

Gender, Climate Change, and Conflict Dynamics in Egypt: Opportunities for Synergistic Action

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1. Introduction and Research Objectives

Egypt is highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. The country's large and growing population is heavily dependent on the Nile River for fresh water. Projections indicate that agriculture will suffer the largest climate-related loss with a significant decrease in food production. This situation constitutes a particularly serious threat for rural women, the majority of whom are seasonal workers. Agriculture employs about 45 per cent of all women in the labor force, but women only own 5.2 percent of the land in Egypt. Unequal inheritance rights, and customary practices that discriminate against women contribute to females' limited asset ownership, and their more unstable earnings and higher food and water insecurity¹.

Compounding the consequences of climate change, Egypt faces major social and political challenges. These include the closure of public space through the issuance of restrictive laws, state repression and severe securitization measures. Women's groups are frequently targeted. Protests and violent clashes have taken place throughout the country. On a more positive note, Egypt has made a number of noteworthy commitments to address climate change and promote gender equality through the ratification of relevant international frameworks and domestic legislation. Although conformity remains uneven at best, these standards do represent a synergistic opportunity for advancing those two agendas. The same is true for the work of women's rights organizations, which have stepped up their operations despite increasing scrutiny². Noteworthy developments include the National Strategy for Women Empowerment 2030 launched by the National Council for Women (NCW) in 2017, as well as several other recent initiatives aimed at fostering rural women's empowerment in Egypt's complex climate-security context.

This chapter presents an analysis of the interconnections between gender, climate change and conflict dynamics in Egypt. It draws on longitudinal research initiated in 2007 and conducted over multiple subsequent trips to the country. A feminist political ecological framework highlights the ways in which cultural norms and legal frameworks impact gender-differentiated access to natural resources and decision making in the context of political violence and climate change. I combine insights derived from an examination of local conditions, including visits to specific projects (e.g. Salam Canal, Al-Zarayeb), with interviews conducted with a range of local actors and international stakeholders both in Egypt and abroad. I argue that using a gender lens helps reveal the critical importance of providing opportunities for women's participation in decision-making, thus

¹ Hanan Hazier and Racha Ramadan (2016) "Women Participation in Labor Market in Egypt: Constraints and Opportunities". The Economic Research Forum. Giza, Egypt. Retrieved from: <https://erf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/999.pdf>

² S. Mohamed (2018) "Under the State's Gaze: Repression Against Women's Rights Organizations in Egypt". The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. Retrieved from: <https://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TIMEP-CSSS-briefing.pdf>

enabling them to engage more inclusively in conflict and natural resource management activities to the benefit of all.

2. Context

The combination of political disenfranchisement with a lack of social justice and economic opportunities during a time of deteriorating environmental conditions and explosive population growth is threatening the stability of the region as a whole. A number of climate-change related environmental factors constitute potential drivers of conflict in Egypt – a country already showing significant increases in potential instability and unrest. The negative impact of climate change on the Nile Basin, in particular, is expected to accelerate in coming years.

These multiple and inter-related impacts are not gender neutral. A feminist political ecology³ framework helps unpack the intersecting social categories of gender, ethnicity, class, and place that shape women's and men's experiences with livelihood generation, resource access, and engagement in private and public spheres.

i. Climate Change and Security Dynamics in Egypt

Egypt faces numerous climate-related threats to its environmental sustainability, including energy, water, and food security. Periodic droughts, flash floods and landslides, as well as *khamsin*⁴ windstorms, all common environmental phenomena in the region, are becoming increasingly erratic, severe, and destructive⁵.

The country is in a uniquely vulnerable position with respect to its water resources, over 95 per cent of which are generated outside its territory. Furthermore, Egypt relies almost exclusively on the Nile for fresh water; climate change-related impacts on the availability of water from this river thus constitute significant threats to the environmental security⁶ of the population, as well as the livelihoods and wellbeing of the women and men that depend on it for their survival. Additionally, the country's long Mediterranean coastline is already experiencing the consequences of sea level rise, including saltwater intrusion, soil salinization, and deterioration of crop quality. Projections indicate that agriculture will suffer the largest climate-related loss with a significant decrease in food production⁷.

