



# Gender-Smart Investing in MENA:

An Egyptian perspective on strengthening investment strategies to empower women

*"There is an urgent need for investors to promote equality through their decisions, so that society emerges from this crisis faster, more inclusive and resilient than before" – Tania Carneige, Leader of KPMG Impact Ventures Practice, KPMG 2020*

September 2021

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# ABOUT THIS PRACTITIONER BRIEF

This Practitioner Brief was co-developed by Chloé Gueguen and Salma Hassanein from the Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF) and Minoush Abdel-Meguid, from Mezzan Investments. It presents current learning and experience of Gender-Smart Investment in Egypt and develops a proprietary and practical approach to GSI Investment that will be implemented through Mezzan's upcoming Gender-Smart Fund.

## About Mezzan Investments

Mezzan Investments is a gender-smart mezzanine private equity fund that is under establishment and will be launched in Egypt. Mezzan seeks to invest in opportunities in the Small and Medium-size Enterprises (SME) space in Egypt in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and gender-smart investment strategies. Mezzan will work with Egyptian companies to develop a more gender-balanced approach which bridges the gender gap within companies, stakeholders and communities by providing hybrid financing to finance growth and capital restructuring needs. This research is being used to develop Mezzan's Gender-Smart Strategy.

*The word Mezzan in Arabic means 'balance'. Mezzan Investments will adopt a gender-smart investment strategy at both the fund manager and the portfolio level and create impact by highlighting the business case for greater diversity and gender equality*

Minoush Abdel-Meguid,  
CEO at Mezzan

## About the Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF)

Launched in 2015 and funded by the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the DAI implemented AWEF seeks to stimulate and increased Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) through a Market Systems Development (MSD) approach in Jordan and Egypt. AWEF's learning series on Women's Economic Empowerment in MSD aims to catalyse discussion and engagement on the topic and share current initiatives, good practices and lessons learned amongst and between donors, the private sector and other practitioners. This paper is part of AWEF's wider learning series.

## About DAI

DAI is a global international development company that works on the frontlines of global development. DAI operates in over 100 countries and runs projects for a range of clients - USAID, EU, FCDO, AFD, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Millennium Challenge Corporation, World Bank, Danida, UNICEF, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, private companies, and national and subnational governments. DAI develops innovative solutions to tackle development problems caused by inefficient markets, ineffective governance, and instability in sectors including economic growth, governance, global health, information and communications technology, environment and energy, stability, and sustainable business. DAI has a strong focus on mainstreaming and promoting inclusivity within its development approach and adheres to four key values: integrity, responsibility, excellence, and global citizenship.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, we want to thank AWEF's donor, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the British Embassy to Egypt for their generous financial support and longstanding commitment to advance women's economic empowerment in Egypt and across the world.



# LIST OF ACRONYMS

Arab Women's Enterprise Fund	<b>AWEF</b>
Business-to-Customers	<b>B2C</b>
Chief Executive Officer	<b>CEO</b>
Commercial International Bank	<b>CIB</b>
Digital Financial Services Learning Programme	<b>DFSL</b>
Egypt's Gender Equity Seal	<b>EGES</b>
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office	<b>FCDO</b>
Financial Services Regulatory Authority	<b>FRA</b>
Gender Equality Scorecard	<b>GES</b>
Gender Equality & Women Empowerment	<b>GEWE</b>
Gender-Smart Investing	<b>GSI</b>
Gender Lens Investing	<b>GLI</b>
International Finance Corporation	<b>IFC</b>
Micro-Finance Institutions	<b>MFI</b>
Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises	<b>MSME</b>
Middle East & North Africa	<b>MENA</b>
National Council for Women	<b>NCW</b>
Small and Medium Sized Enterprises	<b>SME</b>
United National Development Program	<b>UNDP</b>
United States Dollar	<b>USD</b>
World Economic Forum	<b>WEF</b>
Women Empowerment Principles	<b>WEP</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Purpose of this Practitioner Brief

This Practitioner Brief presents key findings of research conducted in partnership by Egyptian investment fund, Mezzan Investments, and the FCDO funded Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF), from March to September 2021. The Brief aims to catalyse discussion and action across Gender-Smart Investing (GSI) practitioners, Egyptian firms and impact investors. It has three specific objectives:

1. It contributes to thinking and ideas that align with the **2X Challenge's global thought movement**. It takes stock of emerging learning from Gender-Smart Investing in Egypt and the wider MENA region. It assesses, through on-the-ground analysis, the extent to which GSI strategies and best practices are being adopted across different sectors principally in Egypt.
2. It aims to encourage more businesses to adopt gender-smart investment strategies and scale their impact to achieve greater gender balance and empower more Egyptian women. It presents emerging good practices in the Gender-Smart Investing field and draws on testimonies and examples of how AWEF has worked with corporate partners and Egyptian firms to apply GSI strategies (see Section 2).
3. It aims to catalyse innovative gender-smart investing practices among impact investors, starting with Mezzan Investments itself. As a pioneer private equity investment manager, Mezzan plans to establish a new gender-smart fund dedicated to Egypt which provides growth and restructuring capital to Egyptian SMEs within a GSI framework. The findings from this research will help Mezzan develop a unique approach to Gender-Smart Investment based on a sound understanding of gender equality, gender-smart business models and approaches required to embed women's economic empowerment in Egyptian companies. The fund will be the first of its kind in the MENA region and Mezzan is committed to driving forward this new innovative initiative.

## Women's Economic Empowerment challenges in MENA and in Egypt

Despite progress over recent years, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains the region with the largest gender gap in the world, with an estimated 142.4 years to close the gender gap, if progress continues at the current pace. When it comes to Women's Economic Participation and Opportunity, the region is the second-lowest global performer, just ahead of South Asia. Only 3 in 10 women in the region participate in the labour force (31%), yet this figure hides regional disparities: in Egypt, less than 2 in 10 women (20%) participate in the labour force - among the lowest rate in the world - only 7.4% of managers in the country are women, and women's income is, on average, only 22% that of a man<sup>1</sup>.

As part of its 'Vision 2030' Strategy, Egypt has undergone a major economic reform over the past five years, including a significant shift in development and social policies. The success of this reform process depends on the private sector response, and the creation of new jobs particularly in the formal labour market. With 80% of women currently excluded from the formal labour force, the size of the challenge in the global pandemic context is clear. Global research<sup>2</sup> shows that women are more likely to experience economic fallout from COVID-19, and their jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis as men's jobs. The Arab States is the region that observed the second highest drop in the number of employed women: between 2019 and 2020, women's employment declined by 4.1% and men's employment by 1.8%<sup>3</sup>.

## Why it makes business sense to invest in women

While the challenges are significant, so are the socio-economic opportunities. Research<sup>4</sup> shows that, in Egypt, investment in women's empowerment could lead to 3.8 million fewer people in poverty by 2030. Greater gender equality is not only a social duty, it is good for the economy and business. Investing in women's economic empowerment can have a positive impact on company financial performance, governance, innovation and even risk management. If female employment rates were to match male employment rates in Egypt, this would result in a 34% increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)<sup>5</sup>. As Figure 1 demonstrates, more inclusive approaches make business sense.

1. Women Economic Forum, Global gender Gap report, Insight Report March 2021  
 2. COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects, McKinsey Global Institute, 2020  
 3. Building Forward Fairer: Women's rights to work and at work at the core of the COVID-19 recovery, ILO, 2021  
 4. Empowering the Third Bn: Women and the World of Work, Booz and Company, 2012

**FIGURE 1:** *The Business Case for Investing in women*

Women play a key role in economic life as employees, consumers, entrepreneurs, producers, and investors. There is a strong business case for investing in more inclusive operating, financing, and consumer engagement strategies. AWEF and wider global research<sup>6</sup> demonstrates that investing in women and building more inclusive corporate cultures can deliver a surprising array of benefits.



It is smart business to invest in...



**Female entrepreneurs**

Companies founded by women deliver twice as much revenue per dollar invested<sup>7</sup>



**Female customers**

Globally women generated an estimated USD 31.8 trillion in consumer spending in 2019<sup>9</sup>. On average, 89% of women across the world reported controlling or sharing daily shopping needs compared to only 41% of men<sup>10</sup>. Based on a study of insurance firms in ten emerging markets, the insurance sector could capture USD 1.7 trillion in new business by 2030 if insurance firms provided more products and services targeted at women<sup>11</sup>.



**Female investors**

Recent research conducted by IFC found the Private Equity and Venture Capital firms with gender-balanced senior teams delivered between 10% and 20% higher returns than teams with a majority male or female leaders<sup>12</sup>. Another study found that gender-balanced Fund Managers – those with at least 30% representation of women in senior investment roles – generate up to 20% higher returns than those that are not gender diverse<sup>13</sup>.



