

Navigating the Paradox of Progress: A Qualitative Study of Women's Entrepreneurship in Morocco

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

The contemporary Moroccan economic landscape positions gender as a dynamic force at the intersection of neoliberal aspirations and deep-seated patriarchal structures. While legislative milestones and digital initiatives have ostensibly paved the way for feminine economic participation, the entrepreneurial arena remains a contested site of power. This study examines how Moroccan women navigate the paradox of progress where institutional visibility often conceals the persistence of traditional reproductive governance and socio-economic exclusion.

METHOD

This research utilized a qualitative relational framework. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 women entrepreneurs in three Moroccan regions. Intersectional thematic analysis was employed to explore how variables of financial autonomy, family obligations and digital literacy influence women's ability to bridge the gender divide and establish professional legitimacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1. The Paradox of Progress: Enablers vs. Barriers in Women's Entrepreneurship (n=17)

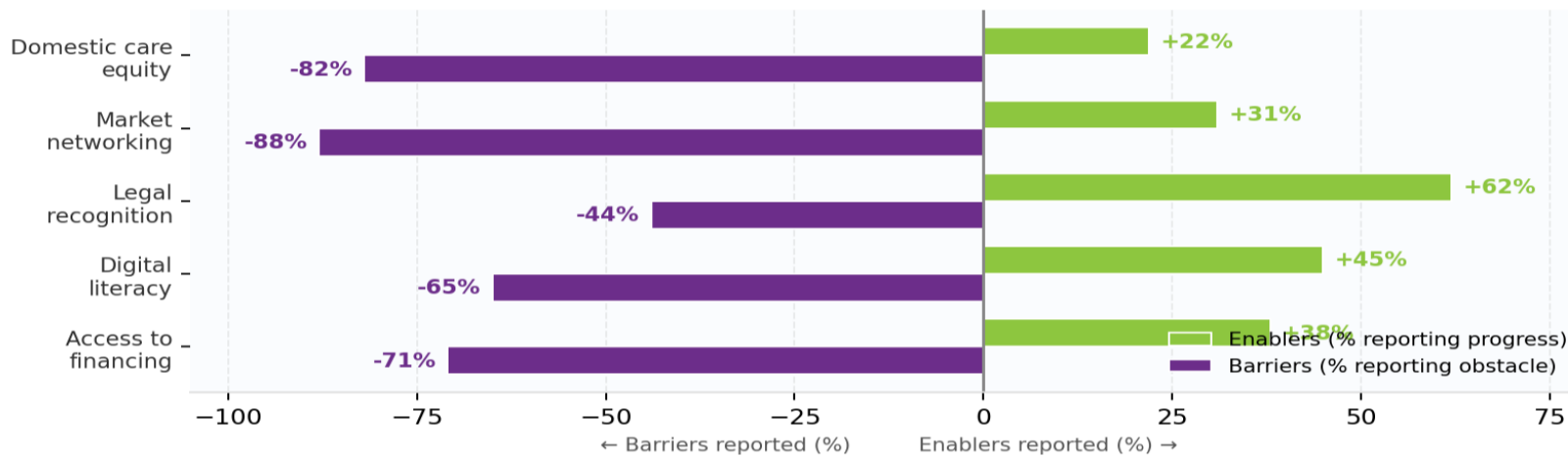


Figure 2. Thematic Salience Across 17 Interviews (Cumulative %)

