

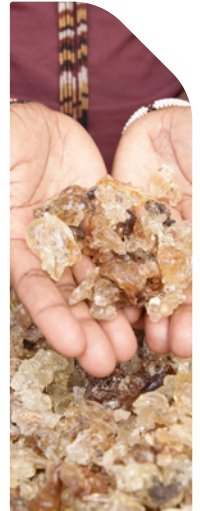
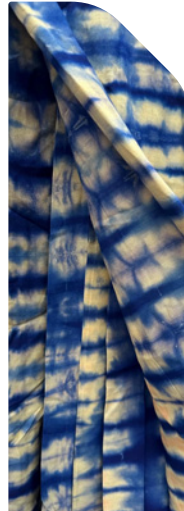
MICRO-ENTERPRISES AS PATHWAYS

TO THE ECONOMIC INCLUSION
OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN THE ARAB WORLD

**IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES
OPPORTUNITIES
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Commissioned by:
IPPF Arab World Regional Office (AWRO)

October 2025





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Foreword

This mapping report aims to analyze the landscape of microprojects supporting social and economic empowerment in Tunisia, Sudan, and Mauritania. It explores the opportunities that exist, the barriers that continue to limit progress, and the ways in which entrepreneurship can be better supported to create more inclusive and sustainable livelihoods for women and young people.

The report brings together the voices of youth, women, and a wide range of stakeholders and partners across the three countries. Their insights and lived experiences are essential to understanding local realities and identifying practical pathways for economic empowerment and social inclusion.

At IPPF, we recognize that health, wellbeing, and economic empowerment are closely interconnected. Sustainable livelihoods not only improve economic security but also strengthen resilience, increase opportunities, and enable individuals to make informed choices about their lives and futures. This mapping provides an important foundation for shaping future programs, strengthening partnerships, and promoting integrated approaches that place people and communities at the center of development efforts.

The commitment of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development to advancing economic empowerment and improving livelihoods in these countries has been fundamental. It reflects a shared commitment to supporting vulnerable communities and expanding opportunities for those most affected by poverty and exclusion.

I would like to sincerely thank all those who contributed to this mapping and all those who remain committed to ensuring that women and young people have equal opportunities to build healthier, more resilient, and more prosperous lives.

Dr. Fadoua Bakhadda
Regional Director

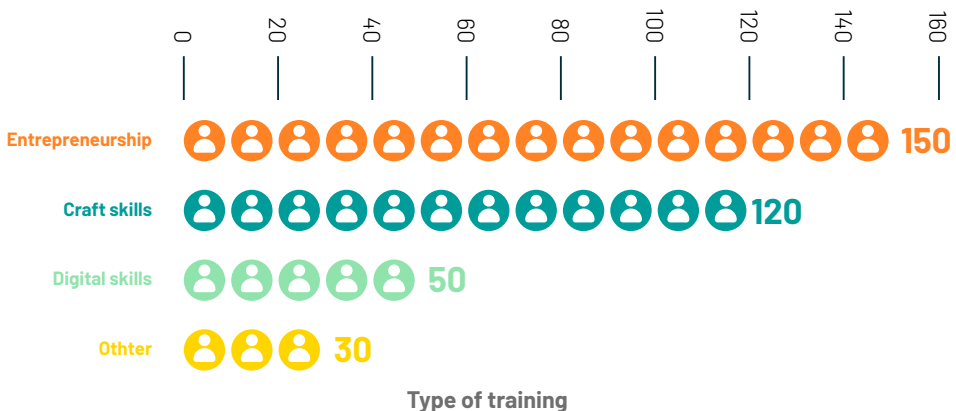
International Planned
Parenthood Federation

Arab World Regional Office

Executive summary

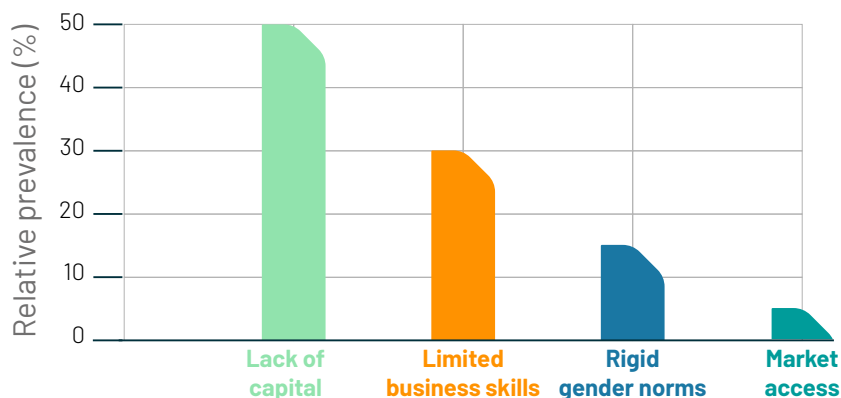
This mapping study examines how social enterprises, handicrafts and small/micro-businesses can be leveraged to improve the wellbeing of women and youth who access the services of IPPF's Arab World Regional Office (AWRO) member associations (MAs) in Sudan, Mauritania and Tunisia. It synthesizes findings from project reports, country consultations and external literature and it integrates them with evidence from economic and labour market research. The study shows that micro enterprises and handicrafts are culturally embedded livelihood strategies that offer viable pathways to greater autonomy and better health outcomes when they are coupled with reproductive health services. In Mauritania around 300 women and youth participated in entrepreneurship and craft training sessions that enabled many to start micro-businesses and join cooperatives. In Sudan, the Sudanese Family Planning Association trained 40 service providers (34 women and 6 men) to link reproductive health services with economic empowerment and conducted community sessions for 180 participants that highlighted.