³ Stephanie Buechler, Anne-Marie S. Hanson (2016) *A Political Ecology of Women, Water and Global Environmental Change*. Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis Group.

⁴ The *Khamsin* is a windstorm that blows in late winter and early spring carrying dust and sand and often reaching temperatures above 40° C (104° F). The name is derived from the Arabic, *khamsun*, meaning fifty, for the approximate number of days during which it blows.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2018) "Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States Best Practices and Lessons Learned". UNDP, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Climate%20and%20Disaster%20Resilience/Climate%20Change/Arab-States-CCA.pdf>

⁶ Environmental security can be defined as "a bundle of issues which involves the role that the environment and natural resources can play in peace and security, including environmental causes and drivers of conflict, environmental impacts of conflict, environmental recovery, and post-conflict peacebuilding". Global Environmental Facility (2018) "Environmental Security: Dimension and Priorities". GEF/STAP/C.54/Inf.06 June 14, 2018.

⁷ Lorena Aguilar, François Rogers, Fidaa Haddad, and Natalia Kostus (2011) "National Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender in Climate Change in Egypt". The Gender Office, International Union for Conservation of Nature – IUCN, In collaboration with the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE).

Overall, the country is heading towards extreme water scarcity, with available fresh water per capita expected to fall below 500 cubic meters per year by 2025⁸. Any further decrease in the total supply of water will likely have drastic impacts. Dwindling water availability coupled with increasing demand are aggravating existing grievances related to deficient water infrastructures, limited transparency and inadequate accountability in the water sector. Unequal distribution of water also contributes to water insecurity⁹.

The projected inundation of the Nile Delta – the most fertile area in Egypt and a major source of its food production – will have a dual negative impact, first on food availability and secondarily on employment in the agricultural sector¹⁰. Climate change-related declines in wheat production are of particular concern. Egypt is already highly dependent on wheat imports from other countries for ensuring food security. Wheat is one of the main staples of the Egyptian diet¹¹. The doubling of global wheat prices in 2011 thus significantly impacted the country's food supply and availability, contributing to spark the violent protests of the Arab Spring in Egypt.

With a 2019 estimated population of over 100 million¹², which is growing by a million every six months¹³, Egypt is also the most populous country in the Arab world and the third one in Africa, behind Nigeria and Ethiopia. The Nile Valley and Delta are among the world's most densely populated areas; construction projects seeking to accommodate growing housing needs are progressively reducing viable agricultural land¹⁴. Apart from further stressing limited natural resources, rapid population growth is putting additional pressure on other sectors such as employment, housing, sanitation, education, and health care.

As population growth drives demand, and climate change alters hydrological cycles, increasing competition over water is liable to result in popular uprisings and violence, becoming itself a conflict risk. Egypt has indeed witnessed a long sequence of turbulent transitions during the last decade. Inspired by the 2010 Tunisian revolution, Egyptian opposition groups led demonstrations and labor strikes countrywide. Subsequently, Egyptian civil society experienced a brief and unprecedented level of openness and freedom to organize. As a result, there was a proliferation in

Retrieved from: <https://genderandenvironment.org/resource/egypt-national-strategy-for-mainstreaming-gender-in-climate-change-in-egypt/>

⁸ Amir Dakkak (2017) "Egypt's Water Crisis – Recipe for Disaster". EcoMENA – Echoing Sustainability in MENA. Retrieved from: <https://www.ecomena.org/egypt-water/>; Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (MWRI). 2014. *Water Scarcity in Egypt*. http://www.mfa.gov.eg/SiteCollectionDocuments/Egypt%20Water%20Resources%20Paper_2014.pdf

⁹ Finaz, C. (2015) "A New Climate for Peace – Egypt Country Risk Brief" (Briefing Note No. 9). London: International Alert. Retrieved from: <https://library.ecc-platform.org/publications/egypt-climate-fragility-risk-brief>

¹⁰ Joel Smith, Bruce McCarl, Paul Kirshen, et al. (2014) "Egypt's Economic Vulnerability to Climate Change", *Climate Research* 62, no. 1 (2 December 2014): 59-70. Retrieved from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269038349_Egypt's_economic_vulnerability_to_climate_change

¹¹ Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO (2014). GIEWS Country Brief. Egypt: FAO Global Information and Early Warning System.