**...it is also good for macroeconomic growth and sustainable development**

According to McKinsey, if women's participation rates in the global economy were the same as men's, it would add USD 28 trillion or 26% to annual GDP by 2021<sup>14</sup>



6. Working with the Private Sector to Empower Women: What to Measure and How to Build the Business Case for Change, AWEF  
 7. Why Women-Owned Start-ups Are a Better Bet, BCG, 2018  
 8. T.Moran, B. Kotschwar, M. Nolan, Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey, Peterson Institute for International Economics, (2016)  
 9. World Data Lab, "MarketPro" (2020)  
 10. Nielsen, "Women: Primed and Ready for Progress," (October 14, 2019)  
 11. IFC, SHEforSHIELD: Insure Women to Better Protect All, (2015)  
 12. IFC, Moving Toward Gender Balance in Private Equity and Venture Capital (2019)  
 13. IFC, Moving Toward Gender Balance in Private Equity and Venture Capital (2019)  
 14. The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can add \$12 trillion to Global Growth, McKinsey Global Institute, 2015

### The GSI challenge - broadening and deepening Gender-Smart Investing

Despite the business and impact case for investing in women being well documented, global investment capital continues to be directed to men, for instance, only two per cent of venture capital globally goes to women-led start-ups. This paradox has already kick started several initiatives to enhance gender-smart investing and a brief history of Gender-Smart Investing is summarised in Annex 2. What this shows is that, since 2009, there has been increasing interest and focus on gender-smart investing particularly around financing initiatives, entrepreneurship, and leadership. However, the **Gender-Smart challenge now is to more effectively integrate GSI within mainstream investment strategies, business models and processes.** This Brief presents five strategies to strengthen GSI and advance women's economic empowerment. These strategies focus on:

**FIGURE 2:** Five strategies to strengthen GSI and advance women's economic empowerment



**STRATEGY ONE**  
Increasing Women in Leadership and Management



**STRATEGY TWO**  
Increasing Recruitment and Retention of Female Talent and Committing to an inclusive workforce



**STRATEGY THREE**  
Building more Inclusive Value Chains and Accelerating Women's Financial Inclusion



**STRATEGY FOUR**  
Designing and Developing Products and Services for Female Consumers



**STRATEGY FIVE**  
Strengthening Leadership and Public Commitment to Women's Empowerment

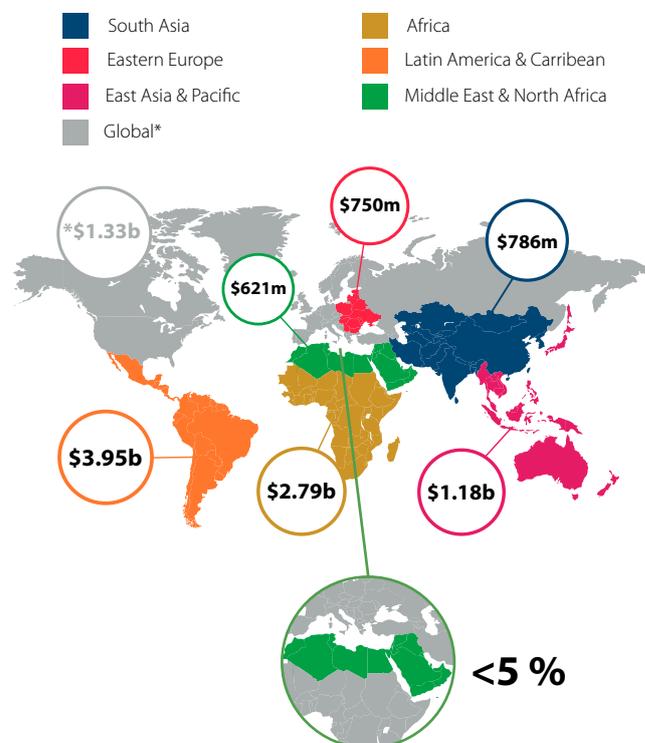
These strategies closely resonate with the objectives and ambitions of the new "2X Challenge" which was extended and renewed in June 2021<sup>15</sup>. G7 Foreign and Development Ministers called for the G7 and other Development Finance Institutions to collectively mobilise USD 15 billion by 2022 to provide women in developing countries with improved access to leadership opportunities, quality employment, finance, enterprise support and products and services that enhance economic participation and access. This builds on the success of the 2018-20 2X challenge which mobilised USD 11.4 billion of investment across 200 businesses in the developing world. However, the MENA region accounted for just 5% of this USD \$11.4 billion-worth of GSI investments<sup>16</sup>.

*The incredible increase in gender lens investing that the 2X Challenge is unlocking in this next phase will play a vital role in creating equitable, resilient, sustainable economies in the post-COVID-19 recovery. Investing in women is good business – and a catalyst for achieving all of the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

**Jessica Espinoza,**  
Chair of the 2X Challenge and Vice President, Investments at DEG, during the launch of the new 2X challenge, 9 June 2021

This suggests that a comprehensive and collective effort is needed in the MENA region to mobilise action to mainstream Gender-Smart Investing. Besides, to date most of the gender-smart investment has come from the financial services sector and more needs to be done to explore and strengthen GSI practices in other sectors. Our research suggests there are examples of success and opportunities to build on at the investor and firm level. In this Brief we provide examples of what is being done in several sectors and firms in Egypt covering financial services, agri-business and food, media, and manufacturing (with a focus on ready-made-garments). We recommend specific areas for action based on real world examples and good practice. The Brief is one contribution to a much wider debate on what more can be done to broaden and deepen action on GSI across Egypt and the Middle East and North Africa Region.

**FIGURE 3:** 2X Challenge's investments committed and mobilized in the world and in MENA (2018-2020)



15. Global gender finance initiative sets ambitious new \$15 billion fundraising goal after securing more than double its original \$3 billion target, 2X Challenge Press Release, June 2021

16. <https://www.2xchallenge.org/>

# INTRODUCTION

## Defining Gender-Smart Investing

While the definition for **gender-smart investing** can be quite broad, for the purpose of this brief, the term “Gender-Smart” is used to reflect an ethos and action being taken by investors, businesses or other community stakeholders who understand that **gender is material to financial, commercial, and development outcomes**.

From an **investor’s viewpoint**, Gender-Smart Investors recognise that financial systems engage with and benefit men and women differently and are actively committed to using finance as a tool to promote gender equality. Gender-Smart investing can be defined as an investment strategy that seeks to intentionally, and measurably, to use capital to address gender disparities between women and men and better inform investment decisions. Applying a “Gender-lens” can highlight opportunities and reveal risks that strengthen investment decision-making to achieve enhanced financial and social outcomes. [The recent CDC and IFC’s Fund Manager Guide to Gender-Smart Investing](#)<sup>17</sup> defines strategies that investors can adopt at the firm or portfolio level. This Brief has drawn on these resources and particularly the IFC SheWorks Report<sup>18</sup> which focuses on putting gender-smart commitments into practice. Our focus is on enhancing Gender-Smart Investing (GSI) from a **business viewpoint** although governments also play a key role in improving the enabling environment for GSI. In Section 2, we present five GSI strategies that businesses can adopt to empower women as leaders and managers, employees, suppliers, customers, and investees. Within these there is a particular emphasis on action to enhance financial inclusion – this partly reflects the evolution of GSI but also the expertise and experience that AWEF and Mezzan bring to this area of work.

Throughout the Brief we draw on evidence from research carried out in Egypt, examples of AWEF business models and interventions and more detailed research and engagement with Paymob – a leading digital finance company that has proactively mainstreamed gender-smart investing across its business and operations ([See Annex 1](#)).

## Overview of the Brief and Methodology

This Practitioner Brief covers the following:

- **Section 1** provides an overview of gender disparities and women’s economic empowerment gaps in Egypt compared to its peer economies. This includes findings from a field survey carried out for this Brief.
- **Section 2** presents five gender-smart investing strategies and examples of how these have been applied by companies in Egypt.
- **Section 3** presents key recommendations for companies and investors seeking to adopt more ambitious approaches on Gender-Smart Investment.
- **Annex 1** presents a deeper dive into the digital finance and Fintech sector in Egypt and provides an overview of gender-smart investing gaps and opportunities. It includes lessons learnt from AWEF’s Digital Financial Inclusion interventions and a case study of AWEF’s partnership with Paymob<sup>19</sup> - this examines how Paymob has successfully incorporated gender-smart investment strategies into its product, market development strategies, work environment and company culture.

Box 1 presents details of the research methodology applied to develop this Brief. It involved a mixed-methods approach including: i) a desk review of publicly available reports; ii) stakeholder interviews conducted with Egyptian firms; iii) an in-depth review of Paymob’s processes and staff interviews and; iv) a quantitative survey disseminated digitally to 21 firms in Egypt between April and August 2021.

### BOX 1 — Research Methodology

- The digital survey questions examined various aspects of each business’s approach to gender - policies in place, female representation at boards and within the workforce. It gathered subjective information on perceptions regarding the importance of diversity, women’s contributions to decision making within companies and related impacts on creativity and innovation. The survey covered a range of companies from different industries, sizes, geographies, private and public-sector companies.
- Several stakeholder interviews were conducted with senior management in a more limited number of companies. Questions covered policies adopted by the companies to support and empower women, challenges companies faced attracting and retaining women and specific constraints female entrepreneurs face as they set up, grow and expand their own businesses.
- Extensive consultation was also done with the focus company Paymob, including several interviews and calls with employees of the company at senior and middle management level. Data was provided by the company and several project partners. The score card used for GSI scoring for Paymob was developed by [SEAF](#) (“Small Enterprise Assistance Funds”) a global private equity impact manager. The score card was based on data provided by Paymob and follow-up interviews to ensure total impartiality.
- Time, resources, and methodological considerations constrained data collection throughout this process. Some interviewees also felt more comfortable remaining anonymous, and their names have been omitted from the research.

The business case for Gender-Smart Investing is clear cut. Findings from the research carried out for this Brief suggest there are examples of good practice emerging in Egypt and the wider MENA region. There are positive signs of change and increased understanding of why GSI makes business sense and is good for investors. However, many of the GSI strategies presented in this Brief have been supported by donor funds and the private sector is not yet taking the lead on driving mainstreaming of GSI.

