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pave the way forward”

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I. Introduction

According to a projection based on current population growth, the *Forum Méditerranéen des Instituts de Sciences Economiques* (FEMISE) assesses that countries in the Southern Mediterranean region would need to create at least 34 million jobs by 2030 to maintain the current employment and unemployment rates - and 90 million if the objective is to create enough jobs for new entrants in the labor market.

In the region, the young people are currently experiencing the highest population growth, and also the highest unemployment rates. Meeting the challenges of the youth situation in the Southern Mediterranean implies to consider that youth is a source of economic and social opportunities, which should lead States to carry out and develop appropriate reforms to create an enabling environment for employment. Training is central, the role of the private and the public sector in the general economy is also important; and the creation of some legal frameworks, in particular those dealing with the social protection of rural workers, appears indispensable.

In the agricultural and rural sector, the number of active women continues to increase. This sector suffers from a lack of attractiveness for the youth, a situation reinforced by the lack of rural infrastructure in the field of basic needs and quality of life. Regarding the organization of rural territories, the participation of minority groups, such as women and young people in public life in a coordinated way seems to be a solution to progress in the implementation of a fair agricultural and rural development. Their participation, together with the other local actors, can encourage the emergence of a more productive agriculture, which can increase rural income and help stabilizing the most vulnerable groups.

The socio-political environment, the institutional and security context play a fundamental role in the development of business and enterprises. In the region, this context is still too unpredictable for economic actors. However, many actions can be taken by States to promote a better integration of young people and women into national economies and rural territories.

II. Young people and employment in the MENA region

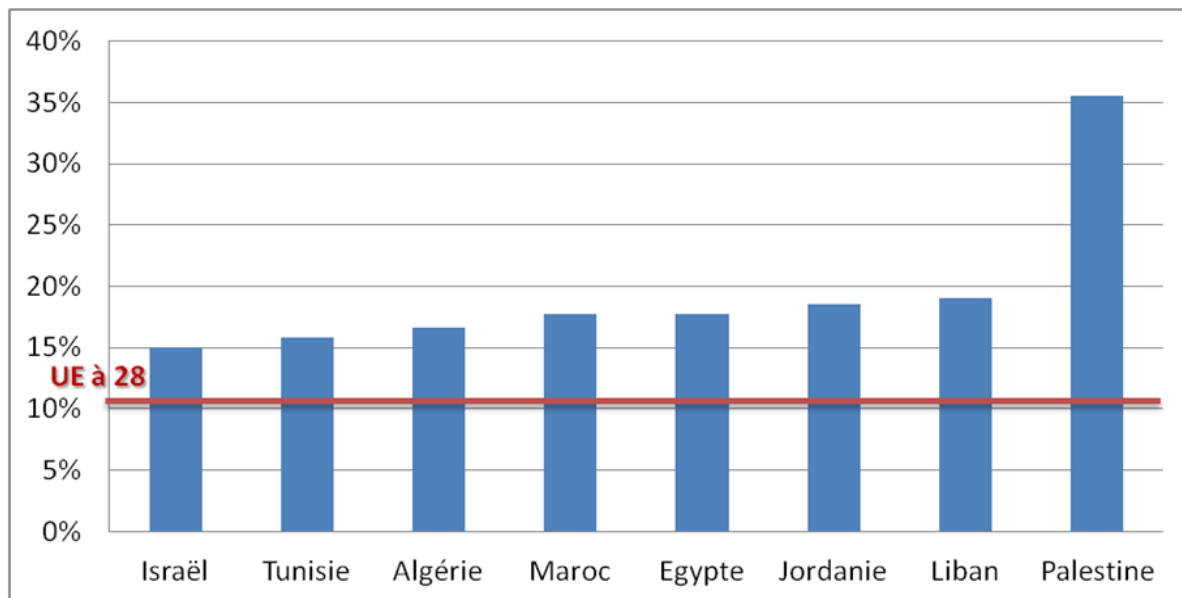
The (15-24) age group represents a large percentage of the population in Arab states around the Mediterranean; it is also the category in which growth is currently highest and activity rates are lowest. More than one-third of young people are unemployed and are not enrolled in any form of education or training. This observation is more alarming as the category of young people most affected by unemployment is that of university graduates. This situation generates considerable frustration for young people who feel abandoned by politicians. The states in the Mediterranean basin are therefore facing a significant economic and social challenge.

2.1. Demographic situation: the challenges of a massive arrival of young people on the labour market

Population growth in the countries on the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean is about 2%. The region entered a period of demographic transition during the 1990s, but population growth remains higher than global population growth, which is estimated over 1% per year.

The young population within the region is also increasing at a higher rate than other groups within the population. Young people currently account for between 15 and 20% of the total population in numerous countries in the southern and eastern Mediterranean whereas this figure falls to only 11% in Europe (cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of young people in the total population in 2015



Source: ILO and Eurostat - 2015

These young Mediterranean citizens represent a key factor in establishing growth and quick development as well as in reducing poverty in a promising economic context. Regions that were able to take full advantage of this population growth reminiscent of the baby-boom, such as East Asia between 1965 and 1990, have therefore enjoyed considerable growth in their per capita production as well as an increase in savings and investment. Such changes assume that human capital is promoted accordingly. It also implies an economic dynamics that can lead to the creation of jobs which value young people's skills.