Participation in training by type



the connection between income generation and health. Tunisia's context is characterized by high educational attainment among women yet persistent unemployment; women and youth surveyed expressed a strong desire to develop micro-projects in **artisanal crafts, agro-alimentary products, aesthetics and digital services**, but they face structural barriers such as limited access to finance, rigid gender norms and a lack of technical support. The report finds that barriers to market entry are remarkably similar across the three countries: lack of affordable credit, limited business skills, fragmented producer groups, socio-cultural norms that restrict women's mobility and decision-making and weak linkages between handicraft producers and markets. At the same time, opportunities abound.

Major barriers faced by women and youth



Mauritania has a nascent social enterprise for contraceptive distribution that generates a **20%** profit margin, and an ecotourism project has trained **190** women in handicrafts and **70** in sustainable tourism, providing income to nearly **200** women-run cooperatives. Tunisia benefits from a **Startup Act** that offers tax exemptions and access to foreign exchange for new businesses and from a rich tradition of crafts such as pottery, textiles and leatherwork. Sudanese women are proving resilient entrepreneurs despite conflict and economic turmoil: UNDP programmes support over **3 000** women farmers with seeds and tools and help 500 women join savings associations, while independent initiatives encourage women-run salons, art studios and food businesses in displacement camps.

The study proposes a set of recommendations for each country and for AWRO's regional programme. Key actions include establishing **integrated health-economy hubs** at MA clinics where health consultations are paired with enterprise training; providing **micro-credit** and seed capital through partnerships with microfinance institutions; strengthening **business skills** through mentorship, cooperatives and digital marketing training; advocating for **simplified tax regimes** and regulatory frameworks for micro-enterprises; and investing in market access via tourism, online platforms and fair-trade networks. The report concludes that combining reproductive health services with economic empowerment is a powerful strategy for strengthening the autonomy of women and youth and for enhancing the sustainability of IPPF AWRO's health services.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale¹

The **International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)** is a leading global service provider and advocate for health and rights. Established in 1952, IPPF operates as a federation of over 140 national



member associations and collaborative partners. The Federation's mission is to promote health and human rights as fundamental principles, ensuring that every individual can make informed choices about their wellbeing free from discrimination, coercion, or violence. Guided by core values of voluntarism, inclusiveness, gender equality, and respect for diversity, IPPF works to advance universal access to quality health services, particularly among marginalized and underserved populations. Over the past seven decades, the Federation has played a pivotal role in shaping global health policies and delivering millions of services annually through community-based, rights-driven approaches.

Within this global framework, **the IPPF Arab World Regional Office (AWRO)** serves as the regional coordination and support hub for **Member Associations (MAs)** across the Arab region. AWRO's work reflects both the Federation's overarching vision and the unique socio-cultural, economic, and political realities of the region. Since its establishment, AWRO has focused on strengthening the capacity of national MAs to deliver comprehensive, quality, and accessible health services. The office also provides technical assistance, strategic guidance, and advocacy support to promote health as an integral component of broader human development and social justice efforts.

¹ Sources: [8] [9] [10]

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) operates across the Arab region through its Arab World Regional Office (AWRO) and national Member Associations (MAs). While the primary mandate of the MAs is to deliver comprehensive health services, the Federation recognizes that health outcomes are deeply intertwined with economic and social determinants. Women and young people in Sudan, Mauritania, and Tunisia face persistent unemployment, precarious incomes, and restrictive gender norms that undermine their ability to access health services. Conversely, health challenges such as unplanned pregnancy, maternal morbidity, and limited access to care hinder women's participation in economic life.

Integrating economic empowerment with health services is, therefore, both an equity imperative and a strategic approach to increasing the utilization of services and improving overall livelihoods. The present mapping exercise forms part of AWRO's Economic and Social Empowerment Initiative, which seeks to support women and youth accessing MAs' services to establish and expand small and micro-enterprises, particularly in traditional handicrafts, agro-processing, and other culturally appropriate economic activities.

1.2 Objectives of the mapping

In alignment with the International Planned Parenthood Federation's (IPPF) commitment to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the principal objective of this study is to assess the **needs, capacities and opportunities** of women and youth accessing health services provided by the MAs in Sudan, Mauritania and Tunisia with respect to handicrafts and small/micro-businesses. The specific objectives are to:

1.

Profile the socio-economic context of women and youth in each country and summarize the status of their labour participation, education and health. This provides a backdrop against which to interpret economic empowerment initiatives.

2.

Map existing skills, interests and resources related to handicrafts and micro-enterprises among beneficiaries of the MAs and within their communities. This includes identifying traditional crafts, agricultural products, service sectors and new digital opportunities.

3.

Identify barriers and challenges that hinder the development of handicrafts and small enterprises, including financial constraints, technical and marketing gaps, social norms and policy obstacles.

4.

Examine successful models and ongoing initiatives that link health services with economic empowerment, drawing on examples from the three countries and from relevant regional experiences.

5.