AWEF and Mezzan urge investors and businesses to more proactively initiate, scale and embed GSI within their business and operations. This Brief provides examples of what works and approaches that can be adopted across the five GSI strategic areas outlined above. In Section 3 we recommend specific actions that can be taken by a wide range of actors to accelerate progress on GSI. These include actions to increase women in leadership and management positions and the

introduction of new practices to attract and retain female talent and build a more diverse workforce. They include actions to encourage inclusive supply chains and accelerate financial inclusion, and public corporate commitments to change. The recommendations provide a menu of options and opportunities which we hope will stimulate action by GSI practitioners, Egyptian firms, Chambers of Commerce, Industry Federations and associations, the National Council for Women, Women’s associations, and impact investors.

<sup>17</sup>. The recent CDC and IFC’s Fund Manager Guide to Gender-Smart Investing

<sup>18</sup>. She Works: Putting Gender-Smart Commitments into practice, 2016)

<sup>19</sup>. Paymob is a leading digital finance company who, in April 2021, raised the largest Series A round in Egypt (a total of \$18.5 mn) and one of the largest equity rounds in North Africa <https://techcrunch.com/2021/04/08/egypts-paymob-closes-18-5m-series-a-to-expand-payments-services-across-mena/>

## Section 1:

# MEASURING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN EGYPT

This section reviews evidence on how Egypt ranks on global women's economic empowerment (WEE) standards and findings from field work in Egypt. The businesses surveyed and interviewed were principally those that AWEF have worked with or those that Mezzan is connected with. Whilst the firms surveyed may not necessarily be representative of all Egyptian businesses, their practices and priorities shed light on emerging GSI trends, and areas where more attention is needed.

### Egypt's performance against the Global Gender Gap

Current efforts to measure the global gender gap are led by the UNDP [Gender Inequality Index \(GII\)](#) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) [Gender Gap Index \(GGI\)](#). While the GII looks at differences between women and men in health, empowerment, and labour participation, the GGI looks at gender inequalities in economic participation, political participation, education attainment, health and survival.

Egypt is currently ranked 108 out of 162 countries under the GII (2020), and 129 out of 156 countries under the GGI (2021). Although overall empowerment gaps may have decreased since the onset of COVID-19, Egypt scores the lowest under the economic participation sub-index due to long-standing gender inequalities in labour force participation, representation in leadership and managerial positions, unequal access to financial assets and income disparities. Indeed, the GGI shows that only one in five women are in the labour market (20%) and less than 7.4% of managers in Egypt are women. These inequalities are reflected in income and wage gaps where, on average, women's income in Egypt is only 22% that of men. Both the GII and GGI index demonstrate that Egypt is lagging regionally, and globally on women's economic empowerment and significant effort is needed for Egypt to better integrate women into the workforce and the wider economy.

### Egypt's Gender Gap - evidence from a field survey among AWEF and Mezzan's partners:

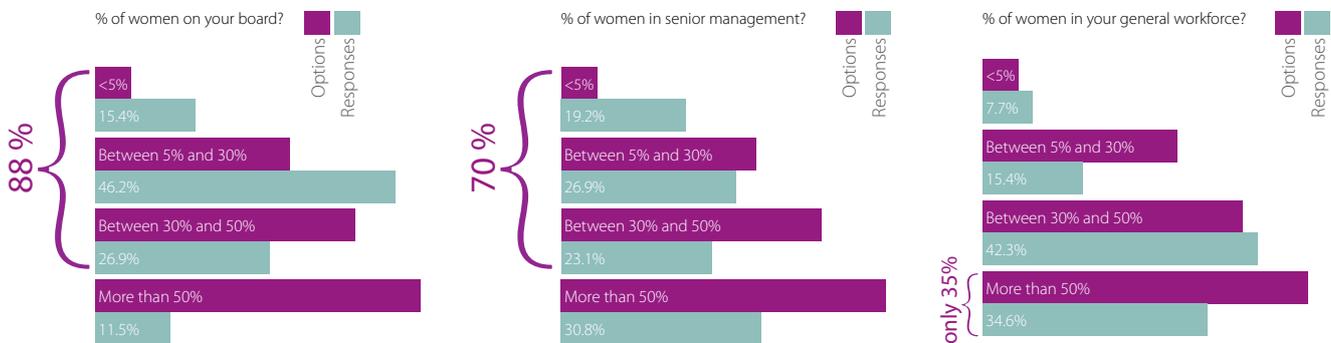
To strengthen our understanding of WEE gaps at the country-level, a survey was launched to explore the extent to which these gaps were observable at the company-level among our portfolio of grantees and business partners. This involved a digital survey covering 21 Egyptian firms which assessed female representation at the board, senior management and employee levels, recruitment retention and promotion policies, female customer-targeting mechanisms, and representation of women-owned SMEs within value-chains. Figure 1 summarises the survey results<sup>20</sup> which reinforce many of the GGI and GII findings.

20. The survey was non-representative of the whole Egyptian private sector, it was carried out with 21 Egyptian companies from a variety of industry sectors, sizes and stages of development



**FIGURE 4:** Overview of Survey Results

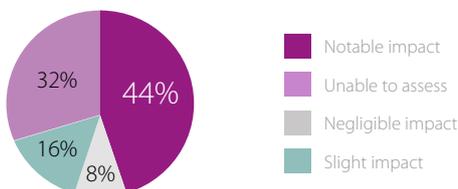
**Key finding 1: there is a glass ceiling that prevents women from attaining board and leadership positions.** Most companies interviewed stated that women represented a minority in their Board (88%) and senior management (70%). Although female representation is increasing in most firms, the rate of increase is relatively slow and more could be usefully done to accelerate this change process.



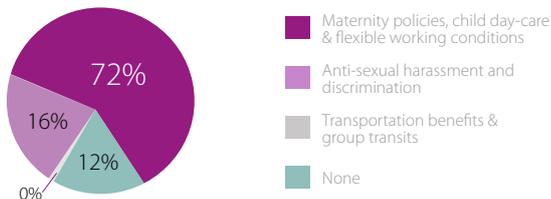
**Key finding 2: more needs to be done to attract and retain women in the workforce.** Whilst there was recognition that more inclusive policies have had a notable impact on business performance, only 35% of firms had achieved gender balance in their workforce. For most firms, female representation was between 30% and 50% and less than 1 in 5 companies had anti-sexual harassment mechanisms in place. This suggests that even within this sample of relatively “gender-aware” firms, more work is needed to build inclusive workplaces, strengthen family friendly policies and strengthen gender-sensitive recruitment and retention policies.

**Key finding 3: there are latent commercial benefits from engaging women more proactively as producers and consumers.** The survey also provided evidence that female-owned businesses within firm’s supply chains are perceived to be very reliable, creative and innovative. The field work and wider research suggested that, while many companies recognise there is a commercial opportunity to design services and products that meet women’s specific needs, only a limited number of companies have actually developed, or put in place, targeted strategies to realise this potential.<sup>21</sup>

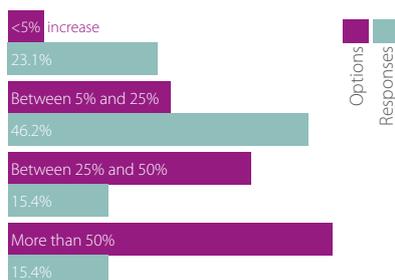
To what extent do you think that your inclusive work policies and gender focused CSR has positively impacted your business in terms of innovation, productivity, talent acquisition, retention and brand equity?



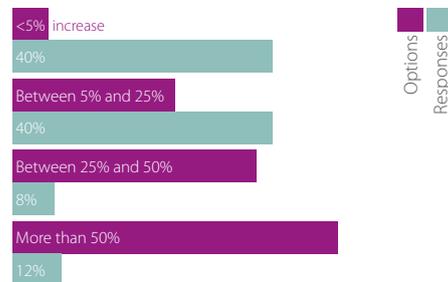
Do you have special policies that support hiring and retaining women in your company?



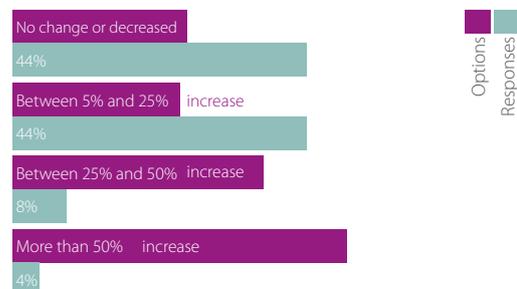
Overall increase in female representation (board, senior management, and workforce) over the past three years



What is the percentage of female owned/led companies within your supply chain?



How much has this percentage of female owned/led companies within your supply chain changed over the past three years?



20. The survey was non-representative of the whole Egyptian private sector, it was carried out with 21 Egyptian companies from a variety of industry sectors, sizes and stages of development

21. Section 2 provides some concrete examples of how firms, particularly in the financial sector are beginning to adjust their business model to target this relatively untapped market of female consumers.

# حفلة تكريم دات

## Section 2:

### GENDER-SMART INVESTMENT STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN EGYPT

This section provides an overview of five types of gender-smart investment strategies that businesses could adopt to empower women more productively within their business. We examine the extent to which these strategies are beginning to be adopted in Egypt and highlight emerging challenges and success stories.