A massive arrival of young people of working age in a context where the domestic economy is unable to absorb this labour can quickly generate high social and economic costs. As soon as young people begin to work in the informal sector, the possibility of finding formal employment is reduced. They find themselves in a permanent state of employment characterized by low wages, as well as limited advancement and learning opportunities. Far from being a temporary solution, informal employment can become a vulnerability and poverty trap for numerous young people.

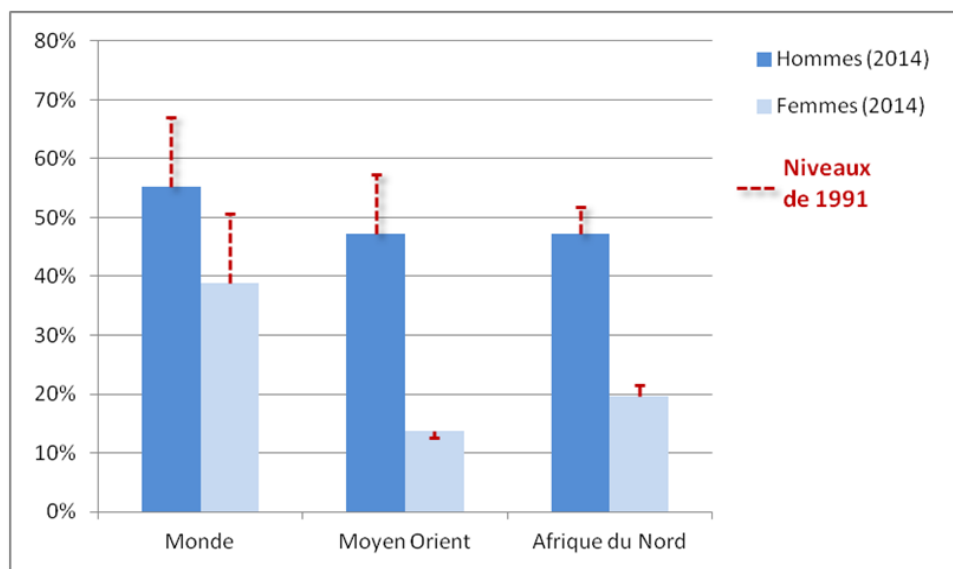
Generally speaking, the dynamic nature of the young Mediterranean population is hampered by the misalignment of labour market needs and the competences produced by the education system. In the MENA region, this gap between the skills required and those available is growing, resulting in long transition periods for graduates. The demand for specific skills is high and linked to both the introduction of new technologies and the needs of a global market economy, but it is not relayed by the school system which remains disconnected from the requirements of the market economy.

2.2. Education system and weak insertion of young people on the labour market

Today, approximately one young person in three has joined the labour market in North Africa and the Middle East (ILO, 2015), whereas the global average is closer to one in two (cf. figure 2). This situation has worsened since the 1990s with labour market insertion rates gradually falling. The figure 2 also shows that young women are much more marginalized by the labour market than men, which underlies the informal characteristics of their employment.

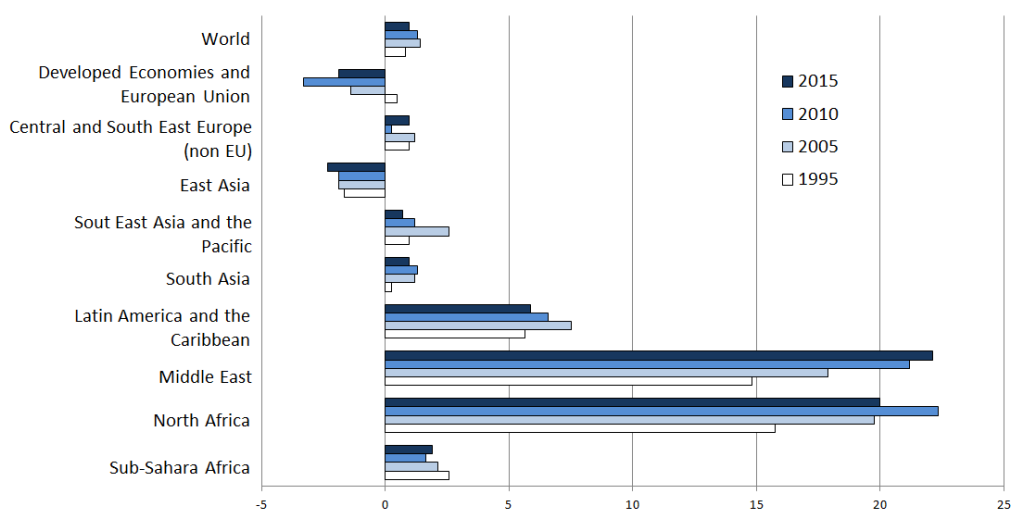
Moreover, while the gap of the unemployment rate between young women and young men is quite small at international level and in most of regions, it is significant in the MENA countries: in fact, the unemployment rate of young women are 20 and 22 points more than the unemployment rate of young men in the Middle-East and North Africa (cf. figure 3). In the last 12 years, this difference has increased in the Middle-East whereas it varies in North Africa.