¹² UN Data (n.d.) Retrieved from:

<http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=egypt&d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a12%3bcrID%3a818>

¹³ CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics) (2018) *Home Page*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.capmas.gov.eg/HomePage.aspx>

¹⁴ Voll, S. P. (1980) "Egyptian Land Reclamation since the Revolution". *Middle East Journal* 34(2):127–148; Sims, D. 2015. *Egypt's Desert Dreams: Development or Disaster?* Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

the number of grassroots organizations that opened all over the country; these included the rural areas most severely affected by climate change.

Rapid urbanization and urban encroachment around metropolitan areas of Cairo, Alexandria and the Nile delta, aggravated by the impacts of climate change, are additional stressors that further drive violence against women – a concerning pattern also documented elsewhere¹⁵. “Global and regional initiatives supporting adaptation or climate resilience in urban settlements” are being developed¹⁶, but are not yet being meaningfully implemented in Egypt. If uncontrolled urbanization is not properly managed, it could result in increased unemployment and poverty, further contributing to the already high rates of violence in urban areas.

Fearing popular mobilization, the government passed a controversial law in 2013 that banned public protest¹⁷. Egypt has increasingly tightened its grip on human rights organizations by prosecuting their leaders over receiving foreign funding, barring them from travel and freezing their assets. Egyptian civil society is currently confronting a range of forms of state repression. Arrests of political activists, lawyers, political party members, and researchers; travel bans; asset freezes; and repeated interrogations and trials of civil society workers and staff are often reported¹⁸. Nevertheless, numerous protests in response to water shortages, excessive water pollution and water-intensive land reclamation projects in the Egyptian desert have taken place in recent years¹⁹, and are likely to intensify as available water resources are further depleted.

ii. Gender Dimensions

The events and processes outlined in previous sections affect women and men in different ways, consistent with the findings of the growing body of literature documenting the gender-differentiated impact of “natural” disasters²⁰ and climate change across the globe²¹. Feminist

¹⁵ Greta Moran (2018) “What does the Violence Against Women Act have to do with Climate Change?”. Grist. Retrieved from: <https://grist.org/article/what-does-the-violence-against-women-act-have-to-do-with-climate-change/>

¹⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2017) “Initiatives in the Area of Human Settlements and Adaptation”. Retrieved from: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/docs/2017/sbsta/eng/inf03.pdf>

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch (2013) “Egypt: Deeply Restrictive New Assembly Law Will Enable Further Crackdown, Stifle Electoral Campaigning”. November 26, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/26/egypt-deeply-restrictive-new-assembly-law#>

¹⁸ Saskia Brechenmacher (2017) “Institutionalized Repression in Egypt”. In *Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/18/institutionalized-repression-in-egypt-pub-69959>

¹⁹ Ashok Swain (2011) “Challenges for Water Sharing in the Nile Basin: Changing Geo-Politics and Changing Climate”. *Hydrological Sciences Journal*, 56:4, 687-702; The New Humanitarian (2010) “Growing Protests over Water Shortages”. Retrieved from: <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2010/07/27/growing-protests-over-water-shortages>

²⁰ Enarson E., Fothergill A., Peek L. (2018) “Gender and Disaster: Foundations and New Directions for Research and Practice”. In: Rodríguez H., Donner W., Trainor J. (eds) *Handbook of Disaster Research. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*. Springer, Cham; Buechler, S. & Hanson, A. (2015). “Introduction: Towards a Feminist Political Ecology of Women, Global Change, and Vulnerable Waterscapes. In Buechler, S., Hanson, A., D Liverman, & Gay-Antaki, M. (Eds.). *A Political Ecology of Women, Water and Global Environmental Change* (pp. 1–16). New York: Routledge.