**STRATEGY ONE**  
Increasing Women in Leadership  
and Management



**STRATEGY TWO**  
Increasing Recruitment and Retention  
of Female Talent and Committing to an  
inclusive workforce



**STRATEGY THREE**  
Building more Inclusive Value Chains and  
Accelerating Women's Financial Inclusion



**STRATEGY FOUR**  
Designing and Developing Products and  
Services for Female Consumers



**STRATEGY FIVE**  
Strengthening Leadership and Public  
Commitment to Women's Empowerment





## GSi STRATEGY ONE:

### Increasing Women in Leadership and Management

Gender diverse boards add value to Egyptian companies and make them more attractive to investors. In 2019, the IFC surveyed 2,139 privately held and listed companies in Egypt and concluded that gender diverse boards lead to stronger company performance, financially and organizationally. Currently, 47% of companies have women on their boards and women represent around 14% of all board members in Egypt<sup>22</sup>. This finding was further validated by the field survey conducted for this brief as presented in the previous section.

#### The presence of women on boards and in senior management can bring significant benefits to businesses:

- 1. Higher profitability.** The same IFC study shows that companies with female board members outperform their peers with a 2% higher return on equity (for private companies and 7% for listed companies). They have a 4% higher return on assets and 5% higher return on sales.
- 2. Higher solvency.** The study also demonstrates that publicly listed companies with female board members had 2% higher equity ratio, a lower debt-to-equity ratio of 0.95 (compared to 1.04) and 4% lower debt-to-asset ratio.
- 3. Improved conflict management and communication.** Diversity on boards deepens discussion by allowing and presenting different perspectives. Women tend to resolve conflict and misunderstandings during discussions.



*Board meetings are more disciplined and structured derived from women's inherent multi-tasking capacities and attention to detail*

Dr. Alia Soliman

Several boards' member and IFC Corporate Governance Master Trainer



- 4. Lower employee turnover** as women tend to focus more on culture and work environment contributing to higher employee satisfaction and retention.

- 5. Increased corporate social responsibility, high innovation** and spending on research and development.

During field interviews conducted as part of this brief, several board members (male and female) highlighted the strengths that female board members bring to their business and suggested various actions that companies can take to strengthen women's representation in Boards and Senior Management, summarised in the [Section 3](#).

#### BOX 2 — Financial Regulatory Authority, mandating women on boards among non-banking financial institutions

Women's representation in boards and leadership can also be encouraged by catalytic legislation. For example, in the financial sector, the [Financial Regulatory Authority \(FRA\)](#) – the authority responsible for regulating the non-banking sector - issued Decree 109 in July 2021, which requires listed and regulated non-banking companies to increase female board representation to 25% or at least two board members. In addition, the FRA's Egyptian Institute of Directors is offering women a 50% discount for its Certified Board Member Certification program, the regulator's training arm in a partnership with the IFC. These decisions and commitments are in line with the FRA's commitment to achieve sustainable development and women empowerment plans as well as the implementation of the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women by 2030, in which women are supposed to hold 30% of leadership positions in the country.



22. Women on Board in Egypt, How Gender-Diverse Boards Bring Value to Egyptian Companies, IFC, 2019



## GSI STRATEGY TWO:

### Increasing Recruitment and Retention of Female Talent and Committing to an Inclusive Workforce

Global research shows clear economic benefits from greater gender diversity in the workplace. An [IMF study](#)<sup>23</sup> indicates that greater female participation can bring different skills and perspectives to the workplace, including different attitudes to risk and collaboration, which can in turn, lead to innovative products and service design. Having a stronger gender balance in the workforce is also increasingly valued by investors and considered a top criterion for GSI investment<sup>24</sup>.

Whilst many companies strive to become more diverse, a [World Bank study](#)<sup>25</sup> highlights several factors that limit the recruitment and retention of Egyptian women in the workforce.

- 1. Sexual Harassment in the workplace:** Although Egypt is one of the few countries that criminalises sexual harassment in employment, education, and public spaces and brought in legislation in 2014 to this effect, women continue to suffer from varying forms of verbal and physical abuse, all of which limit their activity and productivity. A 2015 study reported that over 50% of 18–64-year-old women experienced sexual harassment on public transport and over 90% of the victims did not report the incident due to the fear of shaming<sup>26</sup>. Transportation to work is a challenge, particularly for working women in Egypt, and families sometimes choose to forgo women working to avoid their exposure to harassment on public transport. This aligned with findings from our fieldwork survey which demonstrated that only 18% of the firms surveyed had an anti-sexual harassment policy and most people interviewed had not conducted any form of anti-sexual harassment training.
- 2. Limiting Social Norms:** Some jobs are done almost exclusively by men, and women either shy away from them due to social norms, or companies avoid recruiting women into these positions due to prevailing social norms or values.
- 3. Burdens of family responsibilities and lack of affordable childcare facilities:** Many companies fail to adopt family friendly policies and those interviewed highlighted the need to create mechanisms to help women to return to work, for example by providing or enabling access to affordable childcare.

*“We need to empower women more through good, affordable (or subsidised) childcare options, more flexible working arrangements during the early child-rearing years, more gender sensitive policies, including anti-sexual harassment policies. I am certain that these will be cost effective interventions as I have personally seen the significant value of diversity in the workplace, and the added value that females bring into their teams*

**Noura Selim**  
Executive Director, Sawiris Foundation

As well as strengthening sexual harassment policies and practices, there are other complementary actions that companies can take to encourage a more diverse workforce, as illustrated in the [Section 3](#). In the Agriculture and Ready-Made-Garments sectors for instance, AWEF worked with leading firms to strengthen communication between female workers and management, and embedded supervisory soft-skill training to make the workplace more attractive to women. As [Box 3](#) and [Box 4](#) illustrate, this generated positive results for staff retention and a reduction in absenteeism, which enhanced the participating companies' bottom line.



<sup>23</sup>. Economic Gains from Gender Inclusion: Even Greater than You Thought, IMF Blog, 2018

<sup>24</sup>. CDC 2X Challenge Criteria

<sup>25</sup>. Women Economic Empowerment Study, The World Bank, May 2018

<sup>26</sup>. World Bank Women Economic Empowerment 2018

**BOX 3** — Strengthening communication and supervisory skills in the Citrus Sector

Women are often limited to less prestigious, lower-paid roles and are notably under-represented in supervisory levels in Egyptian agricultural companies. AWEF's research in the agricultural sector demonstrated a paternal dimension to the relationship between female workers and male supervisors. In the citrus sub-sector, although women were perceived to be more skilful and diligent than men and were in high demand, most businesses interviewed by AWEF found that the primary causes of high turnover amongst the female workforce was treatment by their, predominantly male, supervisors.

To address this, AWEF partnered with leading agricultural firms and training service providers to deliver supervisor soft skills training using a 'Train-the-Trainer' (ToT) model. The intervention focused on strengthening communication and changing supervisor behaviour towards women employees in order to reduce absenteeism and staff turnover rates, to increase productivity, and improve product quality control. AWEF supported 9 packhouse firms - Daltex, El Saf We ElMarwa, Agrofood, ElRoda, Royal Fruit, Blue Nile, Agroland, British Products Selling Centre and Japanese Food Solutions to deliver 5 Soft-Skills training courses that included Safety & Hygiene, First Aid skills, Communication Skills, Team Building & Leadership skills. These training courses were delivered to over 4100 female packhouse workers.

**The introduction of such soft skills training generated substantial savings for the pack houses in terms of improved production, productivity, quality and efficiency and effectiveness on the production line.** There were also benefits resulting from the reduced turnover of staff, lower absenteeism rates, and reduced time spent solving disputes. AWEF analysed the commercial benefits to firms of this training and shared the results of the assessment to encourage other packhouses and firms in the citrus sector to replicate these practices.

**BOX 4** — Strengthening supervisory skills in the Ready-Made-Garments sector

In the Ready-Made-Garments sub-sector, AWEF research with factory management noted how poor inter-personal relationships between female employees and male supervisors translated into productivity issues. The traditional response was to employ additional supervisors, increasing costs with limited effectiveness and return. To address this, AWEF formed partnerships with factories and training service providers to deliver supervisor soft skills training (SST) with the aim of changing male supervisor behaviour toward women employees, reducing absenteeism and staff turnover, increasing productivity and product quality control.

Arafa Holding, an Egypt-based multinational textiles company produces menswear for the US and European markets. Two of Arafa's subsidiaries, Swiss Garment Company (SGC) and Egypt Tailoring Company (ETC), partnered with AWEF and the GIZ Labour Market Access Project (LMAP) to provide a supervisory skills training (SST) programme to 25 of their supervisors. The soft skills training provides tools for management and leadership, highlighting the importance of behaviours, and training supervisors to understand habitual negative reactions and behaviours and how to manage and mitigate them. Following the success of the initial SST, a Training of Trainers model was added to extend the training capacity for the firms.

The intervention resulted in significant annual savings through lower female staff turnover and absenteeism rates, and reduced time spent in dispute resolution. Moreover, female employees reported greater engagement and a greater ability to voice opinions at work, challenge incidences of harassment, and an improved ability to communicate with managers and peers. For women workers this also improved their income through longer retention and their ability to use their income for household expenses, school fees, medical expenses etc. Other companies partnered with AWEF to conduct SST trainings following the success with Arafa including the 10th of Ramadan Investment Association, Zorba Group, and 7th new Tie RMG (exporter for Nike and Adidas).