Figure 2: Insertion of young men and women on the labour market (comparison 1991 and 2014)



Source: ILO, Trends Econometric Models, April 2015

Figure 3 : Global and regional gender gaps in youth unemployment rates, selected years



Source : OIT, Trends Econometric Models, Avril 2015

This context of weak insertion of young Mediterranean people in the labour market is primarily due to some failures in the education systems and in particular in the public system. Concerning the gap between the unemployment rate between young men and young women, it is relevant to different social and cultural norms: early marriages for women, number of dependent children, dedicated household chores; the dominant patriarch model in the region. Women are therefore partially marginalized from the labour market. This situation becomes even worse with the important gap of access to education between young women and men. This gender gap in the trainings for human capital is often ignored in policies

Generally speaking, access to education is unequal, for example between the richest and poorest and between urban and rural areas. Rural areas are faced with a lack of resources (infrastructures and budget) and often adopt a system of double shifts: half of the pupils attend lessons in the morning only while the other half attends school in the afternoon, thereby shortening school times.

The education systems are primarily based on relatively theoretical programmes and formal learning rather than on the application of know-how and the ability to solve tangible problems. Young people are thus rarely operational immediately after obtaining their degrees and they do not have enough knowledge about how to develop business activities. By demonstrating this through a TIMSS assessment (Trends in International Maths and Science Study), the African Development Bank (AFDB, 2011) has shown that young graduates in the countries of the MENA region are often less competitive than the global average.

Despite major public investment in education, unemployment levels remain high. In some countries, more than one-third of unemployed young people are university graduates, which reveals the mismatch between higher education and the labour market. The private sector remains somewhat in background, whereas it should play a complementary role to the public sector by ensuring that the training provided matches the immediate needs of the market. The private sector has so far limitedly involved in the education system and in the development of the skills that are useful on the markets.

2.3. From the restricted development of the private sector to job safety in the civil service

Since the 1980s, the transition of the economies in the MENA region towards an open economy as well as the renewed role of the state as a driving force fostering the growth of the private sector have not materialised. The development of private firms remains limited. The administrative procedures for creating businesses are complex, often laborious and poorly adapted to the needs of a dynamic economy and a changing market. Labour market regulations are not flexible, which does not encourage companies to hire new employees. The African Bank of Development states that companies in the region need an average of 6 months to dismiss a worker legally while the World Bank places some of the region's countries at the very bottom of the "Doing Business 2016" table (cf. table 1). Doing business is an indicator that aggregates the ease of creating a firm, the possibility of obtaining a building permit, the connection to the electricity network, etc. Such a situation offers very little prospect of employment to the young workers arriving massively in the labour market.

Table 1 : Ranking of the ease of doing business (out of a total of 189 countries)

Country	Rank
Israel	53
Tunisia	74
Morocco	75
Jordan	113
Lebanon	123
Palestine	129
Egypt	131
Algeria	163

Source: Doing Business, World Bank, 2016

Against such a backdrop, private companies often adopt strategies enabling them to avoid formal procedures while simplifying their management procedures and limiting commercial transaction costs. The informal economy is the only avenue open to companies outside the slow, complex and costly official channels; it also forces them not to expand and thus to recruit very few workers.

At the same time, the implementation of structural adjustment plans (SAPs) marginalized the public sector in the countries of the MENA region, causing a shift of employment from a public sector historically characterized by high levels of social protection towards a private sector with high rates of informality and low levels of social protection.

Despite these changes, the states and public enterprises remain the main employers in response to the social tensions due to poverty and low employment. Young people are usually keen to join the civil service which, in addition to provide job security, offer numerous benefits such as health insurance or social recognition. The administrations often employ underemployed staff whose wages increase public spending without taking measure to stop unemployment or calming social tensions in the middle or long term.

In a context of continuing social malaise, there is an increased risk of extreme behaviour on the part of young people who are either inactive or disappointed, including clandestine emigration or radicalization accompanied by potentially very high collective, economic and social costs.

2.4. Agricultural and rural development: the new aspirations of young people

Agriculture remains a relatively unattractive sector for young people in the countries in the MENA region. They perceive agriculture as an activity offering little value, limited social recognition and low revenues in the light of risks such as climate and prices variability, health and limited access to land and other means of production and of the constraints of an agricultural and rural lifestyle.

This analysis is not without entirely unfounded. In the MENA region, the agricultural sector often has no legal framework enabling the profession of farmer to be clearly defined, thereby contributing to the low level of professionalism in the sector and to the continued existence of a largely informal system. The consequences of this situation can be summarized in four points:

- a weak labour market structure in which farmers' needs are often not aligned with the labour available and the socio-professional aspirations of young people;
- poor qualifications among young workers who often do not have access to a basic agricultural training system;
- largely precarious or informal job opportunities thereby limiting the possibilities for socio-professional advancement within the agricultural sector;
- As the result of the informality of the majority of agricultural activities in these countries, working conditions are often poor (no respects for minimum working hour, the occupational health and security...) with low wages and considerable asymmetries and inequalities. In the absence of an unambiguous system of contracts for agricultural workers, the legislation in force is rarely applied.

