revolved around identifying either the consequences of work-family conflict /or enrichment. The results of such studies show mixed results as some of which support the idea that women are developing by their dual roles (Ruderman et al, 2002). Other studies show evidence that women's dual roles are not well recognized organizationally (Brett & Stroh, 1999). Rothbard (2001) found in his study of engagement in work and family roles that both males and females experienced enrichment between roles but in opposite directions; males from work to family and females from family to work. Females eventually suffer from diminution due to such dual roles in the direction of work to family. Hewlett (2002) in her controversial study pointed out that many high-achieving females gave up their right to have children, favoring their career advancement. While career advancement clock and maternity clock can't be synchronized, the result is that when recognizing the reality, it is usually too late to conceive. Women are always pressured to choose between having families and having successful careers, and the ones who have both feel that they are not fairly and sufficiently giving to either (Hewlett, 2002). Work-life conflict was found to exist for women without children too in the direction of work to life, as organizations usually depend more on non-parents to perform extra duties when needed, which results in more depleted women by their work (Hamilton et al, 2006).

Ambivalence 2: "Families continue to be liabilities to women's career development in organizations."

Studies have found that the home and family-related obstacles do not necessarily interfere with motivation and professional success for many women. The problem with having the additional burden of family responsibility for women is that it is viewed as a negative thing. Research has suggested that many companies look at women with home-related commitments with disfavor. What is worse is that some women may even be penalized professionally for having their own commitments outside of the career realm. Having marital and family responsibilities may not interfere in terms of commitment among women, but these factors might slow down their promotional opportunities of women managers. Some women have reported that the workplace was inviting and conducive to success when they were single, but changed negatively to a more unwelcome environment when they got married and had children. Although organizations are providing work-life benefits in the form of parenting leaves, reduced hours, flexible work hours, part-time jobs, and telecommuting, these arrangements in reality don't conform to advancing the ladder to senior management ranks. Because women are the majority of the beneficiaries from these organizational arrangements, their career advancement will eventually be negatively affected, which shows how

families can be liabilities to women's careers in the organizations (Drew & Murtagh, 2005).

Model 3: "Women's career paths reflect a wide range and variety of patterns."

Although the traditional career ladder takes the form of upward hierarchical progression, there is evidence that the case for women is that it takes the form of snake-like or zigzag career paths (Gersick & Kram, 2002). Women's career paths are characterized by upward mobility, stability, downward mobility, and fluctuation (Huang & Sverke, 2007), and the race to the top of the organization as a series of achievements and defeats is not viable for women as much as for men (Hurley & Sonnenfeld, 1997). The corpocratic model for men characterizing the hierarchical progression towards the top of the organization is different from women's holistic framework, through which there is always interplay between work, relationships, organizational factors, and various life stages. As a result, the organizations supporting the corpocratic career model are considered to be dissatisfactory and demotivating to women who are playing the dual professional and family roles (O'Leary, 1997). Based on the previous studies, it was found that four reasons supported the idea why women leave their corpocratic organizations and start their own businesses; searching for more flexibility, dissatisfaction with the organizational environment, the effect of corporate glass ceiling and glass walls (The phenomenon referred to as the "glass ceiling," is a term originally used in 1986 by a Wall Street journalist to connote the status of women in the corporate world. The term was coined as a description of the complex barriers that block women's opportunities to break through the top levels in the organization. This "glass ceiling" is especially evident when one looks at rarity of female senior executives in organizations of virtually all disciplines.), and lack of challenging opportunities in the organizational positions were the strongest reasons fostering women's willingness to leave their organizations and start their entrepreneurship life so as to engage meaningfully in their personal and professional lives (Mattis, 2004).

Ambivalence 3: "Organizations predominantly organize for and reward upwardly mobile career paths."

Despite the emerging suggestions that future career patterns must be characterized by flexibility, transferability of skills, and challenging corporate opportunities, we can perceive that contemporary organizations are still revolving around the same corpocratic career paths defined by traditional progression up the hierarchical ladder, and vertical trajectory accompanied with monetary, and power and status rewards (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Although the patriarchal nature of institutions is broken down, women will find it difficult to advance their careers in what is considered male territory. They define patriarchy as a process and a context through which male supremacy is promoted by men and institutions. Patriarchy is a stumbling block for women because it "controls access to hierarchical power and characteristics of knowledge claims". In this environment, cultural practices and information flow signify male authority, hence placing women as mere subordinates to men. However, the problem with patriarchy is that it is a "complementary process" that is legitimized by both women and men and forms part of the organizational culture. In this manner, male dominance becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon in organizations. Women are not accepted wholly into the workforce but are merely tolerated. Hence, the notion of "patriarchal elitism,"

especially in top executive culture, is widespread. As a result, few women are capable of progressing to the most senior levels of organizations and are still facing discrimination at work (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Model 4: “Human capital and social capital are critical factors for women’s career development.”