**GSI STRATEGY THREE:****Building more Inclusive Value Chains and Accelerating Women's Financial Inclusion**

Inclusive supply chains can be an important lever for companies to create positive and sustainable impact, as evidenced in the field survey presented in [Section 1](#). Companies can foster innovation, increase brand value, and explore new markets by integrating under-represented groups - such as women-owned businesses or people who live at that bottom of the economic pyramid - as suppliers, distributors, and retailers. Yet, 80% of the firms surveyed recognised that female-owned MSMEs represent less than 25% of their supply-chains.

*Women entrepreneurs can be hesitant about registering their businesses. In many cases, they are misinformed about the benefits involved and about the registration process especially if they live in a remote area so commuting long distances maybe not be the safest or the most convenient for them*

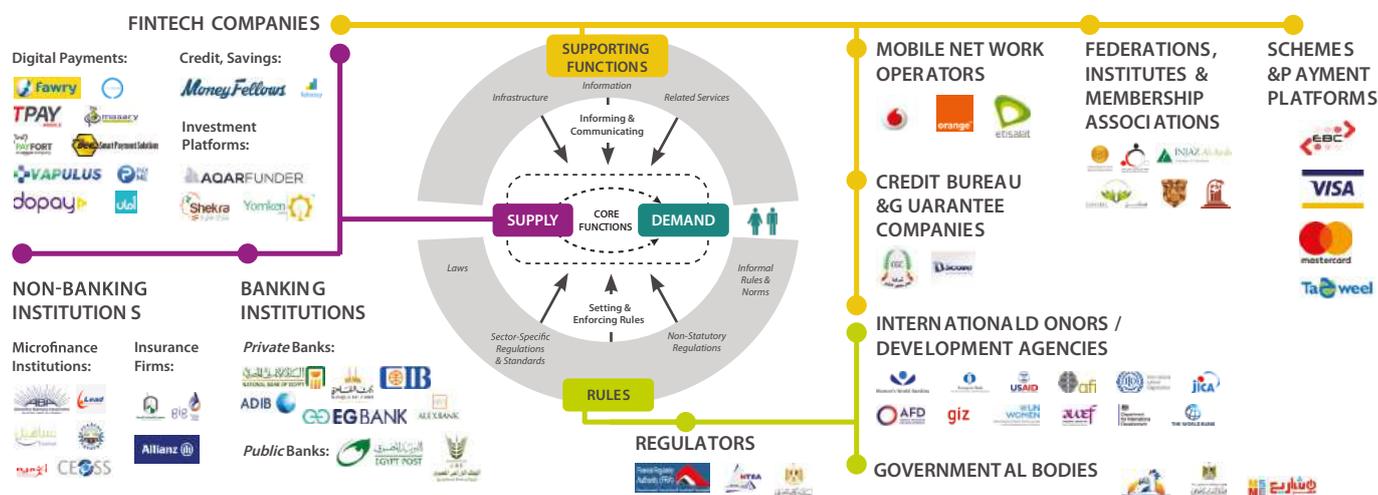
**Gillan Shaaban**  
Chief Commercial Officer, Paymob

There are many barriers to market access opportunities for women-owned businesses, including lack of mobility and access to physical markets, limited equipment and technology, low access to information, training and limited support to effectively run, grow and formalise their business. Access to finance is also a key issue, and one that AWEF had identified as a systemic constraint as part of its 2018 [Women's Financial Inclusion market assessment](#) (see [Figure 5](#)). AWEF found that, by making financial services more widely available and lowering costs and barriers to access finance, financial technology (fintech) can help democratise financial services to the masses - starting with the 23.2 million Egyptian women who remain excluded from the formal financial system.

*Microcredit plays a crucial role in financial inclusion which leads to social inclusion and plays an important role in job creation*

**Amr Abou El-Azm,**  
CEO, Tamweely

**FIGURE 5:** Overview of the Egyptian Digital Financial Inclusion Market System<sup>27</sup>



Overview of the Constraints to Women's Financial Inclusion in Egypt

Demand-Side Constraints	Supply-Side Constraints	Constraints to an Enabling-Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social and cultural norms</b> inhibit women's access to financial resources and their ability to work in the financial sector. Social norms also prevent women from being mobile and accessing bank branches which tend to be far from rural areas.</li> <li>• <b>Lack of collateral</b> and recurring revenues prevent female microfinance beneficiaries from graduating from group loans to individual loans of higher value.</li> <li>• Poor consumers, especially women, tend to have <b>limited financial literacy</b>.</li> <li>• There is an overall <b>lack of trust and understanding of the financial sector</b>, especially the insurance sector. Due to religious beliefs, financial services are <b>perceived negatively</b> by some because of the 'interest' linked to these services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial institutions have <b>limited gender-disaggregated data</b> preventing them from developing gender-relevant products and marketing channels etc.</li> <li>• There is <b>limited diversity and a lack of relevant products that fit poor women's needs</b>, especially in micro-savings and microinsurance.</li> <li>• <b>Bank presence in rural areas is limited.</b> The outreach of the e-payment agent networks (male-dominated) and e-money cash-in/cash-out points can be further strengthened.</li> <li>• There is a <b>cultural disconnect</b> between the banks and the poor. <b>Internal banking processes</b> are not adapted to poor women, micro-businesses, or those with limited collateral.</li> <li>• There is <b>limited information</b> on the financial products available in the market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is <b>limited communication on a holistic Financial Inclusion Strategy</b> and integrating a gender perspective in relevant policies and strategies.</li> <li>• <b>Egyptian Inheritance laws</b> tend to reduce women's access to assets, which in turn, limit women's capacity to start a new venture or apply for credit.</li> <li>• Building credit history and providing creditworthiness can be challenging for women, and it appears that the <b>credit bureau – iScore – provides limited credit information</b> on this target population, thus also reducing the ability, for financial institutions, to design relevant products for women.</li> <li>• <b>Limited affordability of e-payment services:</b> High consumer fees on mobile wallets inhibit their ability to reach the unbanked, especially women who are more price-sensitive.</li> <li>• For new consumers, <b>registration for e-wallet accounts can be cumbersome</b> (KYC regulation and infrastructure).</li> <li>• For suppliers (microfinance institutions, mobile operators), the license process to offer a new mobile wallet service can be lengthy and challenging.</li> </ul>

Gender-Smart Investment strategies are needed to break down barriers to women's financial inclusion and form female entrepreneurs and consumers. AWEF partnered with multiple financial services providers to increase women entrepreneurs' financial literacy and digital financial capabilities (see Box 6 and 7) and to connect female microbusinesses to corporate supply chains. As illustrated in Box 5 below, larger corporations play a role in building more inclusive markets as part of their corporate supply chains. For example, Unilever Egypt launched its "Zeinab" program in 2017 and has been engaging greater numbers of female-owned and female-run MSMEs to increase the penetration of Unilever products in rural and low-income urban markets.

With more than 900 registered female merchants, Zeinab has had significant impact on Unilever's sales across Egypt particularly in its tea and toothpaste products "which were not even present in some markets prior to the launch of Zeinab", according to Islam Abdel Raouf, Unilever Zeinab's director.

AWEF's work with Fawry and Aman is another innovative example of working with leading financial services companies to enhance financial inclusion and create new market opportunities for women-owned or -run micro-enterprises - see Box 5.

27. Making Digital Finance Work for Women in the MENA Region, AWEF Practitioner Learning Brief, 2020

**BOX 5** – AWEF's support to Heya Fawry and Aman for e-Payment – building gender-inclusive value chains and enhancing financial inclusion for women micro-enterprises

Founded in 2008, Fawry is the largest e-payment platform in Egypt serving the banked and the unbanked population. In April 2020, Fawry became the first publicly traded technology unicorn in Egypt.

In February 2019, most of Fawry's affiliated e-payment kiosks were owned by male agents. To address this Fawry partnered with AWEF to launch 'Heya Fawry' - Egypt's first female-only e-payment agent network with lower capital and legal registration requirements for agents. Now in its third year, Heya Fawry aims to help women entrepreneurs gain access to job opportunities by becoming Heya Fawry agents, while providing life-enhancing financial services to predominantly unbanked female customers. From February 2019 to April 2021, the Heya Fawry initiative created over 300 job opportunities for female agents and enabled thousands of unbanked consumers to conduct an estimated 300 thousand e-payment transactions (worth an estimated EGP 10 million). Partnering with Unilever Zeinab allowed these female agents to offer their customers a range of products in addition to the Fawry e-payment services thereby increasing their income from commissions.

*We are pleased with the continued success that Heya Fawry has achieved, as well as its contribution to improve the conditions of low-income and disadvantaged women in Egypt. We stand with the Egyptian Government to accelerate digital transformation and promote financial inclusion*

**Ahmed Fahmy,**  
Head of Partnerships at Fawry

Heya Fawry also teamed-up with AXA Insurance to provide additional micro-insurance benefits and has more recently started working with the LEAD Microfinance Institution which designed a dedicated Heya Fawry Microfinance Program and provides digital microloans to selected female-owned micro-businesses. To promote these products, Fawry conducted a mass digital marketing campaign targeted at female merchants to encourage them to apply to the Heya Fawry Microfinance program and join Fawry's agent network. In under 2 weeks, the marketing campaign reached over 250,000 people.