²¹ Houria Djoudi, Bruno Locatelli, Chloe Vaast, Kiran Asher, Maria Brockhaus, and Bimbika Basnett Sijapati (2016) “Beyond dichotomies: Gender and Intersecting Inequalities in Climate Change Studies”. *Ambio*. 2016 Dec; 45(Suppl3): 248–262. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5120018/>; Dankelman, I. (2010). Climate change, human security and gender. In I. Dankelman (Ed.), *Gender and climate change: An introduction* (pp. 55–72). London: Earthscan.

approaches to social theory and feminist political ecology have shown that access to, and decision-making power over, natural and political resources are deeply gendered²².

Women in Egypt, as elsewhere, do not exist in isolation, but as part of “[h]ouseholds ... linked to communities through collective actions and through informal and overlapping networks of reciprocity and cooperation” that produce gendered norms and social roles²³. Conformity with gendered expectations of female subordination has resulted, among other inequalities, in illiteracy rates for women being significantly higher than those for men – one third of adult women are estimated to be illiterate compared to 15 per cent of males. Consequently, over 10 million women in Egypt cannot read or write and thus have limited opportunities outside of the agriculture sector for employment²⁴. Yet, land and resource ownership in Egypt, essential for livelihood security, are traditionally ascribed to males. This pattern places rural women in a particularly disadvantageous position. A very small percentage of them (5.2 per cent) are agricultural landowners owing to patriarchal attitudes and inheritance customs in Egypt that privilege males²⁵.

The 2011 Egyptian revolution – part of the so-called “Arab Spring” – and the regime changes that followed, also highlighted the rampant sexual violence perpetrated against women in public spaces. Urban violence is not an uncommon occurrence in Egypt’s growing cities. Daily incidents are reported throughout the country and especially in Cairo, one of the most densely populated cities in the world. Female residents of impoverished neighborhoods in Greater Cairo are at a particularly high risk²⁶.

Gender-based violence is a manifestation of patriarchal attitudes. Incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assaults in public spaces (e.g. Tahrir Square during the 2011 and subsequent demonstrations) have been widely publicized and condemned²⁷. Acts of violence against women by intimate partners and family members also remain pervasive in Egypt and are largely tolerated because of the relationship of the woman to the perpetrator – that is, they are considered a private matter. A 2015 study found that almost half of ever married women aged 18-64 years in Egypt reported having experienced some form of spousal violence, with 32 per cent reporting physical violence and 12 per cent alleging sexual violence²⁸.

²² Nightingale, A. (2003) “Nature–Society and Development: Social, Cultural and Ecological Change in Nepal”. *Geoforum* 34:525–540; Sultana, F. (2009) “Fluid Lives: Subjectivities, Gender and Water in Rural Bangladesh”. *Gender, Place and Culture* 16(4):427–444; Elmhirst, R. (2011) “Introducing New Feminist Political Ecologies”. *Geoforum* 42:129–132.

²³ Cleaver, F. (1998) “Choice, Complexity and Change: Gendered Livelihoods and the Management of Water”. *Agriculture and Human Values* 15:293–299. At 298.

²⁴ Amal Kandeel (2017) “Millions of Rural Working Women in Egypt at Risk from Climate Change”. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/millions-rural-working-women-egypt-risk-climate-change>

²⁵ Hanan Hazier and Racha Ramadan (2016). Supra note 1.

²⁶ Finaz, C. (2015). Supra note 9.

²⁷ EuroMed Rights (2016) “Egypt: Report on Violence Against Women”. Retrieved from: <https://euromedrights.org/publication/egypt-report-violence-women/>; Miwa Kato (2017) “Women of Egypt”. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. The American University in Cairo. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/women-of-egypt/>

²⁸ Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS) (2014) Retrieved from: <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/organizations/central-agency-public-mobilization-and-statistics-capmas-egypt>

Furthermore, Egypt's explosive population growth is directly correlated with women's limited participation in the labor force. The World Bank suggests that increases in fertility rates in Egypt are partially driven by higher female unemployment: as women are unable to find jobs, many choose to marry – or are married off – as a survival strategy and start reproducing at an early age²⁹.

