

## Supporting Women's Livelihoods in Egypt: Opportunities and Challenges

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### In a nutshell

- Egyptian women, especially rural women, have low economic participation by standard measures.
- Standard measures under-estimate the economic engagement of rural women.
- Married women work a "second shift" of domestic responsibilities.
- Gender role attitudes are equitable for education, but not work.
- One area where women, particularly rural women, are more engaged than men is in tending livestock and poultry.
- "Graduation" programs, providing livestock as assets, and addressing the multitude of other constraints facing women, are a promising strategy for supporting Egyptian women.

### Egyptian women face a multitude of barriers to livelihoods

Egypt has made enormous progress in ensuring gender equity in health and education, but not in economic engagement (World Bank 2018). In 2018, while 72% of men aged 15-64 were employed, only 17% of women were employed (Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2019). Despite women's rising educational attainment, women's employment has declined over time (Assaad et al. 2018; Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2019).

Standard measures of economic participation underestimate women's contributions to the economy. Women, particularly rural women, often contribute to the market economy through agricultural or home-based enterprises (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019; Rizk and Rashed 2019). When such activities are considered, rural women's employment rate rises from 16% to 35%.

Women also make enormous contributions to the economy and society through their domestic work. Married women work an entire "sec-

ond shift” of domestic responsibilities, averaging 34 hours per week, compared to the 4 hours per week spent by married men (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019). Married women’s additional responsibilities make it particularly difficult for them to engage in work outside the home, especially work in the private sector, which has long hours (Assaad, AlSharawy, and Salemi 2019; Assaad, Krafft, and Selwaness 2017; Selwaness and Krafft 2018).

Gender role attitudes, although equitable towards women’s education, are not equitable in regard to women’s work. The vast majority of Egyptians agree that boys and girls should get the same amount of schooling (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019). These gender attitudes are being realized in current school enrollments (Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2019). However, the vast majority of Egyptians also agree that, when jobs are scarce, men have more right to jobs than women (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019).

One area of the economy where women, especially rural women, are more engaged than men is in tending livestock and poultry (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019). For example, 24% of rural women are primary caretakers of animals compared to only 10% of rural men. In 2018, the most common animals, by far, were poultry, which are a relatively low-value asset.

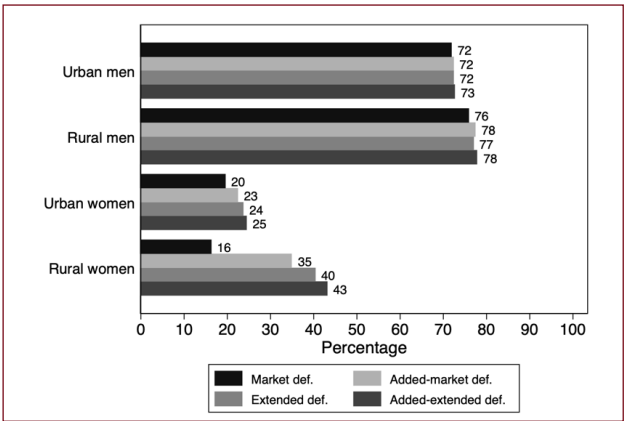
“Graduation” programs, which not only provide a productive asset (such as livestock) but also address a holistic set of other barriers to livelihood transformation (such as training, health, and savings), have led to sustained reductions in poverty globally (Banerjee et al. 2015). Implementing a graduation program in Egypt is well-aligned with the challenges facing Egyptian women. Indeed, the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development is already piloting and evaluating a graduation program, *Bab Amal*, targeting the ultra-poor in Upper Egypt, and assessing whether the program has particular benefits when targeted to women (BRAC, Sawiris Foundation, and J-PAL 2019). This program has enormous potential to expand the economic engagement of women and lift impoverished women and their families out of poverty, by addressing key constraints to their economic engagement and success.