*... our mission is to provide poor and low-income entrepreneurs with sustainable access to quality microfinance services that address their needs. The Lead Foundation saw great opportunity to partner with Heya Fawry to meet the needs of ambitious female microentrepreneurs who work from home or manage a shop.*

**Sandy Salama,**  
Marketing and Communications Manager  
at Lead Foundation

In 2021, building on the success of the female agent business model, AWEF supported Aman for E-payment to empower women from low-income communities to become Aman agents. Aman for E-payment provided greater income opportunities for 1000 female agents who are now providing digital financial services to their communities (predominantly women) in more remote rural areas. In response to COVID-19, and the surge in digital payments, Aman for E-payment started onboarding female agents to an innovative solution deployed exclusively by Aman; an agent App. This meant that females could become agents through downloading the Aman app on their own smart-phone and getting onboarded virtually to the system. The app tracks gender-disaggregated data pertaining to the agents and their customers which helps the company to assess its performance on this new female segment and informing future product developments. Aman also created a mass media marketing campaign targeting women micro-entrepreneurs, and in a few months, almost twenty thousand women downloaded the Aman app.



*Aman strives to achieve financial inclusion for all segments of societies in Egypt, especially women in the poorest communities. Therefore, we are pleased to be an effective technical and financial partner to the leading foundation in women's financial empowerment, AWEF.*

**Mohamed Wahby**  
Chief Executive Officer at Aman for E-payments





## GSI STRATEGY FOUR:

### Designing and Developing Products and Services for Female Consumers

Integrating more women in the value chain can also be a good strategy to mirror the market and address women's needs as consumers. In 2019, women controlled around \$31.8<sup>28</sup> trillion in worldwide spending, an increase from approximately \$20 trillion in 2009<sup>29</sup>. However, they are a vastly under targeted and underexplored customer segment, especially in developing and emerging countries. Companies still have much to learn about selling to and engaging with women as consumers.

There are various ways that companies can ensure their services and products reach and benefit female customers. They can adopt human-centred design principles, design products and services for women's unique needs, address problems that disproportionately impact women or focus on market opportunities targeted towards women customers. Beside tracking gender-disaggregated data and directing marketing campaigns toward women companies can tailor their products to enhance uptake by female customers.

One of the companies interviewed, the Egypt Post, which has over 4,500 branches and nearly 6,500 postal agents across all governorates, committed to design programs that help Egyptian women access financial services including microcredit via third party agreements and by tailoring specific formal financial services such as government-to-people transfers (G2P). The two examples below (see Box 6 and 7) illustrate business innovations focused on catalysing digital financial inclusion. It shows how financial services providers, like Kashat and Tasaheel, have adjusted their service offerings to embed greater financial education and meet women consumers' need for information and clear understanding about new services. However, there is potential to adopt similar strategies in other sectors and market segments where women are important consumers with specific needs, interests, and concerns.

#### BOX 6 — AWEF, Tasaheel and Raseedy recognising Egyptian women's needs for greater digital and financial education

Through its activities in Egypt and Jordan, AWEF reported that one of the most common reasons for women not using Digital Finance Services (DFS) was lack of knowledge and understanding of how these services function, and of the benefits of using them. This is particularly the case in North Africa and the Levant, where digital financial services are still new and both lack of trust and awareness of such services affect their adoption by female consumers.

To reach more female customers Tasaheel, an Egyptian Micro-Finance Institution, worked with AWEF to develop short videos to help to increase women's digital financial literacy and capabilities. This "embedded" program helped improve female microloan borrower's digital financial literacy and provided them with new tools to streamline their business and microloan operations. Tasaheel recruited "Digital Finance Services Learning Facilitators" to deliver this training to female clients. The approach was developed by AWEF, Tasaheel and Raseedy (Tasaheel's e-payment sister company) and cascaded skills and tools to Tasaheel's female borrowers and Raseedy e-wallet users. Over the 2-year partnership, AWEF estimated that this new service reached over 80,000 female Tasaheel clients. 55% of the female beneficiaries indicated that the videos helped them address business bottlenecks, 15% of beneficiaries saw increased profitability (estimated at LE 2.3k per beneficiary) and there was a 22.5% uptake of Raseedy e-wallets.

In 2021, two new partner Micro-Finance Institutions, the Coptic Evangelical Organisation of Social Services (CEOSS) and Together Association for Development and Environment (TADE) joined AWEF's Digital Financial Services Learning (DFSL) programme reaching a further 16,000 women in Upper Egypt, Greater Cairo and West Delta in less than 6 months. Besides increasing women's digital financial capabilities, the DFSL program demonstrated that facilitating women's uptake of Digital Financial Services increased the digital service providers bottom line - the number of digital payment transactions increased from 549 in February 2021 to 9768 by the end of July 2021

#### BOX 7 — Kashat - designing digital nano-loan products catering to women consumers

Kashat is a Cairo-based fintech that offers short-term nano-loans to clients in Cairo and Alexandria. Kashat has a fully digitalised application and approval process through their mobile app. In September 2021, Kashat, raised \$1.75 million in a private bridge round led by Launch Africa alongside participation from regional investors, including Cairo Angels.<sup>30</sup>

Being the first nano lending mobile application in Egypt, Kashat quickly identified that its application was less successful amongst female customers. This was due to limited trust and understanding of such pioneering services in Egypt and the lower level of digital and financial capabilities amongst women in Egypt. Kashat therefore partnered with AWEF to offer digital financial education, via short videos, to existing and prospective women clients in order to expand their female client base. Kashat's extensive Facebook campaign resulted in the videos being viewed by 250,000 women and they exceeded their target of successful female loan application by 35% in July and August 2021

*Initially it was a challenge to reach women due to various cultural barriers. Through AWEF's financial literacy videos, Kashat spread awareness of digital financial services and how they can help businesses amongst women. For each successful loan achieved through the financial literacy video, women borrowers became eligible for subsidised loans and the outcome of this was incredible as we saw a 35% increase in the new accounts created by women.*

Hend Samahy,  
Kashat Marketing Lead

28. Catalyst, Quick Take: Buying Power (April 27, 2020)

29. <https://hbr.org/2009/09/the-female-economy>

30. <https://www.techinafrica.com/egypt-fintech-kashat-raises-funding/>



## GSi STRATEGY FIVE:

### Strengthening Leadership and Public Commitment to Women's Empowerment

Company practices and gender gaps in the workplace can be addressed through ad hoc initiatives and innovations. However, the key to promoting lasting change is vision and leadership from the top of an organisation. The Board, CEO, and senior management must demonstrate that they are serious about empowering women both publicly and privately. The leadership must also be strong enough to mobilise and drive the organisation to move in a new direction. Leaders must often work hard to change systems, policies, and ways of working. Many of these may also be shaped by local country or community practices and norms and therefore may not be readily accepted as they may challenge deeply embedded behaviours and perceptions. It is therefore important that change is introduced gradually and is supported by a coherent change process – via awareness raising, training and sensitive communication. When company leadership commits to gender equality they need to lead by example and demonstrate how their new vision is shaping decisions and direction.

**Often large organisations can take the lead within their industry and publicly commit to gender parity.** In Egypt for example, the Commercial International Bank (CIB) announced its receipt of Egypt's Gender Equity Seal (EGES) certification from the National Council for Women (NCW) and the World Bank. In addition to the EGES, CIB announced its participation in the public private partnership "Closing the Gender Gap" accelerator action plan, a multi-stakeholder platform, launched by the Ministry of International Cooperation and the National Council for Women. This set a new trend within their sector.

**Models and actions implemented abroad can also be replicated in Egypt.** Marc Benioff, the CEO of Salesforce started the "Women Surge Initiative" to advance women's visibility and leadership within his organisation. UN women launched "Women Empowerment Principles" (WEPs) and more than 1300 CEO globally have signed the CEO statement of Support demonstrating their commitment to gender equality in the workplace, marketplace, and community. These public commitments by global leaders is positively reflected in their company culture and within their employee understanding of the case for women's empowerment. This approach needs to be passed on to developing countries and embedded more routinely and deeply in Egyptian companies.

**Firms can help catalyse change at industry level by setting themselves up as role models within an industry and by publishing and announcing their status on women empowerment.** As shown in the detailed case study in Annex 1, Paymob regularly report to their Board on diversity ratios and associated parameters. This has become especially important as new leading international investors have come on board who are keen to see evidence of the impact of diversity measures across all Paymob's workforce. However, regulators can also play a role - they can require companies to report metrics reflecting gender equality and publish these results. This can nudge other companies to adopt good practices and help policy makers identify gaps and priorities across, and within sectors.



*Advocating gender parity beyond CIB with our stakeholders and within the community is among our objectives for women empowerment.*

**Dr. Dalia Abdel Kader,**  
Sustainability Director, Commercial International Bank



#### **BOX 8** Media Awareness Campaigns to raise awareness and influence societal change

While it is vital that policy makers, firm leaders, and international organisations publicly commit to, and communicate women's empowerment, media plays a significant role in shaping societal behaviour towards women.

AWEF's field research of the media sector in Egypt revealed that filmmakers, screenwriters, directors, producers, novelists, songwriters, and other cultural content producers help to form popular culture and guide cultural discourse, including perpetuating negative gender stereotypes, and harmful behaviours. AWEF partnered with Ahead of the Curve (ATC), a social enterprise consultancy specialising in media and gender, to take a systemic approach to facilitating change to the market for content production. Together AWEF and ATC aimed to directly impact the social norms that determine the terms on which women participate in, and gain from, economic activity in the country. Activities included:

1. Gender-sensitisation workshops for content producers. Activities included training in gender roles for university students of filmmaking, a high-profile roundtable discussion on women's representations with major film industry players and press briefings for online and print journalists on the business case for WEE.
2. Introduction of a new awards (the NUT award and the ISIS award) in the Egyptian film industry for the production that best challenged the social norms and stereotypes that constitute a barrier to women's economic and social inclusion in Egypt. These were presented at the Aswan International Women's Film Festival (AWIFF).