Formulate recommendations for IPPF AWRO, national MAs, government stakeholders, NGOs, and relevant institutions, as well as policy makers, to strengthen integrated health-economic empowerment programmes that are gender- and youth-responsive and that promote sustainable livelihoods.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report is divided into nine major sections. After this introduction, **section 2** describes the methodology used for the mapping, combining document review, qualitative consultations and secondary research. **Section 3** provides country-specific profiles for Tunisia, Mauritania and Sudan, highlighting demographic, economic and health indicators as well as the policy and institutional environment for handicrafts and small businesses. **Section 4** assesses the existing skills, resources and potential of women and youth in each country for handicraft and micro-enterprise activities. **Section 5** analyses the barriers and challenges that constrain their participation in economic life. **Section 6** showcases opportunities and success stories from within the three countries and from comparable contexts in the region. **Section 7** examines models that integrate health services with economic empowerment and discusses how such integration can benefit both health outcomes and livelihoods. **Section 8** summarizes policy and programme recommendations for IPPF AWRO and its partners.

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview

This study uses an **interdisciplinary approach** that combines qualitative and quantitative data to capture the experiences of women and youth engaged in handicrafts and micro-businesses. The methodology was guided by the **IPPF Social Enterprise Competency Mapping** and the **Methodology and Guiding Questions for Community-Based Consultations and Stakeholder Meetings**. It consists of five main components:

(1) a review of project reports and country studies, (2) interviews with IPPF AWRO staff and MAs, (3) community-based consultations and competency mapping, (4) secondary research on labour markets and micro-enterprise development, and (5) cross-country analysis and synthesis. By triangulating these data sources, the study aims to present a comprehensive picture of the opportunities and constraints faced by the target populations.

2.2 Document review²

The document review encompassed several categories of sources:

■ **Project completion and activity reports.** The “Activity Report” for June–September 2025 provided detailed quantitative and qualitative information on training sessions, participants and outcomes across the three countries. For example, it documented that more than **300** participants (mainly women and youth) in Mauritania attended entrepreneurship and craft training sessions that enabled them to start small projects and join cooperatives. In Sudan, the same report indicated that **40** health service providers (34 women and 6 men) were trained to integrate economic empowerment into reproductive health services, and community sessions reached **180** participants.

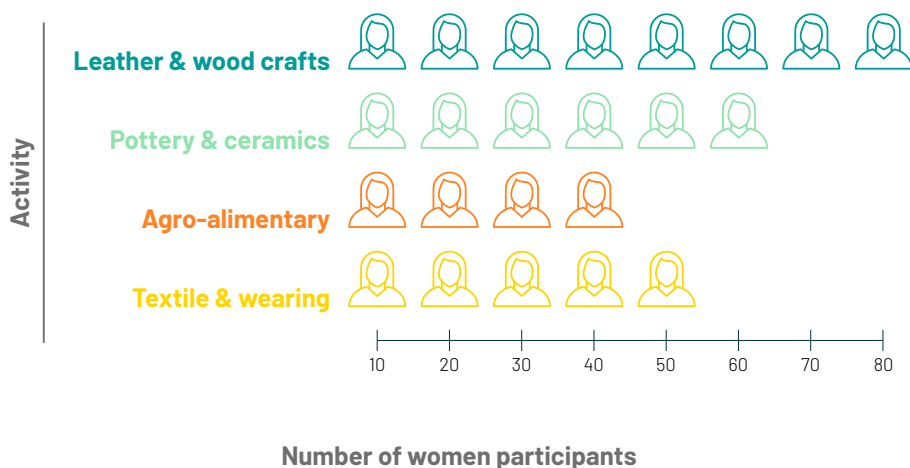
■ **Country-specific consultation reports.** The Tunisia consultation report synthesized female focus group discussions from **Tataouine** and **Greater Tunis**, revealing that educated young women face high unemployment (20% nationally and over **45%** in some interior regions) despite their high literacy and university participation. The report also highlighted the participants’ interest in handicrafts, agro-processing, aesthetics and digital marketing as pathways to self-employment and emphasized the need for micro-credit and mentorship.

²Sources: [1][2][5][7][8][9]

■ **Narrative reports from Mauritania and Sudan.** Four group discussions in Mauritania gathered **80** participants (60% women and 40% youth) to identify health and livelihood challenges and proposed integrated approaches linking health services with income generation. The consolidated social enterprise report noted that the Mauritanian Association for the Promotion of the Family operates a contraceptive re-supply business that achieved a **20%** profit margin. The Sudan report described the socio-economic context of Khartoum, Gezira and Nile River states and emphasized the potential of micro-projects in handicrafts and small trade to support women displaced by conflict.

■ **Regional and international literature.** Additional sources included the “Consolidated Mapping Report – Social Enterprise,” which summarized opportunities, barriers and best practices across the Arab region; the CGAP “Gender-Smart Market Mapping for Nano and Micro Enterprises” practical guide, which emphasizes the need for segmentation and market sizing in gender-sensitive microfinance; and labour market and enterprise articles from UN agencies, donor programmes and academic literature. For example, a United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) impact story recounts how the **Creative Tunisia** project formed a cooperative of **60** women potters whose incomes multiplied five-fold and now support **150** families. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Sudan provided tools and seeds to more than **3 000** women farmers, trained **1 000** women in home-garden production and supported **500** women to join savings cooperatives, thereby improving livelihoods and nutrition. These external references contextualize the country findings and offer transferable lessons.