In spite of this challenging environment – or perhaps because of it – Egyptian women have played a vital role in shaping their country's political realities. Initially after the revolution, the situation for women in Egypt deteriorated markedly, sparking a strong public outcry. Subsequently, the new constitution adopted in 2014 gave unprecedented constitutional rights to women. In April 2019, Egypt approved via national referendum a set of constitutional amendments that included the establishment of a 25 per cent quota for female parliamentarians. These amendments also reaffirmed the military's role as guardian of Egypt, while the government began enacting laws to limit freedoms of assembly and expression.

In Egypt's currently repressive political climate, independent women's rights organizations and feminist groups have often been targeted, both as activists involved in the public sphere and as women grappling with the dire consequences of the escalation and codification of repression. The use of torture – i.e. beatings, electric shocks, stress positions, rape and other forms of sexual violence – has been widely documented³⁰. Protests and violent clashes have taken place throughout the country. President el-Sisi has responded by doubling efforts to eliminate any hint of criticism, as he presides over the country's worst human rights crisis in decades³¹.

Somewhat paradoxically, Egypt has ratified a number of international frameworks and enacted domestic legislation aimed at reducing *de jure*, if not necessarily *de facto*, gender discrimination³². International instruments include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR1325). At the domestic level, the Egyptian Government criminalized sexual harassment for the first time in 2014 and adopted the National Strategy to End Violence against Women in 2015. A new constitutional clause reserving 25 per cent of seats in all local councils to women, the increase of women ministers in the Presidential Cabinet also to 25 per cent,

²⁹ Jacob Goldston (2014) "Unemployment may Lead to a New Youth Bulge in Egypt", World Bank, 10 July 2014. Retrieved from: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/unemployment-may-lead-new-youth-bulge-egypt>

³⁰ Human Rights Watch (2017) "We Do Unreasonable Things Here: Torture and National Security in el-Sisi's Egypt". Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/egypt0917_web.pdf; Amnesty International (2018) "Egypt". Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/>

³¹ S. Mohamed (2018). Supra note 2.

³² *De jure* discrimination takes place "when the text of a law or policy contains discriminatory provisions". *De facto* discrimination occurs "when the law or policy is not discriminatory in itself, but its implementation and enforcement have a negative impact on women", or as a result of "broader practices, as for example, culture, traditions, and stereotyping which deny women full equality and enjoyment of rights". Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (n.d.) "Submitting Information to the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and in Practice". Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/SubmissionInformation.aspx>

and the appointment of Egypt's first woman governor in 2017³³ are additional noteworthy developments.

3. Field Findings

In Egypt, patriarchal constructions of natural resource management frame women's position in their social, natural, and constructed environments, mediating land ownership and water governance often to the exclusion of women. Egyptian agriculture – and subsequently Egyptian food security – face a number of concerns for environmentalists and gender specialists alike. As the rural population grows, land is fragmented into increasingly smaller parcels. This pattern hinders the organization and efficiency of farm resource use, resulting in a weak capacity for socio-economic mobility and a limited adaptability to environmental stressors for both male and female farmers but specially for women given their already marginalized situation. The pronounced male bias evident in access to and control over resources in the country reflects the patriarchal structures that dominate government institutions, family life and economic decision-making in Egyptian society.

The Salam Canal – Egypt's largest land reclamation and irrigation project – illustrates this pattern. This project aimed at converting the wetlands on the River Nile's Eastern Delta from government property to individual privately-owned parcels through government resettlement schemes. The Nile Valley and Delta are among the most densely populated areas in the world. Informal construction to accommodate the burgeoning population is reducing the amount of land available for agriculture. Efforts to reclaim desert land for agricultural production and settlement expansion have been pursued since the 1950s³⁴.