These initiatives show clear pointers to shift market incentives for media content and have pushed other partners follow suit.

## Section 3:

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Brief aimed to contribute thinking and ideas on how to strengthen GSI within Egypt and more widely in the MENA region. It makes the business case for change drawing on global evidence and specific examples from Egyptian firms. Company and industry investment in GSI generate very real benefits in terms of improved productivity, better conflict management and communication, reduced staff turnover, increased social responsibility and innovation. This is good for business and profit and it is also good for investors. GSI will increase the return on existing company investments and help to attract new socially responsible investments into Egypt and the wider region. It will also help build women leaders and entrepreneurs that can promote and contribute to inclusive business growth in Egypt.

In Egypt, and in the wider region, women remain a potentially lucrative “forgotten” customer segment and a currently ignored pool of workers and talent. Egypt faces long-standing gender inequalities in labour force participation, representation in leadership and managerial positions, unequal access to financial assets, and income disparities. Our survey findings reflect these long standing inequalities demonstrating that there is a glass ceiling that prevents women from attaining leadership positions, that more needs to be done to retain women in the workforce, and that there are commercial benefits to engaging women more proactively as employees, producers, suppliers and consumers.

AWEF and Mezzan urge businesses to more proactively initiate, scale and embed GSI within their operations and business development strategies - and ultimately grow the pipeline of ‘investable-ready’ firms. There needs to be a shift from GSI being a donor or investor-only driven agenda to one embraced and led by the private sector. To facilitate this change process, we provide a set of recommendations below that identify actions that can be taken by a wide range of actors to accelerate progress on GSI. These recommendations align with GSI strategies we have presented in Section 2.

The recommendations below include action to increase women in leadership and management positions, attract and retain female talent to build more diverse workforces, build inclusive supply chains and strengthen access to financial services among entrepreneurs. We also highlight the importance of companies designing services tailored to female customers’ needs and firms publicly committing to change and leading by example.

Our recommendations provide a menu of options and opportunities which we hope will stimulate debate on how to strengthen GSI in Egypt. The “2X Challenge” which was extended and renewed in June 2021 by G7 Foreign and Development Ministers. The Gender-Smart challenge facing Egypt and many other developing countries now is to integrate GSI more effectively within mainstream investment strategies, business models and processes. We hope this Brief will accelerate progress and action by GSI practitioners, Egyptian firms, Chambers of Commerce, Industry Federations and associations, the National Council for Women, Women’s Associations and impact investors.



**TABLE 1:** Conclusions and Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS	IMPACT ON BUSINESSES' ADOPTION OF GSI STRATEGIES	IMPACT ON INVESTORS' ADVOCATING FOR THE ADOPTION OF SUCH STRATEGIES	CHANGE AGENTS
<b>GSI Strategy 1 - Increase women in leadership and management</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Encourage CEOs to sign the WEPs CEO Support statement and publicly support women empowerment at board level.</li> <li>» Introduce sponsorship and training programmes to support women's career paths into leadership positions</li> <li>» Establish women support groups and promote mentoring schemes and role models</li> <li>» Continue highlighting the business case for women in leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Enhanced promotion of women in leadership and board roles</li> <li>» Enhanced company performance – strategic direction, profitability, solvency, innovation, compliance, risk management</li> <li>» More diverse skills, improved conflict management and communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Greater returns: companies with diverse Boards provide higher returns on equity</li> <li>» Attract new investors with specific interest in inclusion and corporate social responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Company leadership teams and their Board of Directors</li> <li>» Chambers of Commerce, industry Federations and associations who can lead by example and showcase benefits</li> <li>» National Council for Women and Women's associations who can advocate/advise</li> </ul>
<b>GSI Strategy 2 - Increase recruitment and retention of female talent and commit to an inclusive workforce</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Encourage more inclusive working practices through new policies, training and communication campaigns focused on introducing anti-sexual harassment codes of conduct and a safe workplace environment</li> <li>» Adoption of family friendly policies – generous maternity leave, flexible working hours, access to affordable childcare, returnship programs for women restarting their careers at a later stage</li> <li>» Education and training to enable women to move up and into new roles</li> <li>» Supervisory and management training to improve the working environment</li> <li>» Ease access to safe transportation to work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Enhanced firm reputation &amp; attractiveness to female talents</li> <li>» Improved retention and employee satisfaction leading to greater profitability</li> <li>» Improved performance of women workers (and often the wider workforce) as well as a positive internal culture</li> </ul>	As above	As above
<b>GSI Strategies Three and Four – Promote inclusive value chains, strengthen financial inclusion, and develop products and services tailored for female customers</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Encourage financial sector innovations to promote inclusion including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of data on women users, market potential and women's specific needs and preferences</li> <li>• Tailoring of Products and services for women</li> <li>• Product offerings to include financial literacy support</li> </ul> </li> <li>» Encourage customer focus on women in a wider set of industries</li> <li>» Facilitate engagement of women in supply chains</li> <li>» Promote positive role models - highlight successful female entrepreneurs and allow access to them as mentors for aspiring female entrepreneurs</li> <li>» Encourage/facilitate women owned start ups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Higher growth from reaching a new, untapped, customer segment</li> <li>» Tailored products and customer support will accelerate uptake of financial services by women</li> <li>» Enhanced reputation &amp; ranking – responsible supply chains</li> </ul>	<p>Same as above.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build credit history of women and pool of new investees</li> <li>• Generate a new generation of growing and investment-ready female-owned businesses</li> <li>• Increase availability of data and information about the Return On Investment of Gender-smart investment strategies and promote it to businesses and investors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial sector regulators (or regulatory bodies in other industries) can help improve data availability and promote good practices</li> <li>• Financial sector companies and institutions implement new approaches</li> <li>• Multinational companies and industry adopt and lead by example</li> <li>• National Council for Women and Women associations - facilitate market linkages, access to supply chains, promote role models</li> <li>• Governments – improve enabling environment for financial sector, business and start-ups</li> <li>• Donors – facilitate innovation/ testing, share data, information on what works</li> </ul>
<b>GSI Strategy five – Strengthening Leadership and Public Commitment to Women's Empowerment</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage public disclosure of gender diversity data and have regulators and chamber of commerce publish industry specific data</li> <li>• Encourage adoption/replication of International Good practices and initiatives</li> <li>• Show case company and industry leadership initiatives in public and industry forums, media etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Businesses have greater direct incentives to promote gender diversity within their businesses to increase appeal to investors</p> <p>Builds reputation of the Business</p>	<p>Investors have access to more reliable and transparent data on businesses' gender inclusive management practices</p> <p>Attract new investors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulators, Federations &amp; Chambers of commerce</li> <li>• Multinationals and Industry leaders act as role models and lead by example – proactively encourage industry wide change</li> <li>• Media supports and showcases</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1:

### CASE STUDY – PAYMOB’S COMMITMENTS AND APPROACH TO MAINSTREAMING INCLUSION ACROSS ITS OPERATIONS AND SERVICES

Established in 2015, Paymob is an infrastructure technology enabler providing a suite of digital finance solutions to both businesses and individuals, across the Middle East and Africa, with the aim of empowering the masses with greater access to finance. Via this case study, Mezzan aimed to test possible GSI scoring approaches while testing the appeal for its ‘mezzanine’ products and future GSI investment strategy. Paymob was chosen for this case study for three reasons: Their strong commitment to women’s empowerment, their previous work with AWEF to empower female microbusinesses, and their recent success with regional investors. In fact, in April 2021, Paymob raised the largest Series A round in Egypt yet - a total of \$18.5 million - and one of the largest equity rounds in North Africa.

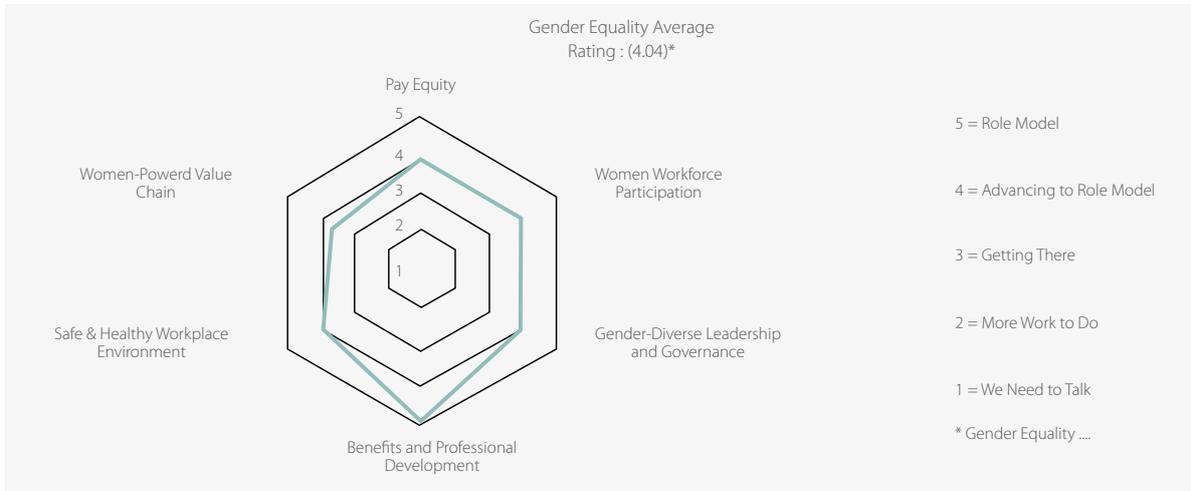
To assess Paymob’s gender equality practices, Mezzan used the [Gender Equality Scorecard \(GES\)](#) which was originally developed by SEAF to assess women’s economic empowerment and gender equality within individual investment opportunities and portfolio companies for SEAF funds. The GES rating system is structured around six gender equality vectors consisting of: pay equity; women’s workforce participation; leadership and governance; benefits and professional development; safe and healthy workplace environment; and women-powered value chains<sup>31</sup>. These vectors each consist of four parameters which are scored on a five-point scale.