On one hand, surveys of CEOs suggested that women are not advancing in managerial level primarily due to a lack of human capital, which is defined in terms of education, mental ability, training, developmental opportunities, job tenure, experience, and mobility in work assignments. On the other hand, social capital has been considered by research to be of critical importance to women’s careers, and the inability to create informal networks has been reported as a primary impediment to women’s career advancement (Ragins et al, 1998). Ibraa (1993) pointed out that men and women in equivalent organizational positions require different networking perspectives for achieving their goals; as men suggested that their track record to be their primary contributor to their career success, women perceive that help from above is a critical factor to their career success (Morrison et al, 1992). While formal learning experiences are important to growth, establishing strong and open networks is critical in navigating organizational structures with embedded (and often hidden) power and political infrastructure. Mentors, coaches, and sponsors - inside or outside the organization - provide important resources and information and play important roles in women’s leadership journey. Mapping existing individual and organizational development networks helps women create access to these development assets. Moreover, because people are more willing to follow leaders who can connect them to resources and information, women’s ability to build strategic networks also makes them more valuable and powerful.

Ambivalence 4: “Women’s human and social capital augmentation has not defeated the glass ceiling.”

Statistics show that very few women are reaching the top of the managerial level (as noted earlier), so the glass ceiling still prevails in spite of the accumulation of significant human and social capital. There were legislative factors such as gender discrimination, pay equity, and laws on sexual harassment; organizational factors such as patriarchy, exclusion from networks, flexible work options, difficulty in dealing with male-dominated organizational culture, lack of training and mentoring opportunity; and individual factors such as gender, education, and geographical mobility; and lastly, family factors that include lack of support from spouse and difficulty balancing work-family responsibilities, all these factors contribute to women’s perception that the promotion opportunities that they are offered are not satisfactory enough compared to those offered to men and they claim that such factors hinder their opportunities towards career development (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). Although creating a connected network of relationships, sharing responsibility, and contributing to the development of others are feminine managerial behaviors (Fondas, 1997), paradoxically, they are not publicly acknowledged as feminine nor do they result in recognizable rewards contributing to their constrained career advancement (Fletcher, 1998).

## **Women empowerment in Egypt:**

From the first perspective, which is human capital and economic development point of view, we can perceive that in search of legal, political, social, economic rights and equality, the Egyptian women have been continuously fighting since 1873 till now. Although the Egyptian constitution stresses equal rights for both males and females to receive the same educational opportunities, there have always been factors complicating the process. For example, during the previous century, parents, especially in the rural areas, used to think that girls were not worth the investment in their education as they used to get them married when they reached their early teenage. During the second half of the last century, the movement from the rural to the urban areas had started and the idea of educating girls started to emerge, but the education infrastructure then was not consistent with the increased demand, which kept the rate of females' education low (Guenena, Wassef, 1999). A radical change regarding females' education took place after the 1952 revolution, which provided massive opportunities for educating the general population of males and females to obtain their university degrees. Since then, women in Egypt started their constructive efforts to increase employment, through acquiring more education, which proved to be one of the most important factors contributing to closing the gender gap through their participation in the labor market (Sullivan, 1987). In spite of the facts mentioned showing the development of females' educational and employment situation, but the recent data compiled by CAPMAS 2023 proved that women are still facing economic and educational challenges where the employment for men constituted 84.2% against 15.8% for women and the unemployment rate for men constituted 4.7% against 17.8% for women. Regarding the participation in economic growth, women's participation rate was 15.9 % against 69.6 5 for men for the year 2023. An increasing illiteracy rate for women against men was spotted as females' rates reached 21% against 11.4% for men. These discrepancies and inequalities were the driving force behind Egypt's low ranking in the gender gap report issued by the International Economic Forum 2024, where Egypt was ranked 135 out of 146 countries. Regarding the women's political empowerment indicator, Egypt was ranked 90<sup>th</sup>, and 140<sup>th</sup> according to the women's economic empowerment indicator (The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 2024). Due to the aforementioned gender inequalities, the women entrepreneurs in Egypt are so much challenged by inequality in reaching financial services, scarcity of credit information, and exchanging financial information between the various financial institutions, as well as the increased business costs (Information and Decision Support Center, 2024). Based on the discussion above, it is recommended that amendments to the labor law are essential in order to increase women's participation in the labor market. Increasing the allocations of small and medium-sized enterprises' loans granted to women entrepreneurs, supported by technical assistance needed. Promoting initiatives that provide awareness to women about the importance of entrepreneurship and the offered financial services (The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 2024). By conducting interviews with 25 women in four random public and private Egyptian organizations asking about their point of views regarding gender inequality and its associated impacts on the economic performance, it was found that the majority of their responses were focused on the existence of biases monetary and non-monetary which is definitely negatively affecting the economic performance especially with the increased economic challenges in Egypt. They stressed on the necessity of developing

