

# Gender Dynamics and Enterprise Performance

*An Action Research Framework for Egypt in the Sub-Saharan African Context*

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## ABSTRACT

The gender dimensions of enterprise performance in Sub-Saharan Africa are critical, yet frameworks tailored to specific regional contexts, such as North Africa, are underdeveloped. Egypt presents a unique socio-economic landscape where gendered business practices intersect with broader continental patterns, necessitating context-specific inquiry. This study aimed to develop and implement an action research framework to analyse how gendered social dynamics influence business performance for small and medium-sized enterprises in Egypt, and to collaboratively design interventions with participants to address identified constraints. A participatory action research methodology was employed, involving iterative cycles of diagnosis, planning, action, and evaluation. Data were collected through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and participatory workshops with 40 female and male enterprise owners in Cairo and Alexandria over multiple cycles. The research identified that socially prescribed gender roles, particularly women's disproportionate responsibility for domestic labour, directly constrained business growth opportunities. A key theme was the 'time poverty' experienced by female entrepreneurs, with approximately 70% of participants citing it as a primary barrier to scaling operations. Collaborative interventions focused on time-management and household-role negotiations were subsequently developed. The study concludes that enterprise support programmes in similar contexts must move beyond financial capital provision to address deeply embedded social and temporal constraints. The action research process proved effective in generating locally relevant, gender-sensitive business development strategies. It is recommended that microfinance institutions and business development services integrate gender-aware advisory components that facilitate household-level dialogue. Furthermore, programme design should adopt participatory, iterative methodologies to ensure interventions are contextually grounded. Action research, gender, entrepreneurship, Egypt, Sub-Saharan Africa, enterprise development, participatory methods. This paper provides a novel, transferable action research framework for analysing and addressing gender-based constraints in enterprise development, demonstrating its application in the under-researched context of North Africa within the continental discourse.

**Keywords:** *Action Research, Gender Dynamics, Enterprise Performance, Sub-Saharan Africa, Women's Entrepreneurship*

### Article Highlights

- Develops a participatory action research framework for gender-aware enterprise analysis.
- Identifies 'time poverty' as a critical barrier for female entrepreneurs in Egypt.
- Recommends integrating household-level dialogue into

### Methodological Insight

Employed iterative cycles of diagnosis, planning, action, and evaluation with 40 enterprise owners in Cairo and Alexandria.

*This article presents a transferable framework for gender-sensitive enterprise development.*

<p>business support programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Argues for moving beyond financial capital to address social constraints.</li></ul>	
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