Distribution of cooperative activities



2.3 Community consultations and competency mapping³

In each participating country, the Member Associations (MAs) of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) undertook community-based consultations and competency-mapping exercises to assess the aspirations, needs, and capacities of women and youth. These activities built upon each MA's institutional experience in health service delivery and community engagement. Methodologies varied by context but generally included focus **group discussions (FGDs)**, **semi-structured interviews**, and **participatory mapping** of local resources and livelihood opportunities. Participants were recruited through MA clinics, community leaders, and youth networks, ensuring a balanced representation in terms of age, education level, socio-economic status, and geographic diversity:

³Sources: [1][2][5][7][8][9]

Mauritania: Association Mauritanienne pour la Promotion de la Famille (AMPF)



The Mauritanian Association for the Promotion of the Family (AMPF), established in **1988**, is a national non-governmental organization and a full Member Association of IPPF. AMPF's mission is to promote health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on women, youth, and marginalized groups. Over the past three decades, AMPF has contributed to the national health agenda through the provision of quality health services, awareness-raising campaigns, and advocacy for gender equality and social inclusion. The association operates through fixed and mobile service delivery points across Mauritania, reaching diverse and often hard to access communities.

Under this initiative, **AMPF** organized **four FGDs** involving **80 participants** (approximately 48 women and 32 youth). The discussions explored key themes, including challenges in maternal and child health, perceptions of health services, barriers to access, and the types of skills participants wished to develop—such as handicrafts, agro-processing, and micro-enterprise management. The consultations also examined potential approaches for integrating health and livelihood activities. Subsequently, AMPF hosted training sessions reaching more than **300 participants**, which provided practical instruction in entrepreneurship, production techniques, and crafts

Sudan: Sudanese Family Planning Association (SFPA)



The **Sudanese Family Planning Association (SFPA)**, founded in **1965**, is one of the oldest civil society organizations in Sudan working in the field of health and family wellbeing. As an active IPPF Member Association, SFPA has a long history of delivering community-based health services, implementing advocacy initiatives, and promoting women's empowerment and youth participation. The association operates through a national network of clinics and outreach teams, maintaining its commitment to provide essential services even in humanitarian and post-conflict contexts.

Within the scope of this project, **SFPA** conducted **two three-day training sessions** targeting **40 service providers** (34 women and 6 men). These sessions aimed to build the capacity of frontline health workers to integrate economic empowerment components into community health outreach. The training covered needs assessment, identification of viable micro-projects, and guidance on accessing finance and market opportunities. In parallel, **six community sessions** were convened, engaging **180 beneficiaries**, primarily women and youth. These sessions facilitated discussions on the interlink ages between economic independence and health outcomes and included components on health education and life-skills development.

Tunisia: The Tunisian Association for Reproductive Health (ATSR)



The **Tunisian Association for Reproductive Health (ATSR)** was established in **1968** and serves as Tunisia's national IPPF Member Association. ATSR has been instrumental in advancing health, gender equality, and youth empowerment in Tunisia for over five decades. The organization operates through a network of clinics and outreach programmes nationwide, providing preventive, curative, and educational services. ATSR is also recognized for its policy advocacy and its contributions to the national dialogue on women's rights, community development, and social inclusion.

As part of this initiative, **ATSR** organized consultations in **Tataouine** and the **Greater Tunis** region, engaging young women and vulnerable women who access ATSR services. The workshops applied participatory mapping techniques to identify existing competencies in artisanal crafts (e.g., sewing, embroidery), agro-processing (e.g., home-made jams and preserves), aesthetics (e.g., hairdressing and cosmetics), digital marketing, and urban agriculture (e.g., poultry and snail rearing). Participants also discussed structural barriers such as the lack of local training centers, high start-up costs, and limited market access. The consultations highlighted a strong demand for integrated programmes that combine access to health services with micro-credit facilities, business mentoring, and vocational training.

2.4 Data analysis and synthesis

Data from the documents and consultations (Check Annexes) were extracted into thematic matrices. Quantitative information on participants, gender distribution and training types was compiled to produce descriptive statistics and charts. Qualitative data from FGDs and interviews were coded to identify recurrent themes (e.g., types of crafts, barriers to business, support needs). Cross-country comparison tables were then developed to highlight similarities and differences in opportunities, barriers and policy contexts. The analysis also integrated external research findings to triangulate and validate the local data and to propose scalable models. Limitations of the methodology include reliance on available reports (which may omit certain details) and the evolving political context (especially in Sudan) that may affect the implementation of recommendations.

2.5 Theoretical frameworks and guiding principles⁴

The interpretation of findings and the design of recommendations were primarily guided by IPPF's theoretical and programmatic frameworks, which place health at the centre of youth empowerment and social justice. These frameworks are grounded in a rights-based, client-centered approach that integrates health, education, gender equality, and economic empowerment.

At the core of this approach lies IPPF's Rights-Based and Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) Framework, which positions reproductive health as both a human right and a foundation for empowerment.

Complementing this, the Integrated Package of Essential Services (IPES) provides a holistic model that combines health service provision with gender-based violence prevention, counseling, education, and livelihood opportunities.

⁴ Sources: [8][9][10]

By addressing the multiple and intersecting needs of young people particularly adolescent girls and young women, IPES supports their overall wellbeing and agency. This integrated approach also operationalizes IPPF's Theory of Change (2023–2028), which identifies bodily autonomy and people-powered action as key drivers of gender equality, health, and social justice.

Aligned with these principles, IPPF's Youth-Centered Approach (YCA) ensures that programmes are not only designed for young people but also with and by them. It promotes meaningful youth participation in all stages of programming design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation which foster leadership, accountability, and sustainability. The Social Enterprise Competence Model further translates these values into practice by developing problem-solving, entrepreneurship, resource mobilization, marketing, and financial management skills among both service providers and beneficiaries. This model strengthens local ownership and sustainability while linking health to economic empowerment.