women's skills that enhance their chances of finding safe, equitable, and balanced jobs, which foster their self-esteem and opportunities for growth and career advancements. From the perspective of career advancement, we can find that the same discrepancies exist. Regarding the leadership roles in the public sector, out of 30 ministers in the latest governmental changes July 2024, we can find that women were selected to occupy only 4 ministries constituting only 13.3% of the total number of the council of ministers which is a very low percentage relative to the valued roles and contributions of women in the Egyptian community. For the post of a minister's deputy, 5 selected women out of 23 deputies, which constitutes 21.7%, and for the governor post, only one woman was selected for this post out of 27 governors, which constitutes only 3.7%. Women's contribution in political life can be exhibited through the number of female members in the parliament, where women are represented by 162 out of 586 members, which constitutes 27.6% of the total parliament membership. The private sector was more favorable, as addressed by the annual report prepared by the Faculty of Business Administration in The American University in Cairo, women's contributions in the corporate board of directors increased from 19.7% in 2022 to 23.3% in 2023, and the report covered 1000 private organizations and banks. The highest sector in supporting women leaders was the financial non-banking sector with a total of 25.2%, which is considered to be the Egyptian leading sector in women's career advancement (The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, 2024).

## Conclusion

From one perspective, linking gender equality, women's empowerment, and human capital development has been increasingly recognized in recent decades, and it has been considered indispensable for several reasons. First, it is a moral and ethical imperative: achieving gender equality and considering the dignity and capabilities of diverse groups of women have become crucial for achieving economic development. Second, it is central to reform the disproportionate effect of economic, social, and environmental burdens on women and girls, which constrain their roles in sustaining their families and communities. Third, there is a strong evidence that better synergies exist between gender equality and economic, social, and environmental sustainability as the more women have voice and participation in public administration and public resources, much of their efforts will be dedicated towards multi-developmental priorities such as child health, nutrition, access to employment, food security, securing sustainable water, sanitation, and energy services. Increasingly, women's full participation is crucial to policymaking in certain areas of gender equality such as female education, and women's share of employment which in turn is having a strong impact on economic growth, although this growth is dependent on the structure of the economy, the nature of growth strategies applied, and the sectoral composition of women's employment and labor market discrimination, among other factors.

From the other perspective and based upon the previous analysis, we can conclude that women's careers are complex and multi-dimensional, while work practices vie for dominance in organizations are single-dimension, which is the male-defined organizational dimension. Although women have moved into the workforce and into middle management levels, but not really on roads at the top of organizational

hierarchies, which reflects the obstacles faced by women towards their career advancement. The effects of the glass ceiling still disadvantage women who pursue career advancement, and the male-oriented organizational structures are impeding women's access to positions of power in the organizational hierarchies. Literature reviews suggest that male-oriented constructions of work and career development still prevail in organizational research and practice, so how can we expect women to achieve their goals of progressing towards the highest levels of organizational structures, while after decades of women working, the predominant organizational attitude is still "think manager- think man"?

From both perspectives, we can conclude that women in Egypt are still challenged by gender inequalities. Policy makers should reconsider women's rights in better educational and employment opportunities. Developing human resource policies that create work-life balance conditions and unbiased recruitment systems is of crucial importance for the improvement of women's employment opportunities. Increased initiatives that support women entrepreneurs, such as We Finance Code, which is aiming at increasing the opportunity for women entrepreneurs to get both funds and technical support for their projects, initiated by the Central Bank of Egypt, are highly recommended.

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