**TABLE 2:** Overview of the company’s profile and its final results on GES

<p><b>OVERVIEW OF PAYMOB</b></p> <p>Paymob is a leading regional fin-tech player with over 85% of the Digital wallets processing market share and one of the largest merchant networks in the payments landscape in Egypt. Paymob has partnered with leading banks, telecom operators, and other leading financial institutions to push the ecosystem forward. The company operates through four different business units, Paymob Accept, Paymob Send, Paymob Wallet and Paymob Sync.</p>	<p><b>KEY FACTS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 50% of current senior management are women and 30% of the board are women.</li> <li>- Applies a gender-blind approach to hiring and promotion.</li> <li>- Adopts gender inclusive work environment including equal pay, anti-sexual harassment policies and mechanisms, parentela leave, and a childcare facility.</li> <li>- 25 – 50% of the products are specifically designed to meet women needs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>COMPANY ACTIVITIES</b></p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paymob Accept is an integrated payment gateway, including online payment, POS solutions and a variety of instalments programs through different banks.</li> <li>- Mobile wallets throughout Meezan network.</li> <li>- Accept website + in-app Plugins and APIs allows merchants to integrate payment gateways on their websites and Apps seamlessly yet Paymob Accept offers a standalone payment link solution for businesses who don’t have Websites or Apps.</li> <li>- Paymob partnered with AWEF, Bank Misr and Zammit, to support 800+ female merchants/microbusinesses. The partnership empowered microbusinesses with payment terminals and the merchants with a fully-fledged e-commerce website hosted by Zammit and integrated with Paymob payment gateway. This allowed the microbusiness/merchants to benefit from increased income opportunities and allowed their consumers to pay for their goods and services digitally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PAYMOB SELECTED GENDER-SMART INVESTMENT STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTS</b></p>		
<p><b>EQUITY</b></p> <p>Gender blind strategy to ensure pay equity, career paths and advancement for women.</p>	<p><b>WOMEN WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION</b></p> <p>50% of women in the overall workforce and senior leadership. Paymob founders are men</p>	<p><b>LEADERSHIP &amp; GOVERNANCE</b></p> <p>Leadership is publicly committed to women empowerment</p>
<p><b>INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS &amp; BENEFITS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maternity leave policies are well communicated and applied</li> <li>- Child day-care</li> <li>- Flexible working conditions policies to retain female employees and enhance their productivity</li> <li>- Women are brought back after maternity leave at same position and pay</li> </ul> <p><b>FUTURE OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexible leave to meet more health needs</li> </ul>	<p><b>EMPOWERED VALUE CHAIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paymob believes that supporting women entrepreneurs within their value chain leads to a more reliable, creative &amp; innovative value chain</li> <li>- Company adopts specific programs focusing on supporting women within value chain e.g. Paymob Accept</li> </ul> <p><b>FUTURE OBJECTIVES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase target women as clients and enhance their customer base by providing discounts and benefits to women</li> </ul>	<p><b>SAFE &amp; HEALTHY WORKFORCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-sexual harassment policy</li> <li>- Flexible working hours &amp; conditions</li> </ul> <p><b>FUTURE OBJECTIVE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adopting new mechanism to investigate women employees’ need in the workplace</li> </ul>

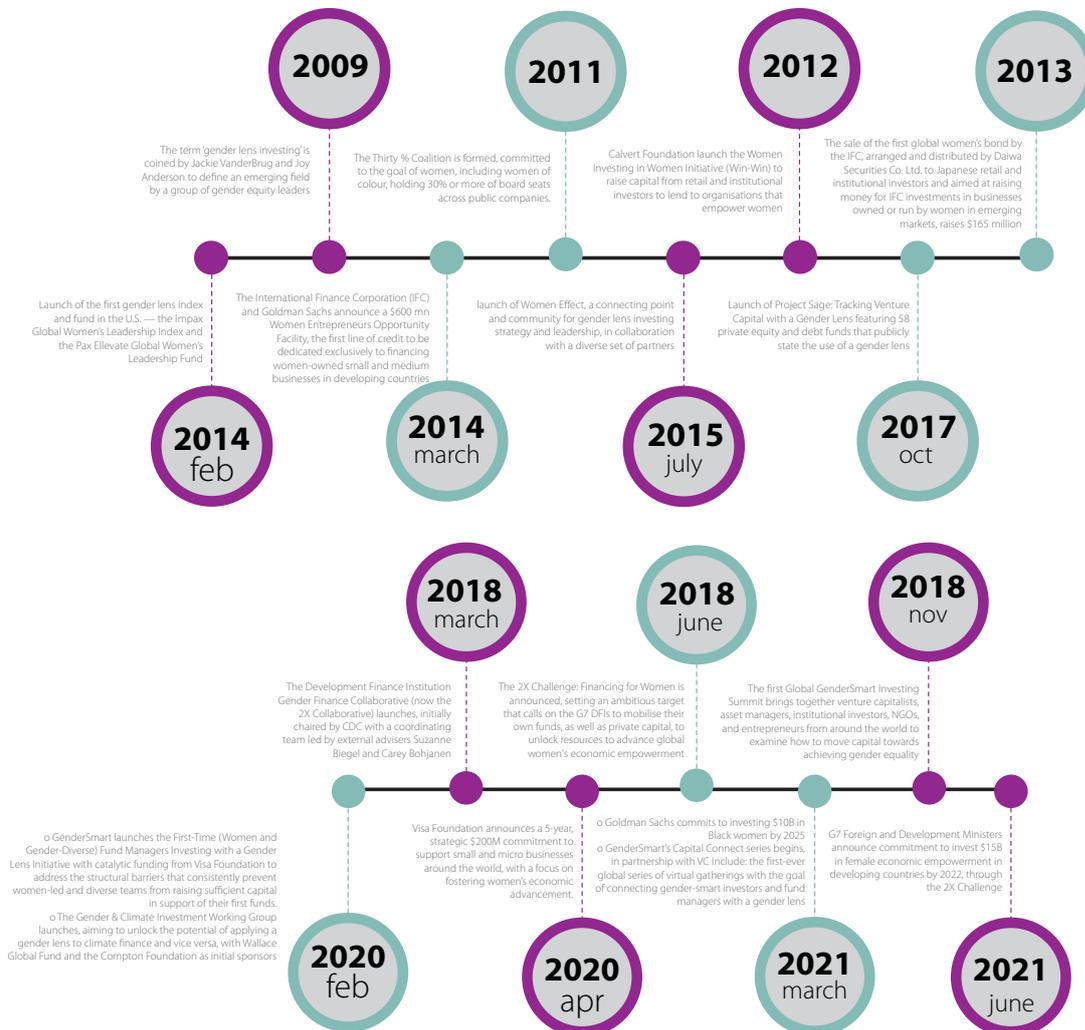
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**FIGURE 6:** Gender Equality Average Rating



## ANNEX 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF GENDER-SMART INVESTING

**FIGURE 7:** A brief history of gender-smart investing



## ANNEX 3:

### LIST OF FIELD INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

#### Companies who contributed to the Survey

<b>1</b>	Autocool
<b>2</b>	Ahly Capital
<b>3</b>	Meris Rating
<b>4</b>	Finbi
<b>5</b>	People of impact
<b>6</b>	Zammit
<b>7</b>	CIB
<b>8</b>	Hassan Allam Group
<b>9</b>	Ahead of the curve
<b>10</b>	NH consulting
<b>11</b>	Paymob
<b>12</b>	Bluenile
<b>13</b>	Egytrans
<b>14</b>	Cairo leasing cooperation
<b>15</b>	GIZ
<b>16</b>	Daltex for agriculture development
<b>17</b>	Icoat group
<b>18</b>	Jilatee
<b>19</b>	Sawiris Foundation for Social Development
<b>20</b>	Unilever
<b>21</b>	Misr Insurance Holding Company

#### Companies Interviewed

<b>1</b>	Ahly Capital
<b>2</b>	Egypt Post Office
<b>3</b>	Finbi
<b>4</b>	People of Impact
<b>5</b>	Tamweely
<b>6</b>	CIB
<b>7</b>	Alia Soliman
<b>8</b>	NH consulting
<b>9</b>	Paymob
<b>10</b>	Jilatee
<b>11</b>	Sawiris Foundation for Social Development
<b>12</b>	Unilever
<b>13</b>	Icoat

## ANNEX 4:

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# Gender Smart Investing in MENA:

An Egyptian perspective on strengthening investment strategies  
to empower women