To enrich these IPPF frameworks, two complementary theories were also applied. The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework reinforces IPPF's youth-centered philosophy by focusing on building young people's strengths; competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring rather than addressing their deficits. The Asset-Building Framework expands on this by identifying six forms of capital essential for empowerment: financial, human, social, physical, normative (social norms), and institutional. These complementary approaches align with IPPF's integrated and rights-based vision, underscoring that empowerment requires access not only to services but also to skills, networks, enabling norms, and supportive policies.

By synthesizing IPPF's rights-based, integrated, and youth-centered approaches with asset-based and developmental frameworks, the study proposes holistic and context-sensitive interventions that advance health, gender equality, and sustainable economic empowerment.

3 Country profiles

3.1 Tunisia: the paradox of education and unemployment⁵

Guided by the rights-based and asset-building frameworks outlined above, the country analysis examines how structural and social factors influence youth and women's economic empowerment in Tunisia. While Tunisia has made substantial progress in health and education, these gains have not yet translated into inclusive economic outcomes.

As it has been indicated in the Tunisia consultations report (Check Annexes), Tunisia has long been considered a regional leader in women's rights and education. Young women have a literacy rate of **91%** and constitute roughly **60%** of university students. Yet these achievements have not translated into proportional labour market participation. In interior regions such as **Tataouine**, unemployment among female graduates exceeds **45%**, reflecting regional inequalities and a mismatch between education and available jobs. Youth unemployment overall is **33.8%**, with university graduates particularly affected.

Despite strong human capital indicators, Tunisia's economic structure provides limited pathways for young people especially women to translate education into sustainable livelihoods. The economy remains heavily concentrated in services and low value-added manufacturing, sectors that offer few opportunities for innovation or upward mobility. In this context, entrepreneurship has emerged as a national priority and a potential driver of youth inclusion.

91%

Young women have a literacy

60%

Constitute roughly

45%

Female graduates in Tataouine

33,8%

Youth unemployment in Tataouine

⁵Sources: [1][2][8][9]

To stimulate innovation and job creation, the government introduced the **Startup Act**, a flagship policy designed to create a more enabling ecosystem for entrepreneurs through tax exemptions, access to foreign currency, and administrative facilitation. However, the benefits of this framework remain unevenly distributed. Access to finance continues to be a major constraint, particularly for women and youth outside the capital.

Many micro-enterprises operate informally and struggle to scale due to limited collateral, financial literacy gaps, and weak linkages to formal markets.

Microfinance institutions such as **ENDA Inter-Arabe** and **Taysir** are the major microfinance providers; government programmes like **Ra'idat (Women Entrepreneurs)** target women entrepreneurs, yet they reach only a fraction of potential beneficiaries. Social norms continue to restrict women's mobility, and community expectations often steer women toward certain activities (e.g., home-based crafts) while discouraging participation in male-dominated sectors. The mapping exercise highlighted two different sub-contexts:

- **Tataouine** (south) – an isolated governorate with a livelihood base in agriculture, herding and some artisanal activities. Participants reported long distances to health centers, conservative norms and a lack of economic diversification. Crafts such as weaving, leatherwork and pottery are traditional but poorly commercialized. Demand for integrated services is high, with participants suggesting mobile HEALTH units coupled with craft training and micro-credit.

Tunisia has long been considered a regional leader in women's rights and education ”

■ **Greater Tunis** (urban) – the capital region benefits from better health infrastructure and more diverse job markets, yet competition is fierce and living costs are high. Unemployment among young women remains significant, especially in peripheral neighborhoods. Participants identified opportunities in digital services, catering, beauty and design but requested mentorship, marketing support and affordable loans.

Overall, participants view **handicrafts, agro-processing, aesthetics and digital marketing** as viable micro-projects that can generate income while accommodating social and household responsibilities. However, the lack of integrated programmes that combine health, finance and business skills means that many remain trapped in informal, low-productivity activities.

Tunisia's macro-economic and health indicators provide essential context for understanding the country's development trajectory. According to World Bank data, **GDP per capita** (current US\$) increased from about **US\$3,708 in 2022 to US\$3,950 in 2023 and is projected to reach US\$4,350 in 2024**. This modest growth follows a pandemic-induced recession but has yet to generate broad-based employment. Women's labour force participation remains low at **26.8% in 2023**, and female unemployment (**22.2%**) continues to exceed that of men (**13.8 %**). The maternal mortality ratio decreased slightly to **36 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023**. At the same time, Tunisia boasts one of the region's highest modern contraceptive prevalence rates, with **48.4%** of married women using modern contraception in 2023. These figures indicate that, while reproductive health outcomes remain relatively strong, persistent structural barriers continue to constrain women's economic participation.

Within this broader socio-economic context, the craft and social enterprise sectors emerge as promising spaces for inclusive and sustainable economic development. They offer practical avenues through which women's economic engagement can expand despite the challenges identified above. **The Creative Tunisia initiative**, for instance, has successfully established a cooperative of 60 women potters whose incomes increased five-fold. This example demonstrates how targeted investment in design training, equipment, and market access can substantially improve artisans' livelihoods. Similar approaches hold potential for other crafts such as textiles and leatherwork. While a comprehensive review of all initiatives lies beyond the scope of this report, available evidence suggests that effective interventions share several core elements: ongoing skills development, access to finance, linkages with designers and tourism markets, and support for collective organization. Building on these lessons, the mapping recommends that future programmes in Tunisia strengthen cooperative structures and incubation mechanisms to transform traditional craftsmanship into competitive, market-ready products and as a result translating social potential into tangible economic inclusion.