The agricultural profession (farm manager, workers, etc.) offers only limited access to social security and retirement mechanisms, thereby directly affecting the attractiveness of the sector for young workers looking for better living conditions in the countryside. In the absence of an institutionalized social welfare system, farmers continue to rely on a social and family fabric focusing on an informal collective system of mutual aid where family members are provided with care and assistance when unfit for work (temporary or permanent) resulting from illness or accidents at work, care for retired members of the family provided by their children, etc. This system is now reaching its limits.

Entering the agricultural sector remains a complex, difficult and high-risk process for young people. The administrative procedures for creating agricultural firms are cumbersome and often very long, despite the fact that young people have specific assets that could be beneficial to the development of the agricultural and rural sector (cf. box 1). These young people are also restricted by recurring land issues, the possibility of obtaining support (technical or financial) from the state to set up business and access to private funding (bank loans) requiring capital in the form of land. The main land-related constraints are linked to the inheritance system (leading to fragmentation of the land, varying delays in transferring assets, etc.), competition for farming land and water (access for animals

and availability of irrigable land) and land legislation which accompany and frames these dynamics. Farmers 'children in many case have to wait until the death of the family head before the heritage¹. This restrains drastically the possibility for a young farmer to set up the business. These difficulties become even more important for women who wish to stay in the agriculture sector with the fact that for the majority of these countries, girls receive only half of his brother's heritage part.

Other existing means to access to agriculture land, for example, are to regroup different farmers to form cooperatives but this method takes long time and is often complicated. This fact discourages many young people. In the present conditions and confronted by new investors in the agricultural sector, young rural workers wishing to set up business often have little leverage.

Box 1 – What young people can offer in agricultural and rural areas

- Openness to the use of modern, innovative or improved technologies, in particular new information and communications technologies (NICTs) in order to enhance farm production, which may help in obtaining improved access to financing services and to market information.
- An improved capacity of the agricultural sector to overcome future challenges through increased resilience, innovation and a greater general desire for change.
- Encouragement to alter perceptions of the agricultural society through the reconnection of young people with their land and through their capacity to create firms with an economic and social impact on their communities (repositioning agriculture as a sector offering the potential for career advancement).

The organization of rural territories is a decisive factor of local dynamism, the creation of professional activities, attractiveness to young people and the enhancement of living conditions. The rural sector is currently encountering major difficulties in organizing itself around infrastructures and services designed to help improve worker mobility, their living environment and the capacity of the inhabitants to generate income from their activities.

The low level of access in rural zones to education, training and community infrastructures (roads, markets, storage centers, communication services, etc.) means that rural inhabitants, and in particular young people, experience great difficulty in entering markets, reducing their transaction costs, developing and promoting their produce, creating more activities and jobs and, *in-fine*, improving their living conditions.

The policies implemented in developing territorial and inter-sectoral dynamics (agriculture, industry, services, etc.) and the introduction of real local governance are still in their infancy in the region. In taking up the challenge of creating jobs in rural areas, local stakeholders such as the private sector, the local administrations and civil society organisations (professional agricultural organisations,

¹ The heritage of agricultural land by anticipation is not a common practice in the MENA region's countries, on the contrary to the European countries.

agricultural or craft cooperatives, unions, etc.) are poorly organised and only play a minor role, despite their potential in strengthening the rural economic and social fabric. The socioeconomic experiences in the creation of cooperatives from different countries show the strengths of these organisations that could be the engine of local economic dynamism.

While highly important, these questions are nowadays still out of concerns of the farmers themselves or the public administration. Farmers pay little attention to these subjects, for example due to insufficient or non-existent information and awareness raising concerning the services to which other sectors of activity have access and from which they should benefit.

2.5. For multi-dimensional policies in favour of young people

There is relatively little data concerning the involvement of young people in political orientations and decision-making, in particular in the agricultural sector and with regard to rural development issues (FAO, 2014). According to the World Bank (IEG, 2013), this lack of information is an indicator of the difficulty in developing policies that respond to the challenges encountered every day by young people, especially in rural areas.

In rural zones, age is generally associated with authority, thereby limiting the possibility for young people to express their needs and thus reducing their role in the policy-making process (Lintelo, 2001). This marginalization of young people forces them to remain on the sidelines instead of becoming stakeholders involved in society, a situation that is all the more marked for young women whose impact on the decision-making process remains negligible; the gender gap therefore remains present in households (cf. box 2).

In this context, governments and local authorities need to adopt a more favorable posture towards socio-economic development and the reduction of inequalities and social disparities linked to age or gender by formulating coherent and inclusive policies vis-à-vis young people. These strategies must be based on a common understanding of the main challenges facing young people and a consensus concerning the desired results of scheduled interventions. According to the OECD in 2015, the MENA region lacked programmes oriented towards young people and implemented within the framework of integrated or coordinated approaches.

Young rural inhabitants also need to be able to do better advocacy and participate more effectively and actively in constructing and conducting political dialogue. The organization of young people and their participation in various entities (unions, associations, etc.) designed to represent them in the dialogue and decision-making processes are thus key elements. Unity and solidarity are essential to young people to enable them to call on organizations and unions to help build on their own economic and professional objectives underpinned by an appropriate institutional and political fabric. Through these organizations, young people can thus enjoy better access to loans, production tools, markets and agricultural training and obtain better information in order to reach markets beyond their local scope of reference.