### *Women’s economic participation is underestimated*

International labor statistics standards define employment as “work for pay or profit,” i.e. engagement with the market (ILO 2013). Measuring this definition has well-known challenges, particularly for rural women (Langsten and Salem 2008). Figure 1 shows employment rates from the new Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey (ELMPS) 2018 wave, using the market definition of employment (and other definitions). Under the market definition, 72% of urban men and 76% of rural men work, while only 20% of urban and 16% of rural women work. The extended definition of employment adds subsistence work (processing of primary commodities for own consumption, e.g. agriculture and animal husbandry). This measure changes men’s employment rates very little, but urban women’s employment increases from 20% to 24% and rural women’s employment increases from 16% to 40%.

**Figure 1. Standard measures underestimate rural women’s employment**

*Employment to population ratios (percentages) when adding individuals who worked for a family enterprise or farm to the market and extended definitions by sex and location, aged 15-64*



Notes: The added-market definition of employment adds individuals who worked on a family enterprise or farm that sold crops or animals they worked with to the market definition of employment. The added-extended definition of employment adds individuals who worked on a family enterprise or farm (not conditional on selling crops or animals) to the extended definition of employment. Individuals were only considered working on a family enterprise or farm if they were one of the (up to) three primary workers for one or more animal, crop, or non-farm enterprise.

Source: Keo, Krafft, and Fedi (2019) based on ELMPS 2018.

In ELMPS 2018, there were a series of questions on households' engagement with a non-agricultural enterprise, crops, or animals. These questions also include information on whether the crops or animals were sold, and who worked on the enterprise, crops, or animals. Although these cover slightly different (longer) periods of time than the market employment questions, we would not expect large differences in economic engagement. However, when we added individuals working on enterprises, crops, or livestock (with market sales) to the market definition of employment, in Figure 1, employment rates increased substantially for rural women, from 16% to 35%. Rural women's extended employment increased as well when similarly added to, from 40% to 43%.

The typical implementation of measuring market employment missed the majority of rural women's engagement with the market economy. Moreover, most of what was detected as subsistence work (extended employment) actually was engaged with the market. Accurate statistics on women's employment are critically important to understanding the economy and tracking progress on gender equality. Measures, like those in the ELMPS modules, which better capture rural women's economic engagement should be considered for inclusion in international labor statistics.

### *Married women work a "second shift" of domestic responsibilities*

While men may spend more time contributing to the economy through market work, married Egyptian women work an entire "second shift" of domestic responsibilities. These contributions are left out of typical economic measures, such as the gross domestic product (GDP) (Waring 1990). Figure 2 shows the hours per week spent on domestic responsibilities. Whether married or unmarried, living in urban areas or rural areas, men spend only 2-6 hours per week on domestic responsibilities such as washing dishes, cooking, cleaning, or caregiving. Unmarried women work 15-17 hours per week in such responsibilities, which is already difficult to reconcile with market

work of 40-44 hours per week, for those who work. Married women face even longer hours of domestic responsibilities, 32-36 hours per week.

### **Figure 2. Married women work an entire "second shift" of domestic responsibilities**

*Hours spent doing domestic work (all individuals) and market work (employed individuals) per week by sex, location and marital status, aged 15-64, 2018*



Notes: The reference period for both domestic work and market work was the last seven days. Unmarried included never married, contractually married, divorced, and widowed. Domestic work included: agricultural activities or raising poultry or livestock; producing ghee, butter, cheese or non-food goods; collecting firewood or other fuel or water; cooking; washing dishes; doing laundry and ironing; managing your household; cleaning your house; construction/repairs; shopping (food, clothing, etc.); caring for sick or elderly (only); and taking care of children (only).

Source: Keo, Krafft, and Fedi (2019) based on ELMPS 2018.