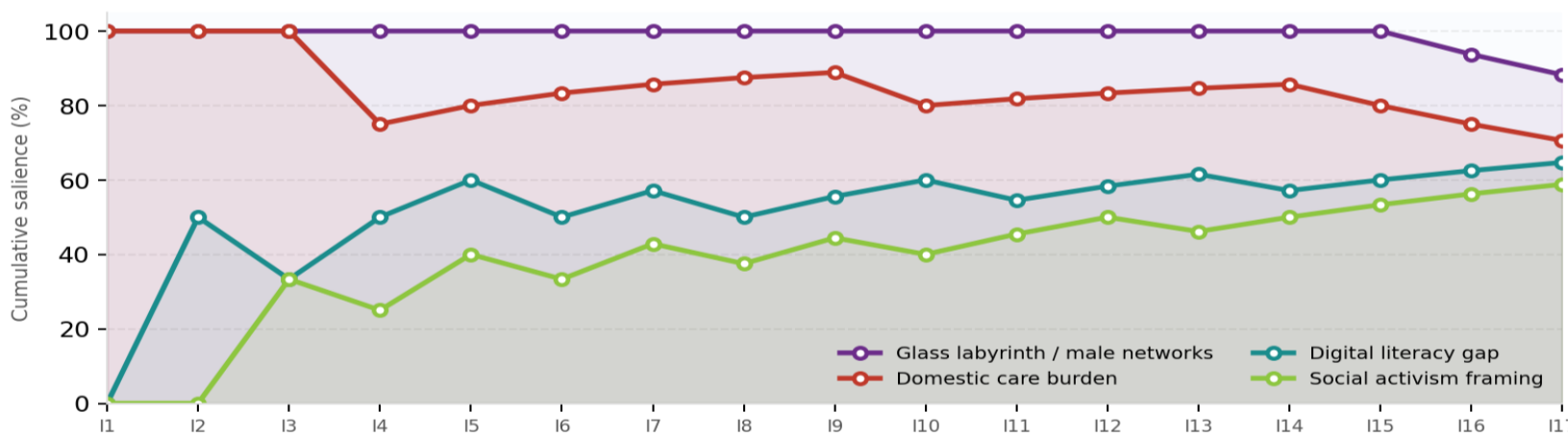


Figure 3. Empowerment Scores Before & After Support Programmes (n=17)

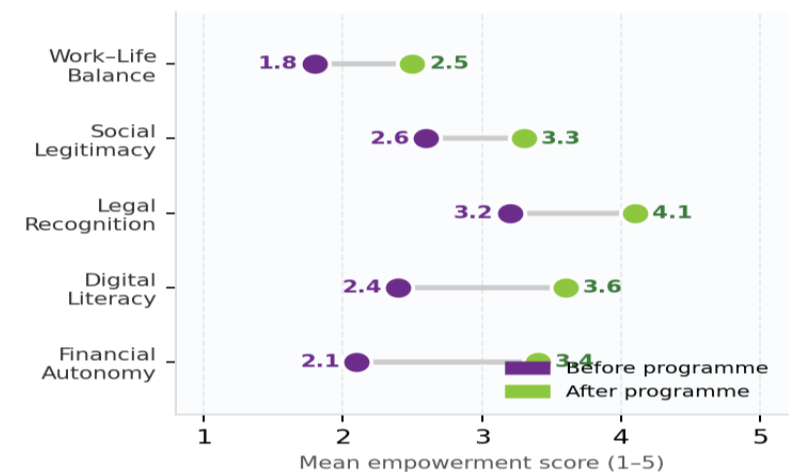
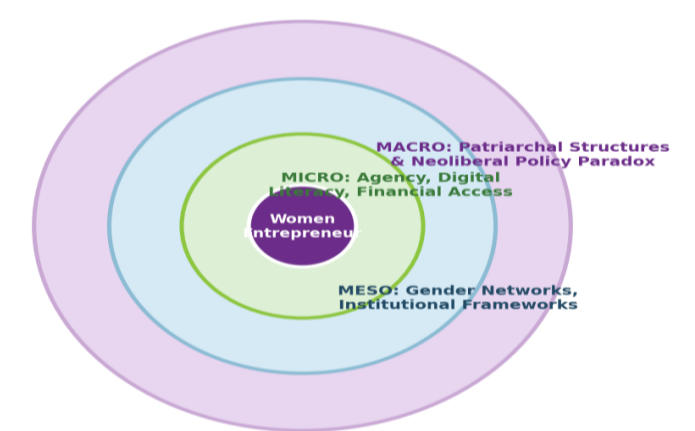


Figure 4. Intersectional Onion Model: Layers of the Entrepreneurial Paradox



F1 — Progressive Growth

A measurable increase in female-led startups reflects the cumulative impact of Morocco's gender-inclusive policy frameworks and entrepreneurship support programs.

F2 — Paradox of Inclusion

Formal visibility and institutional recognition mask the persistence of informal male-centric networks, glass labyrinth, and disproportionate reproductive burdens constraining autonomy.

F3 — Entrepreneurship as Activism

Women entrepreneurs enact social transformation through their ventures, challenging gendered norms and carving spaces of professional legitimacy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's entrepreneurship in Morocco is not merely an economic activity but a form of social activism that challenges the gendered status quo. The entrepreneurial ecosystem must move beyond superficial inclusion mechanisms toward a radical restructuring of intersectional realities that dismantle structural inequalities embedded in everyday economic life.

Policy Recommendations:

- Tailored funding with simplified access for female micro-enterprises
- Intersectional mentoring networks that bridge formal and informal business arenas;
- Digital literacy programs tailored to women entrepreneurs in rural regions;
- Legal reforms enforcing equal market access and tackling gender-based exclusion.

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