In general, a multidimensional policy intended for young people should be based on their real needs and expectations, providing actions in response to the main challenges they face. Young rural inhabitants are the future of the agricultural sector and, more broadly speaking, society as a whole

and it is through their active participation in the decision-making processes that their current situation can be improved.

Box 2 – Measures proposed by the World Bank, the FAO and IFAD (2009) with a view to facilitating the participation of young women and improving their competences and leadership skills

- Reduce the workload of young women with regard to household chores and crop farming,
- Set quotas of young women in decision-making bodies,
- Make local leaders aware of the importance of the participation of young women in the community economy.

Source: Youth and Agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions, FAO, 2014.

III. The question of gender in the agricultural and rural sector in the MENA region

3.1. Contextual elements

Women face serious challenges in the labour market in the MENA region. The employment to population ratio for women was far below the world average of 47.1 per cent for women, at only 14.7 and 18.8 per cent for the Near East and North Africa respectively, compared with 68.3 and 67.5 per cent for men and the unemployment rates for women in the MENA region were about 21 per cent compared with 8.5 per cent for men (ILO, 2014).

Women are employed 1.5 and 2.6 times more often than men for insecure short-term jobs. This fact obviously shows again their limited professional insertion (OIT, statistical series 2012 -2015).

However, it will be a huge challenge to raise female employment rates as these are driven by a combination of economic and socio-cultural factors, and the latter are particularly resistant to change. These include cultural restrictions on women working outside the home, early marriage, stereotypes about what work is suitable for women, labour market segregation, lower female wage rates than for men for work of equivalent value, employers' prejudices about women's capacities (beliefs that women are « good » at manual work for example in agricultural processing plants as they have nimble fingers, are more docile as employees, and do not have management or leadership skills, especially in dealing with male workers) (World Bank, 2013 ; Dey de Pryck & Termine, 2014; Elder & Kring, 2016). In addition, women shoulder the bulk of domestic work with few labour-saving technologies (ILO, 2016) which limits their time available for productive work (or child care and leisure).

These cultural restrictions and the low esteem with which women's work is regarded, as well as their inferior access to education and health services, are self-perpetuating in marginalizing women's work within the labour market or household.

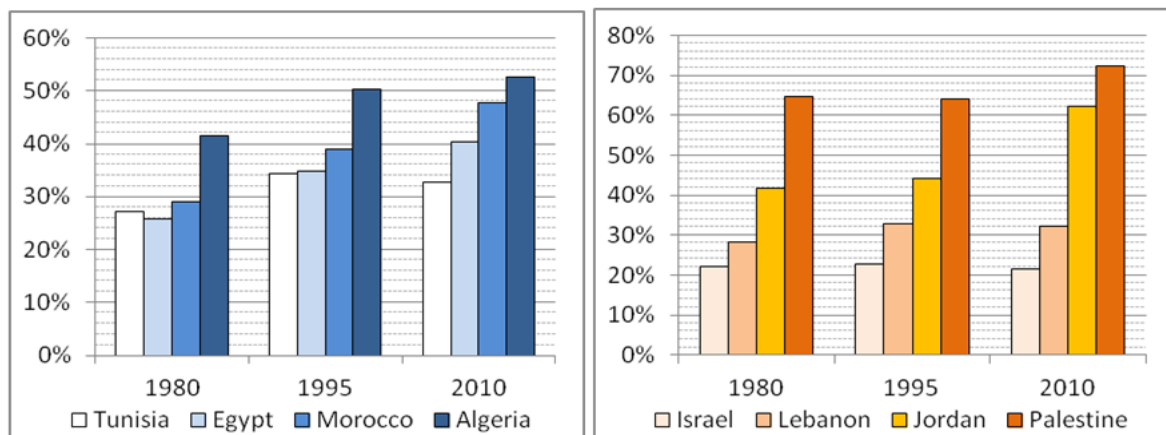
The Global Gender Gap Report 2015 ranked the countries in the region between 127th and 140th out of a total of 145 countries (in terms of women participation in the economy, of economic opportunities, of education, health, political involvement...). The result is that women are maintained in an informal role, for household needs and have a poor access to social services. The ILO statistics series for 2015 show that men have 3 to 8 times more access to retirement allowance than women.

In 2015, the ILO therefore estimated that 17.5% of women were active on the labour market, between three and five times less than the rate for men depending on the geographic location.

While all developed and developing regions of the world have shown a consistent shift of the economically active population out of agriculture between 1980 and 2015 (ILO, 2016; FAO, 2011), the developing regions showed an increasing female share of the economically active in agriculture. This trend is particularly marked in the MENA region, as indicated in Figure 4 for the ENPARD South Initiative countries, apart from Israel which scarcely changed. Interestingly, this pattern of increasing share of female agricultural labour also occurred in Southern Europe, in contrast to Europe as a whole (FAO, 2011). These trends reflect the economic restructuring that has prompted men's shift into better-paid (and higher status) non-farm jobs in rural or urban areas, or abroad. Within agriculture, this has been facilitated by the mechanization of male jobs such as ploughing, while women's typical jobs such as weeding, harvesting (especially of non-cereals such as pulses, fruit and vegetables) and processing, have remained largely manual (see, for example, Abdelali-Martini and Dey de Pryck, 2014, for Syria).