26,8%

Female unemployment

13,8%

Men unemployment

26.8%

Women's labour
force participation

3.2 Mauritania: the potential of crafts and ecotourism⁶

Mauritania's population is younger than Tunisia's; nearly **29%** are under 24 years old, and youth account for **43%** of the working-age population. The country has made progress in reducing maternal and child mortality, yet rural-urban disparities persist. Health infrastructure is limited outside Nouakchott, and many communities rely on outreach by the **Mauritanian Association for the Promotion of the Family (AMPF)**. Economic opportunities are constrained by a small formal sector and a heavy reliance on extractive industries.

Traditional crafts are a key part of Mauritanian culture. Women produce woven mats, leather goods, bead jewellery, silverwork and decorative trinkets. Coastal communities engage in fish drying and processing, while inland communities practice weaving and pottery. The Mauritanian Association for the Promotion of the Family (AMPF) piloted a social enterprise selling contraceptives and medicines that generated a **20% profit margin**, demonstrating that health-related business can be sustainable. External initiatives also highlight the potential of crafts: an ecotourism project supported by the Enhanced Integrated Framework trained **190** women in handicraft production and **70** in sustainable tourism and supported **200** women-run cooperatives. The Mauritania-based "**Ra'idat (Female entrepreneurs) 2025**" competition attracted more than **300** applicants, selected **10** finalists and crowned a women-led collective called **Hirva** that produces resin and pottery goods inspired by local culture.

Traditional crafts

Woven mats

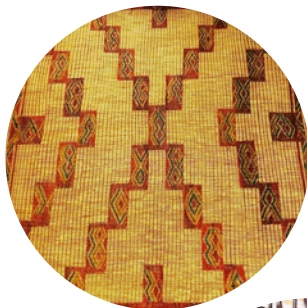
Leather goods

Bead jewellery

Silverwork

Decorative trinkets

⁶Sources: [3][4][8][9]



While Mauritania's youth population offers a demographic dividend, macro-economic indicators underscore the fragility of livelihoods. The World Bank reports that **GDP per capita** rose from **US\$1 960** in 2022 to **US\$2 120** in 2023 and is expected to hover around **US\$2 083** in 2024. Female labour force participation remains steady at around **26%**, signaling that economic growth has not translated into broad-based employment opportunities for women. Maternal mortality remains unacceptably high – around **431** maternal deaths per 100 000 live births in 2019 and **461** in 2018 – and access to modern contraception is limited, with only **12.8%** of married women using modern methods in 2021 and **15.6%** in 2015. These indicators highlight the need to combine economic empowerment with improved health services and rights.

Beyond the high-profile programmes mentioned above, Mauritania has a vibrant craft ecosystem rooted in Saharan heritage. Women artisans continue to produce **woven mats, leather goods and pottery** and organize themselves into cooperatives.

A case in point is the **Antiquité Jadis** cooperative in Nouakchott, which has been active for decades in processing and selling leather and wood crafts. Under the EU-funded PACAO project implemented by COOPI and SOS Sahel, nine women's cooperatives, including Antiquité Jadis, received training in cooperative management and accounting and were provided with high-performance sewing machines. According to the same project, **31%** of Mauritania's population live below the poverty line and **16.6 %** below the extreme poverty line, and the leather crafts sector suffers from a lack of investment and difficulties accessing credit. These statistics underscore the significance of craft-based income for household survival and the need to expand support beyond urban centres.

Despite these successes, the 4 consultations revealed substantial barriers. Participants in the four FGDs (60 % women, 40% youth) cited insufficient health infrastructure, high care costs, limited education and socio-cultural norms that restrict women's economic activities. They emphasized the need for training in handicrafts, agro-processing and entrepreneurship, as well as micro-credit and market access. Participants proposed integrated approaches such as combining health services with workshops on agriculture, crafts and digital skills and suggested forming cooperatives to share resources and negotiate better prices for inputs and products.



3.3 Sudan: entrepreneurship amid instability ⁷

Sudan's socio-economic context has been profoundly affected by political instability, conflict and economic crisis. A large proportion of the population is internally displaced, and infrastructure has been severely damaged. Women, in particular, face acute hardship: a UNDP report notes that **84% of Sudanese women** experience food insecurity and lack access to adequate nutrition. At the same time, the labour market remains heavily male-dominated in which only **3% of companies** have a woman as a top manager and **8%** include women among principal owners. Business taxes and fees have increased dramatically, reaching **30%**, while regulations remain cumbersome.

In this constrained environment, entrepreneurship has emerged as a key survival mechanism for women and youth, particularly those living in displacement camps or informal settlements, who rely on small businesses to meet daily needs and sustain their families.

These dynamics are further reflected in Sudan's macro-economic and health indicators, which illustrate the depth of the crisis. **GDP per capita** plummeted from **US\$1 046 in 2022 to US\$797 in 2023**, underscoring the economic toll of conflict.

Female labour force participation declined from **22% in 2016 to 14.5% in 2022**, while the maternal mortality ratio remained high, **270 deaths per 100 000 live births in 2020 and 298 in 2019**. The modern contraceptive prevalence rate for married women was **12% in 2014** and only **8.5% in 2010**, indicating a persistently high unmet need for family planning. Together, these data reveal the intersection of economic fragility, gender inequality and poor health outcomes that shape the lives of Sudanese women.