Reclamation initiative in the Salam Canal involved the construction of irrigation and drainage infrastructure, land preparation for farming and the development of settler villages. It also required removing the existing population and redistributing the land among the new settlers, which often resulted in violent clashes. The settlers were selected through a formalized application process. While a quota of at least 20 per cent female settlers was mandated, only a handful of female applicants were identified all of whom “handed over the control over land and farm management to a male family member”³⁵ in conformity with gendered expectations.

Some traditionally marginalized minority groups have sought to overcome structural violence and environmental threats by establishing community-based organizations. The Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE) is a case in point. APE is located in an area known as Al-Zarayeb, in the outskirts of Cairo's Mokattam Hills. A neighborhood of informal settlements, Al-Zarayeb is home to 60,000 people most of whom are Coptic Christians, Egypt's largest minority

³³ MENA-OECD (2018) “Women's Political Participation in Egypt Barriers: Opportunities and Gender Sensitivity of Select Political Institutions”. Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/womens-political-participation-in-egypt.pdf>

³⁴ S.P. Voll (1980) “Egyptian Land Reclamation since the Revolution. Middle East Journal” 34(2): 127-148; D. Sims (2015) *Egypt's Desert Dreams: Development or Disaster?* Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

³⁵ Rap, Edwin, and Jaskolski, Martina S. (2019) “The Lives of Women in a Land Reclamation Project: Gender, Class, Culture and Place in Egyptian Land and Water Management”. *Int'l Journal of the Commons*, 13(1), pp.84–104. At. 85.

group³⁶. The association began as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to help women find self-sustaining work by recycling waste materials. Women and girls sort through the garbage looking for plastic and glass. These are manually separated, washed, cut, and sold to manufacturers who transform them into a variety of recycled items. Vegetables, fruits and food remains are also collected and fed to goats and chickens and, in the past, also to the pigs that constituted a key item of the local economy.

Membership in APE increased after the government's controversial decision to kill off pigs during the 2009 swine flu epidemic. Characterized as medically-unnecessary and politically-motivated³⁷, this move severely impacted the Coptic population in Al-Zarayeb where many relied on pigs for their livelihood. APE currently works with 250 women members who count on each other for protection and receive assistance securing an environmentally-friendly source of income, education courses – mostly basic literacy classes – and daycare support for their children³⁸.

The Way Forward: Conclusions and Recommendations

The status of women – and men – in any society is the outcome of the interaction between cultural, political, socio-economic, security, and environmental factors, all of which intersect in a complex and fluid manner. As a threat multiplier, climate change is disproportionately affecting women while amplifying existing demographic, economic, and political pressures on Egypt's stability. Because all manifestations of climate change affect women and men differently, a gender perspective is essential when considering environmental policy and decision-making, and in the development and implementation of strategies concerning mitigation and adaptation. Enhanced opportunities for both women and men to decide on and participate in the implementation of effective mitigation and adaptation measures, including benefiting from the various climate change programs and funds available, would advance Egypt's national economic, environmental and social sustainability.

Against the backdrop of the major environmental and social changes sweeping the country, there has been notable progress related to women's participation in public life. Women in Egypt currently enjoy the highest level of female political representation in the history of the country. Nevertheless, while the proportion of women in the national legislature has substantially increased since the Arab Spring, it remains low compared to other countries in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region³⁹.

Considerable efforts have been made to improve national legislation's compliance with international standards. Egyptian domestic law remains nevertheless limited and unequal with respect to gender considerations, particularly with regard to inheritance, consent to marry and maternity leaves. These inadequacies can have a strong impact on women's access to public life

³⁶ Minority Rights Group International (n.d.) "Copts of Egypt". World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Retrieved from: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/copts/>

³⁷ Al Jazeera (2009) "UN says Egypt pig cull real mistake: Agency says no reason for slaughter as flu is spread from human-to-human". 29th April 2009. Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2009/04/200942923217637747.html>

³⁸ Jihad Abaza (2019) "Protecting the Environment and Supporting Egyptian Women". Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. Retrieved from: <http://interactive.achariricenter.org/egypt/protecting-the-environment-and-egyptian-women/>

³⁹ MENA-OECD (2018). Supra note 33.

and political opportunities, as well as on their ability to effectively respond to the impacts of climate change.