These economic transitions have also impacted on employment status by sex in rural areas. Women represent a very large share of unpaid « contributing family workers » in the Arab States and especially in North Africa (ILO, 2016). FAO (2016) cites percentages of female unpaid workers to total female agricultural workers of 60 per cent in Egypt, 45 per cent in Gaza and the West Bank, 66 per cent in Syria and 79 per cent in Yemen. While the percentage of contributing family workers has been decreasing worldwide and in the MENA region, the absolute figures still remain very high (ILO, 2016).

Figure 4: Share of women in the active agricultural population



Source: FAO 2011

Table 2 shows that only a very small percentage of rural women are engaged in wage labour in agriculture or non-agriculture, whereas almost one-third of rural men are employed as nonagricultural wage labour. The large percentage for female self-employed workers in agriculture and the figures of 53 per cent of females as “non-active or non-reported” suggests serious under-reporting of women’s work. Possible reasons include methodological biases that only capture one job per person and thus miss women’s multi productive and domestic roles, as well as conceptual biases that conceive of women as “wives” and “mothers” and that their “productive” work in the fields is part of their household tasks. For a fuller discussion see: Doss 2014; Mueller & Chan 2015: 12-15.

Table 2 : Rural employment in the MENA region, by sex and employment status (ages 15-64)

Employment status	Males	Females
Agriculture		
Self-employed	24.6 %	38.6 %
Wage earner	9.4 %	1.0 %
Non-agriculture		
Self-employed	8.8 %	2.8 %
Wage earner	30.9 %	3.9 %
Non-active or not reported	26.0 %	53.3 %

Source: Adapted from World Bank, 2007, Table 9.2. Data for 2000 or nearest year.

This ideology that women’s productive work is subsumed within their family and domestic roles is borne out by in-depth case studies in the MENA region. For example, in Syria, women agricultural labour contractors and wage labourers *who earned more than their husbands* still viewed their incomes as “supplementary” to their husbands’ earnings (Abdelali-Martini and Dey de Pryck, 2014).

3.2. Constraints on access to the labour market for rural women

Under the evolutionary socioeconomic context of the MENA region, women contribute more and more to the rural structures and they occupy an increasingly central place in family farming, improving the living conditions of rural households and contributing to the development of territories.

Labour market segmentation as being horizontal (by sector of activity) or vertical (corporate hierarchy), has a direct impact on labour market access for women. When at school, the latter are encouraged to target “traditionally female” sectors such as social, literary or legal careers. Their fields of activity are thus concentrated in sectors which are often less lucrative and restrict their access to the labour market even further, in particular in burgeoning sectors (such as the technical

and financial sectors). But educated women have more difficulty than their male counterparts in finding suitable work in rural areas, due to social norms that discourage their working far from the family home.

Access to the labour market for women is also limited by the lack of transport infrastructures. The absence of links between villages and between rural and urban (or industrial) zones as well as social restrictions causing women to be less mobile than men, restrict their opportunities for finding work.

The limited availability of means of production for women is yet another factor restricting their access to employment. Land ownership is rarely attributed to women who, when this is the case, entrust management to a male member of the family. Inheritance rights vary among the countries, in part due to different historical customs and in part to the religious affiliation. Generally, under Islamic law prevalent throughout the region, a woman is entitled to inherit half the amount inherited by her brother. However, in many cases, women do not receive their fair inheritance rights. A 2005 study in Syria carried out by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) found that approximately 20 per cent of women in rural areas and 15 per cent in urban areas did not receive their share of inheritance, even under the law (World Bank, 2013). Some countries have brought in laws to protect women. For example, in Jordan, Article 319 of the 2010 Personal Status Law mandates a three-month waiting period, starting from the deceased's death, during which a woman cannot waive her inheritance rights. This helps alleviate, temporarily, the social pressures put on a grieving woman by relatives to waive her rights (World Bank, 2013).

This problematic access to land and the means of production in general strongly circumscribes the entrepreneurial capacities of women, in particular in terms of creating and developing commercial agricultural activities. Furthermore, it also limits their capacity for mustering financial resources and public aid (often linked to land deeds), thereby exercising a strong impact on the subsistence means of rural households and, more generally, rural development and economic growth. After conducting an extensive review of the evidence for its landmark report, FAO (2011) concludes: « reducing the gender gap in farmers' access to productive resources could raise yields on women's farms by 20-30 per cent. This would raise total agricultural yields in developing countries by 2.5-4 per cent, reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 100-150 million. »

3.3. Emancipation of rural women and agricultural work

Some pre-conditions

Female agricultural labour can be a true source of emancipation, improving women's socioeconomic situation, enabling them to satisfy their needs and those of their children without requiring the authority of men and offering them increased independence in society (independence with regard to decision-making, finances, mobility, etc.).

The income derived from an agricultural activity must be sufficient to provide financial guarantees allowing women to improve their living conditions pursue their studies and finance their wedding among other things. In this respect, the fact that women are active can be seen as an asset legitimizing their position in society beyond simply being a mother and enabling them to participate in local governance and policy-making.