84% **Of Sudanese women** Experience food insecurity and lack access to adequate nutrition

⁷ Sources: [5][6][7][8][9]

Amid turmoil, examples of resilience abound. **An African Arguments** article recounts how displaced women in Sudan have launched **restaurants, bakeries, beauty salons, perfume and incense stalls, art galleries and clothing shops** in camps and host communities; these micro-businesses not only provide income but also serve as communal spaces for healing. **UN Women** and Red Sea University distributed cash grants worth **SDG 1 000 000** (≈US\$500) to **80** women, enabling them to restart businesses producing perfumes, handicrafts and folklore items. The **United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)-Doha** programme delivered online entrepreneurship and digital-skills training to **250** women and youth, covering topics such as innovation, climate resilience, artificial intelligence and block chain. Bloggers describe the vibrant **Omdurman women's market**, where entrepreneurs sell palm-leaf baskets, peanut butter, spices and home-made perfumes; prominent figures like **Awadeya Samak** and **Silvana Naji** are portrayed as role models who continue trading despite inflation, conflict and market bombings.

The **Sudanese Family Planning Association (SFPA)**, the national member association leading this mapping in Sudan, plays a pivotal role in linking health services with economic empowerment. As part of its clinic and outreach programmes, the SFPA has integrated livelihood support into their activities, recognizing that financial independence reinforces health outcomes. To operationalise this approach, the SFPA organized two three-day training sessions for **40** service providers (34 women and 6 men) on how to integrate micro-enterprise support into health counseling. Participants learned to identify potential micro-projects, advise beneficiaries on accessing micro-credit and markets and use participatory methods to tailor interventions. Six community sessions reached **180** women and youth, emphasizing the interplay between reproductive health, financial independence and self-esteem.

NUMEROUS OBSTACLES

FACE SUDANESE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



**Political
volatility**



**Currency
devaluation**



**Poor
infrastructure**



**Restrictive
gender norms**



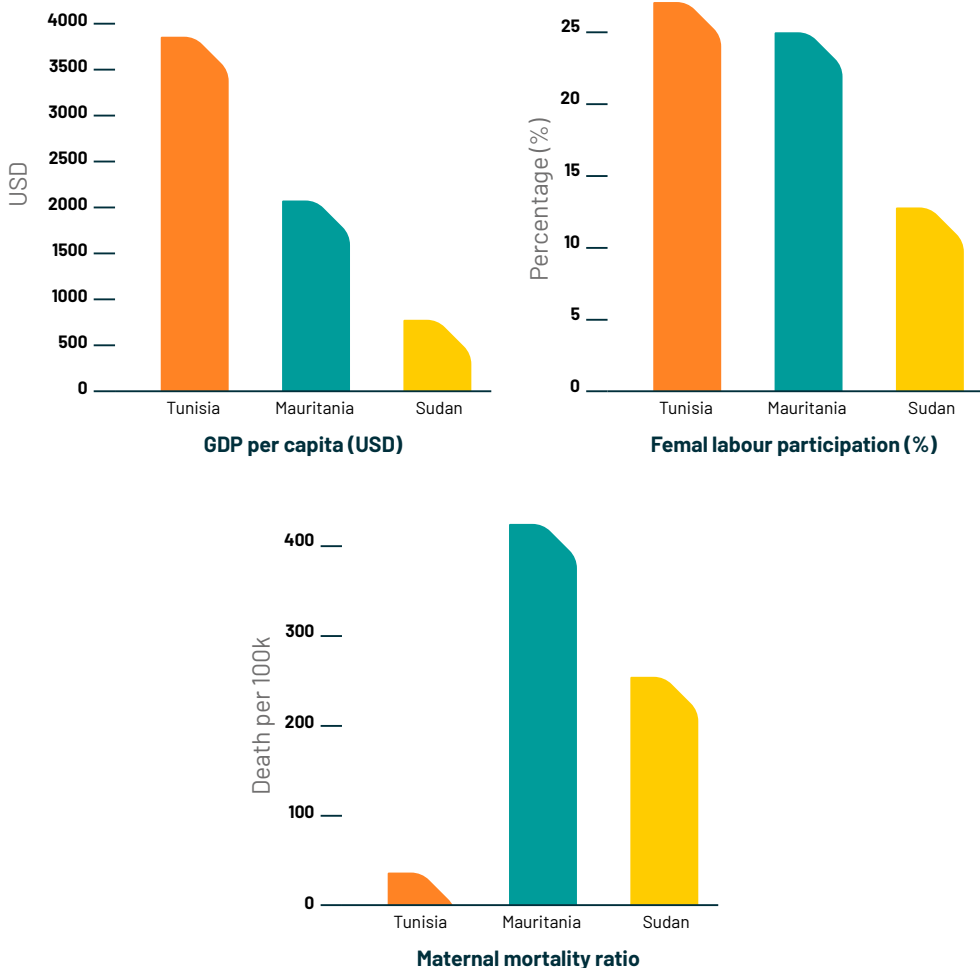
**Limited
access to finance**

Independent research shows that UNDP programmes have provided tools, seeds and training to over **3000** women farmers, trained **1 000** women to establish home gardens and organized savings and loan associations for **500** women. Meanwhile, local entrepreneurs in displacement camps operate **beauty salons, cafés, art studios** and **food businesses** to support their families and cope with trauma.