The "second shift" makes it very difficult for women to hold a full-time job, particularly in the private sector, which requires longer hours (Assaad, AlSharawy, and Salemi 2019). The longer hours may be one of the reasons why women leave the private sector at marriage, but persist in the public sector and non-wage work, which are more reconcilable with their domestic responsibilities (Assaad, Krafft, and Selwaness 2017; Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2019; Selwaness and Krafft 2018). In order for women to achieve economic equity, men will need to do a greater share of domestic responsibilities. Some of these responsi-

bilities may also be able to be shifted onto the market, for instance through time-saving technologies (e.g. prepared meals) or market services (e.g. child care, cleaning services) (Krafft and Assaad 2015).

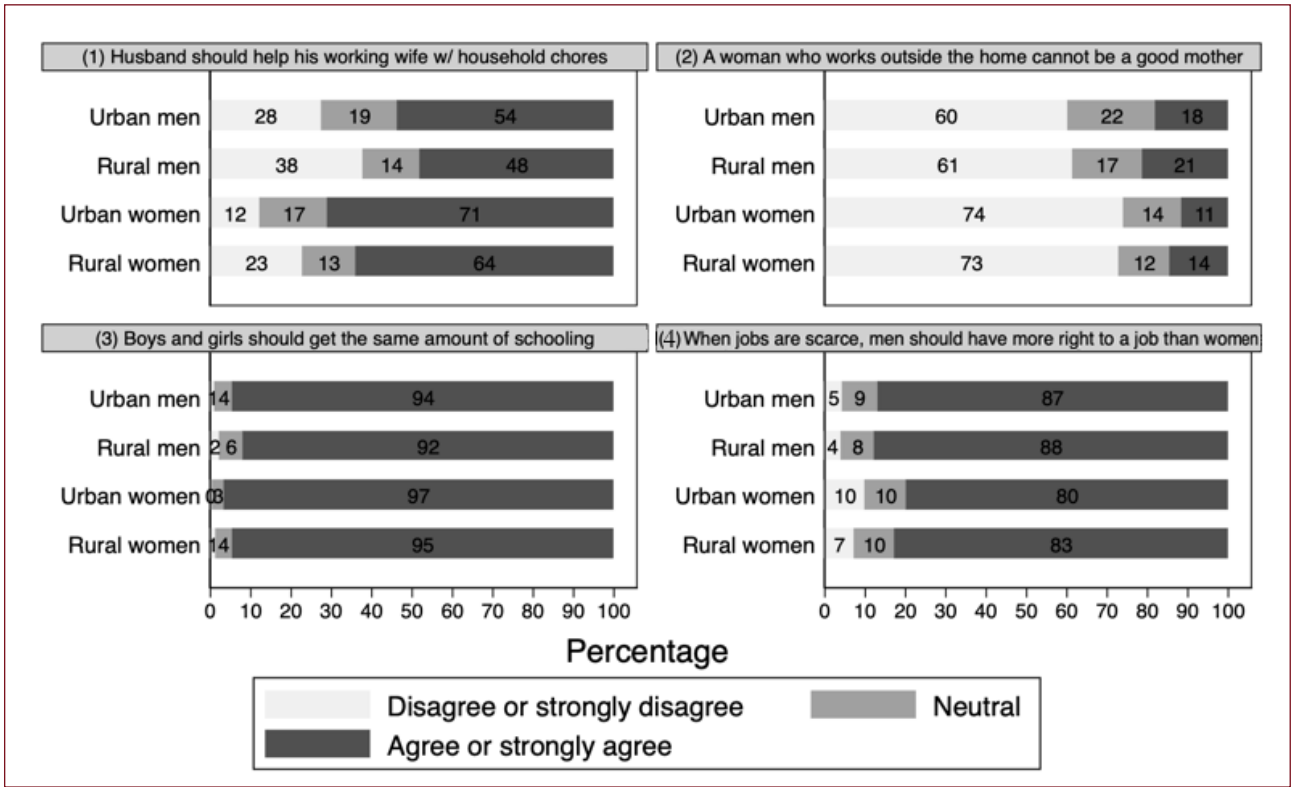
*Gender role attitudes are equitable towards women’s education, but not their work*

Gender role attitudes limit women’s ability to work outside the home. Traditionally, women were the

homemakers and men the breadwinners (Hoodfar 1997). This division of responsibilities is reflected in the hours women work on domestic responsibilities. It is also reflected in the gender role attitudes Egyptians express, as shown in Figure 3. In some areas, such as education, there are strong norms supporting gender equity. Nearly all Egyptians agree that girls and boys should get the same amount of schooling. This aspiration is increasingly being realized (Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2019).