Labour can also, however, be a means of exploiting and alienating people where the application of labour law is virtually non-existent. It can therefore reinforce the imbalance in the relations between men and women through hierarchical relationships strongly conditioned by gender.

Female labour can also be purely short-term, primarily involving young single girls who often work to help their families and prepare their marriage. This aspect of work plays a key role in preventing girls from attending school and tends to make young women all the more dependent on their husbands. In many cases, these women stop working once they are married.

This short-term instability of female access to the labour market is exacerbated by the fact that fluctuations on the world market increasingly expose labour to a potential reduction in production costs.

In this respect, working to develop and maintain the access of women to the labour market would only appear genuinely desirable if labour represents a factor of emancipation and empowerment, according greater value to the person and giving them an increased sense of self-esteem and confidence. According to the ILO, decent work is characterized by the possibility of carrying out suitably paid productive work in safe conditions at the place of work and benefitting from social protection for the individual and their family.

Box 3 – What is a “quality” job?

A job referred to as “quality” must directly contribute to empowering workers (men and women) by strengthening desire (self-esteem, personal power, etc.), assets (remuneration, control of resources, etc.), knowledge (knowledge, recognition of know-how, etc.) and ability (capacity for solidarity and for collective defense, assertion of rights and a role in political life, etc.).

The job must enable people to extricate themselves from a precarious situation through reassuring elements enabling people and families to assume their professional, family and social obligations and to exercise their fundamental rights. It must also enable individuals to develop their skills, encouraging self-esteem, confidence, initiative-taking and control. For some individuals, emancipation through work is a process of social acknowledgement, promotion and the ability to satisfy their needs, resolve their problems and muster resources with a view to taking control of their own lives and improving their physical, moral and economic well-being.

The emancipation of women through work is thus dependent on three types of change which will enable the women in the region to become agents of their own change and to assert their rights:

- a change in individuals, whereby women become actors capable of analyzing their own situations and taking ownership of their own actions and decisions;
- a change in family structures and conventional forms of power;
- a change in social relationships, establishing new relations with other actors, new coalitions and collective support.

Conditions for the emancipation of rural women

The conditions of women empowerment depend to the employment status type. There are large differences among different categories of rural women, both between and within countries in the region, that need to be analyzed and addressed specifically in ways that are compatible with local norms and values.

The conditions and the needs of rural women vary depending on their working status as unpaid household workers, self-employed farmers or wage labourer. A woman can in addition response to these three types of status, simultaneously following the seasons:

- *Unpaid household workers*: Since the largest share of rural women continue to work as unpaid family labour, the key conditions for their « emancipation » are changes in social norms and practices that give greater value to women’s unpaid work and encourage joint decision-making with their husbands on farming matters, share of and use of household income (whether from the farm or non-farm work) for productive or consumption needs, and investment decisions (in agriculture, nonfarm enterprises, labour-saving technologies for

the household such as improved cooking stoves, refrigerators). There is evidence that changes are taking place spontaneously in response to multiple shifts in opportunities and needs for money and food. However, encouragement from respected public figures, including national and local religious leaders, community leaders, and local professionals such as school teachers, extension workers, veterinarians, government officials, can reinforce the legitimacy of these changes, particularly for those who are reluctant to embrace these changes.

- *Self-employed farmers*: Rural women have traditionally engaged in small income earning activities such as producing eggs, cheese, vegetables, medicinal plants, and carpets, sometimes hidden from their husbands to use their personal income as they wish (Fernandez and Mehdi, 2013). There is undoubtedly considerable potential for women to improve on and expand these income earning activities. Many NGOs, government and donor-assisted programmes have provided technical and financial assistance to women to support these activities. However, to offer to women with sustainable, remunerative agricultural businesses that bring solid incomes, there is need to considerably enhance their access to productive resources, technologies, information and services. For example, women represent under 5% of agricultural holders in North African & West Asian countries for which data are available (FAO 2011). Clearly respecting/enforcing women's rights to inherit land and livestock would contribute to improving their asset base. Laws may be needed to enable women to open bank accounts in their own names (without a husband's or male relative's signature) and to receive loans – although the culture and administrative procedures of financial institutions may also need revising to eliminate social prejudice against giving women loans. Again, extension services need reform in terms of their methods, procedures and recruitment of female personnel, to provide equitable services to women who are at present seriously neglected. Agricultural research and innovation professionals need to work more closely with rural women, to understand their needs, aspirations, constraints and opportunities.
- *Wage labourers* : With regard to rural women wage labourers, there is a great need for more jobs for women in quantity and in regularity (i.e. not just short term seasonal jobs, such as picking fruit, but ideally in value addition too, to create more jobs). There is also a greater need to create better jobs – and to improve the conditions of work in existing jobs. This includes greater respect des conditions de travail, equal pay for men and women for work of equivalent value, the payment of overtime, the fight against all forms of discrimination, harassment and the opportunities for women to join the ranks of technical experts, supervisors and managers and not remain largely trapped in poorly paid, relatively unskilled manual work. While some of these conditions can be met more easily if work contracts are formalised, it is not realistic to consider the formalization of agriculture for the time being in rural areas where much of the work is small-scale and family-based. However, larger scale farms/plantations and agricultural industries (processing and packing plants) are already improving their working conditions and gender equity within the work force though much remains to be done (Dey de Pryck & Termine, 2014). Building on a foundation of more

regulated, clearly defined and balanced contractual relations, women can envisage a socio-professional progression within agricultural businesses. Female workers can become crop technicians or forepersons entrusted with such tasks as recruiting workers in the villages, supervising and controlling work on the farm and recording hours worked. They can also play the role of intermediary between the farm manager and the workers. This acknowledgement of a woman's management skills and expertise has a strong impact on her self-esteem and financial independence and contributes to rebalancing gender relations in the professional and family units.