It must however be born in mind that the elimination of gender-based legal discrimination only constitutes a first step. Women's subordinated socio-economic status in Egypt, and the pervasively patriarchal gender norms that regulate social life often appear to conflict with a public role for women. In order to effect a meaningful impact on women's lives, legal frameworks must be supported by gender-sensitive public institutions to ensure the sustainability of gender equality policies. A noteworthy step in that direction was the establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW). Working through its Women Business Development Center and its Women Political Support Unit, the NCW is the central Egyptian agency tasked with promoting women's status and closing socio-economic gender gaps⁴⁰. The official designation of 2017 as the Year of Women in Egypt further signaled the adoption of economic and social policies with greater sensitivity to the needs of women. Some improvements are already evident, especially at the institutional level. On the other hand, the NCW has been criticized for remaining silent on the issue of SGBV against women, including sexual violence and harassment by security forces⁴¹.

The NCW was responsible for the elaboration of the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030. Significantly, as stated in this document's introductory section, "[t]he Strategy should not be seen as a course of action for those concerned with women's empowerment, gender equality and gender-based discrimination issues, but rather as a road map for the Egyptian society at large"⁴². This approach is re-emphasized in Egypt's National Voluntary Report 2018 – the second review on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report outlines Egypt's strategic plan's three dimensions (economic, social and environmental), and stresses "[t]he high priority the country attaches to achieving food, water, and energy security"⁴³. Efforts to advance SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) "[stem] from the belief that the nation's progress and stability can only be achieved through women's active participation"⁴⁴. Clearly, these initiatives follow an *efficiency* rather than an *equity* approach to gender equality⁴⁵.

Given these realities, advancing women's empowerment agenda in Egypt's current context may require a "recalibration" of feminist language. "Progress may be best attained when the focus on

⁴⁰ MENA-OECD (2018). Supra note 33.

⁴¹ Sara Abdel Rahim and Erin Fracoli (2016) "Egypt's National Council for Women: A Substitute for Civil Society?" Retrieved from: <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/egypts-national-council-for-women-a-substitute-for-civil-society/>

⁴² National Council for Women, NCW (2017) "National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030: Vision and Pillars". Nasr City, Egypt: NCW. Pg. 9. Retrieved from: <http://ncw.gov.eg/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/final-version-national-strategy-for-the-empowerment-of-egyptian-women-2030.pdf>

⁴³ Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform (2018) Egypt's Voluntary National Review 2018. Pg. 9. Retrieved from: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20269EGY_VNR_2018_final_with_Hyperlink_9720185b45d.pdf

⁴⁴ National Council for Women, NCW (2017) "National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030: Vision and Pillars". Nasr City, Egypt: NCW. Pg. 9. Retrieved from: <http://ncw.gov.eg/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/final-version-national-strategy-for-the-empowerment-of-egyptian-women-2030.pdf>

⁴⁵ Shahrá Razavi (2017) "Revisiting Equity and Efficiency Arguments for Gender Equality: A Principled but Pragmatic Approach". *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*. Volume 38, 2017 - Issue 4. Pgs. 558-563.

women's rights is less pronounced in advocacy or rights per se but rather embedded in the sine qua non for economic growth and social progress"⁴⁶. Women in violence-prone and environmentally-sensitive settings like the Salam Canal and the Al-Zarayeb neighborhood would thus benefit from assistance programs that "emphasize how women's contributions can help build a healthy, safe, and prosperous society"⁴⁷.

Lessons from Egypt can, by qualified extension, guide efforts to advance and sustain peace and security in other contexts, while also responding to the challenges posed by climate change and deteriorating environmental conditions. During this critical time when humanity faces a potentially existential threat in the combined destructive forces of violent conflict and climate change, women in Egypt and across the globe must, with their male counterparts, be at the forefront of a worldwide response that is sensitive to local contexts.

⁴⁶ Miwa Kato (2017) "Women of Egypt". *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. The American University in Cairo. Pp. 50. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/women-of-egypt/>

⁴⁷ Ibid. Pp. 50-51.