**Figure 3. Gender role attitudes are equitable for education, but not work**

*Gender attitudes (percentages) by sex and location, ages 15-64, 2018*



Source: Keo, Krafft, and Fedi (2019) based on ELMPS 2018.

However, in terms of work roles, attitudes are not gender equitable. While the majority of Egyptians agree that men should help their wives with household chores, a substantial minority do not agree. Moreover, it is clear from Figure 2 that even those men who agree in theory are not putting this principle into practice. While the majority of Egyptians dis-

agreed with the statement that a woman who works outside the home *cannot* be a good mother, a substantial minority, particularly of men, agreed. The vast majority of Egyptians, both men and women, agreed that when jobs are scarce, men should have the priority. Especially given Egypt’s struggles to create good jobs (Assaad, AlSharawy, and Salemi 2019; Assaad,

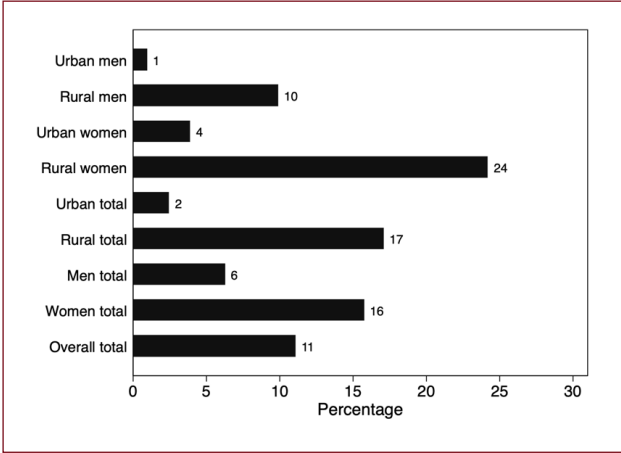
Yassin, and Krafft 2018), this precludes women’s employment. Until both attitudes and actions in both domestic work and market work are more equitable, Egyptian women’s economic opportunities and empowerment will be limited.

*Women work with livestock more than men*

There are some bright spots in the economy in terms of women’s economic participation, particularly in livestock. People in rural Egypt depend heavily on livestock and poultry with 29% of rural families owning livestock or poultry compared to only 5% of urban households (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019). Rural women have an especially prominent role in caring for livestock and poultry, which contributes to their families’ well-being and allows them economic opportunities (Figure 4). While only 1% of urban men, 4% of urban women, and 10% of urban men care for livestock or poultry, 24% of rural women do so.

**Figure 4. Rural women commonly care for livestock or poultry**

*Percentage of individuals who were a primary caretaker of livestock or poultry, by sex and location, aged 15-64, 2018*



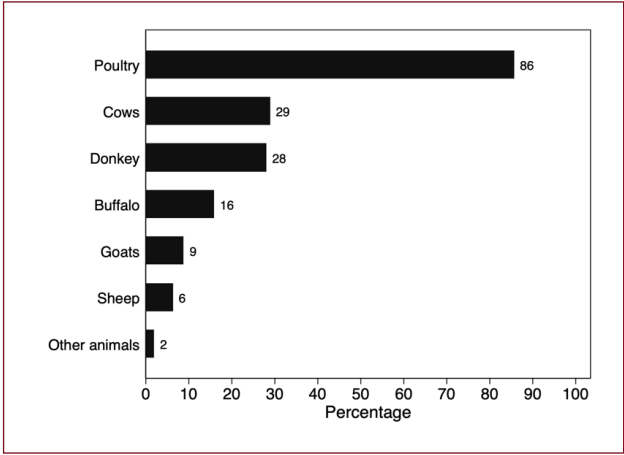
Notes: Households with livestock or poultry had to report (up to) three primary caretakers for each animal and these caretakers could be, but did not have to be, household members. Individuals were only considered working with animals if they were one of the (up to) three primary caretakers for one or more animal. The animals included cows, poultry, goats, sheep, camels, donkey/ mules, horses, buffaloes, or other animals.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on ELMPS 2018.