This context makes a strong social pressure on the households and contributes to their poverty conditions. The lack of acknowledgement of the importance and of the women work, reinforce this salary gap and maintain the women in a situation of dependence to the men and a poor self-esteem.

3.4. Which political tools?

In recent decades, most countries in the MENA region have developed national strategies targeting gender quality and reflecting a genuine political commitment to improving the status of women in the region. Politicians are nevertheless still confronted by certain challenges which currently limit the implementation of effective change. The challenges are:

- social, with a lack of awareness among the population and social structures that are still deeply marked by inequalities;
- legal, with the absence of legislation or the presence of an incomplete legal framework, the complexity of existing laws and the difficulty in implementing them;
- institutional, with limited effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, the difficulty in promoting gender equality within the framework of reforms applied to the governmental structure as a whole and the lack of skills to manage and analyses the issue of gender and parity, in particular in the public services.

The political reforms relating to gender quality must be designed as part of a clear and shared strategic planning by means of participatory processes. The commitment of the populations, dialogue and good governance, in particular at local level, are the very core of a functional system aimed at developing the civil, political and economic rights of women within a framework of clearly identified national orientations. In this respect, women's organizations must be given the opportunity to participate in the policy definition process.

At governmental level, political coordination enabling reforms to be implemented must be introduced both horizontally, through the different institutional entities boasting different skills and sectors of intervention (economic, social, environmental, etc.) and vertically, between the central and local levels of government (from the central and local decision-making bodies to the executing agencies).

A system based on participatory and transversal principles must therefore be capable of analyzing the impact of laws and initiatives on the issue of gender. An apparently neutral political approach does not necessarily imply gender equality and may prove to be discriminatory by affecting men and

women in different ways. In this respect, gender equality must form the basis of policy-making, from the initial stage of policy development to the implementation and the evaluation of policy impacts.

The presence of central institutions specializing in the question of gender quality, enabling political reforms to be generalized and coordinated between the different ministries and proposing and developing tools, guides and analyses must be encouraged at governmental level. The institutions dealing with gender generally have relatively limited powers at present as they often have other remits (such as human rights, social affairs or child protection) or because they lack authority, visibility and/or available tools.

The effective functioning of such central institutions is primarily conditioned by: i) a clearly identified authority and remit, ii) an adequate budget, resources and teams, iii) strong political commitment and iv) their consideration at the highest levels of government (if gender issues are not incorporated into the activities of the institutions as a whole, the efforts made in favour of equality may well be marginalized).

The institutional framework must also be more effective with clear roles assigned to all stakeholders and the introduction of coordination mechanisms between organizations. The institutions must also understand the importance of the objectives defined, identify the challenges, provide the necessary resources and improve their capacities for effectively implementing ministerial strategies.

Moreover, the introduction of independent supervision and evaluation of the efficacy of the policies and strategies identified is essential in ensuring the informed development of programmes and initiatives before implementing them and guaranteeing their impact. With this in mind, it would seem crucial to support evaluations by means of reliable accounting, good-quality data and an efficient and coordinated statistical system (in particular between producers and collectors).

IV. Conclusion

Rural youth and women remain vulnerable groups in the MENA region. Common vulnerability factors include low access to the needed capitals for economic and human development. It also includes: lack of access to land, water and to other structures of production, lack of access to financial resources, lack of access to training and agricultural advice, lack of social networks, and lack of participation in institutions and rural governance. Where they are possible, they remain essentially informal and precarious.

Still, young people and women have specific advantages both for agriculture and the organization of development in rural areas: youth mobility is a source of innovation in new territories; the geographical stability of women is a resource for local and collective organization and governance.

Young people are more and more numerous in the population of the MENA region. Agriculture remains their first source of employment even informal. Women have to assume more and more responsibilities in household works due to the migration of many heads of household related to economic reasons. In fact, the key blocking factors mostly remain cultural ones.

At the policy level, little priority seems to be given to these trends: neither specific means, nor adapted policy is thought out or implemented to enable the youth and women to develop their participation in agricultural and rural development. Rural women and young people mostly find themselves in strategies that look for circumventing the constraints they face, which far from solving their difficulties, only reinforces their situation of vulnerability and precariousness and their marginalization of the formal economic system.

In the middle term, this lack of interest will have serious consequences on the situation of rural areas and their agriculture, and even on the social stability in the region. The current socio-political upheavals in the MENA region should all the more strongly encourage the public authorities to undertake reforms in favor of these social groups because youth and women are key resources to guarantee social and economic stability in the middle and long term.

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