The types of livestock and poultry Egyptians have show potential for upgrading into more profitable assets. As shown in Figure 5, poultry are the most common type of animal, which are less valuable than cows, donkeys, buffalo, goats, sheep, and other larger animals. While raising animals is a strategy that is used across age and education groups, it is more common for less educated and older women (Krafft, Keo, and Fedi 2019). The broad engagement with livestock and poultry, but concentration among vulnerable women, suggests that supports for livestock-based livelihood strategies could have a positive impact, particularly on marginalized women.

**Figure 5. Poultry are the most common animals**

*Types of livestock owned by rural households (percentage of those households owning livestock)*



Notes: Adds up to more than 100% because households may own multiple types of animals. Other animals category included the responses of: horses, camels, and other animals.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on ELMPS 2018.

*Graduation programs can lift women out of poverty*

Egyptian women make enormous, underestimated, and underappreciated contributions to Egypt’s economy. Their market work is underestimated, missing their engagement with household enterprises, crops, and livestock. Their domestic work is an entire “second shift” for married women, a shift in which men do not serve. Gender role attitudes limit women’s



participation in work – although they are equitable in other areas, such as education. This multitude of constraints and challenges will be difficult to overcome with any single program or policy.

A new approach to economic empowerment, “graduation” programs, shows enormous potential for women, especially poor and rural women, in Egypt. Graduation programs recognize that there are a variety of aspects of economic marginalization, and work to tackle all of these aspects in a blended, integrated program (BRAC 2016). The programs typically target the poorest households in a community, and provide them with a productive asset, training and support for that asset, as well as health, consumption, savings, and general life skills support (Banerjee et al. 2015). This multidimensional approach has shown consistent impacts around the world, reducing poverty and improving well-being. Graduation programs also work much better to generate sustainable self-employment than stand-alone entrepreneurship programs or other active labor market policies, which tend to be ineffective (Blattman and Ralston 2015; Cho and Honorati 2014; Krafft and Rizk 2018; McKenzie and Woodruff 2014).

Egypt is building graduation programs into its *Forsa* program, designed to graduate impoverished families from the existing *Takaful* and *Karama* cash support programs of the Ministry of Social Solidarity (World Bank 2018). The Sawiris Foundation for Social Development and other local partners are piloting Bab Amal, a graduation program in Upper Egypt (BRAC, Sawiris Foundation, and J-PAL 2019). This program is being tested through a randomized evaluation to understand its impact.

Given that Egyptian women already are the primary caregivers for livestock and poultry, livestock assets could be particularly empowering for women. Market research for the Bab Amal program recommends them as the best asset for Egypt (Bolanos et al. 2019). The Bab Amal evaluation is also investigating whether targeting asset transfers to women has a particular, unique impact (El-Gueretly, Moqueet, and Selim 2019).

While we await the results of the evaluation, in order to consider whether such a program might work in Egypt, and particularly for poor women, it is helpful to assess whether the local conditions align with success elsewhere (Bates and Glennerster 2017). Women, and particularly poor rural women in Egypt, face multiple constraints to their economic engagement, suggesting graduation programs’ multi-pronged approach is needed. Non-wage work, including self-employment, is easier to reconcile with women’s substantial domestic responsibilities, and women are already caring for livestock despite inequitable gender roles towards employment generally. The Bab Amal program will include training on gender equality (BRAC, Sawiris Foundation, and J-PAL 2019), which, together with increasing women’s assets and economic empowerment, may ultimately lead to Egypt being as equitable in employment attitudes and practices as it is in education.

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