Sudanese women entrepreneurs face numerous obstacles: political volatility, currency devaluation, poor infrastructure, restrictive gender norms and limited access to finance. The high business tax of **30%** and an opaque regulatory environment discourage formal registration. The SFPA and partners attempt to address these barriers by connecting beneficiaries with microfinance institutions and by advocating for policies supportive of micro-enterprises. Nevertheless, most entrepreneurial activity remains informal and vulnerable to external shocks, reflecting structural weaknesses that are not unique to Sudan.

To contextualize these findings, the chart below provides a comparative overview of key **macro-economic and health indicators** for Tunisia, Mauritania and Sudan. It illustrates variations in **GDP per capita, female labour force participation and maternal mortality ratios**, underscoring the differing macro-economic environments in which micro-enterprise programmes operate and the importance of designing context-specific interventions.

Comparative macro-economic and health indicators



4 Existing skills and potential for handicrafts and micro-enterprises

The competency mapping in each country identified a rich array of skills and interests among women and youth. These findings demonstrate the cultural relevance of handicrafts and the ingenuity with which communities repurpose traditional knowledge for income generation.

4.1 Artisanal crafts⁸

Tunisia: Many Tunisian women possess **traditional sewing and embroidery** skills, having learned them from family members or through informal apprenticeships. Consultations revealed that some have also experimented with **modern fashion design** and **accessory production** (e.g., handbags, jewellery) but lack formal training in quality control, design trends and marketing.

In Tataouine, women continue to produce **woven rugs** and **leather goods**, yet they rarely move beyond local markets due to limited transportation and awareness.

In the Greater Tunis area, craft skills are increasingly combined with digital tools: young women expressed interest in **selling handicrafts online** and in using social media for promotion, but they need training in digital marketing and e-commerce. In addition, there is a small but growing group working with **wood carving** and **ceramics**, inspired by the success of the Creative Tunisia cooperative where **60 women potters** multiplied their income five-fold.

⁸ Sources: [2][3][4][8][9]

Mauritania: Traditional Mauritanian crafts include **weaving** (palm-leaf mats, woolen blankets), **leatherwork** (bags, slippers, harnesses), **silver jewellery** and **beadwork**. Coastal communities also practice **fish drying and smoking**. Participants in the FGDs demonstrated a strong interest in reviving **dyeing, embroidery** and **pottery** skills.

The ecotourism project that trained **190** women in handicrafts emphasized eco-friendly production and the use of local materials. The “Hirva” group of six women selected in the **Ra'idat 2025** competition showcased innovation by combining traditional designs with resin and concrete to make **decorative home ware**.

Despite these examples, many crafts remain undervalued because of inconsistent quality, lack of branding and limited access to markets.

Sudan: Has a long tradition of **basket weaving, clay pottery, tanning of leather, gum Arabic harvesting** and **patchwork quilting**. In displacement camps, women have adapted these crafts to produce marketable goods such as **woven bags, hand-embroidered clothing** and **traditional cosmetics**.

Entrepreneurs also run **home-based bakeries, coffee shops, art studios** and **beauty salons**, using their skills to generate income and provide a sense of normalcy.

The SFPA training sessions emphasized the potential for linking such crafts with health services, for example by selling crafts at clinic events or forming cooperatives that also serve as platforms for health education.

190 women

Trained by the ecotourism project
in handicrafts emphasized eco-friendly production

4.2 Agro-processing and food services⁹

Agro-processing is a promising sector across the three countries because it relies on local resources and caters to domestic consumption. Tunisian participants mentioned interest in **small-scale food production** such as jams, pickles, dried fruits and **snack shops**. Mauritanian women considered **milk and yogurt processing, fish drying** and **couscous production**, while Sudanese women operate **juice stands, spice milling** and **home-catering** businesses. These activities offer relatively quick returns but require training in hygiene, packaging, marketing and compliance with health regulations. Women emphasized that profits from agro-processing would help them pay for transport to health clinics, purchase medications and secure better nutrition for their families.

4.3 Aesthetics and services¹⁰

Hairdressing, cosmetics, bridal preparation and other aesthetic services are highly popular micro-enterprises, especially in urban areas. Young Tunisian women expressed a desire to open **beauty salons** and spa services but cited high start-up costs and the need for training in modern techniques. In Mauritania, there is growing demand for **henna artistry** and **bridal make-up**, which could be scaled through cooperatives. In Sudan, the popularity of **beauty salons** in displacement camps demonstrates both the resilience of women entrepreneurs and the social importance of aesthetic services in maintaining dignity and morale.



Mauritania

⁹Sources: [9] ¹⁰Sources: [9]

4.4 Digital and marketing skills¹¹

Participants in the Greater Tunis consultations highlighted the potential of **digital marketing** and **e-commerce** for selling crafts and services. Many young people are already active on social media but lack formal training in branding, photography and online customer engagement. In Mauritania and Sudan, digital literacy is lower, yet entrepreneurs recognize that online platforms offer an avenue to reach Diaspora communities and international customers. Developing digital skills can therefore bridge the gap between traditional crafts and modern markets.

4.5 Urban agriculture and other emerging sectors¹²

Urban agriculture such as **poultry keeping**, **snail farming** and **home-gardening** emerged as an alternative micro-enterprise in Tunisia. Participants noted that these activities require small start-up capital and can be carried out alongside domestic work. In Sudan, UNDP programmes have trained women to establish **home gardens** that improve food security and generate income. In Mauritania, some participants considered **beekeeping** and **camel milk processing** but emphasized the need for technical guidance.

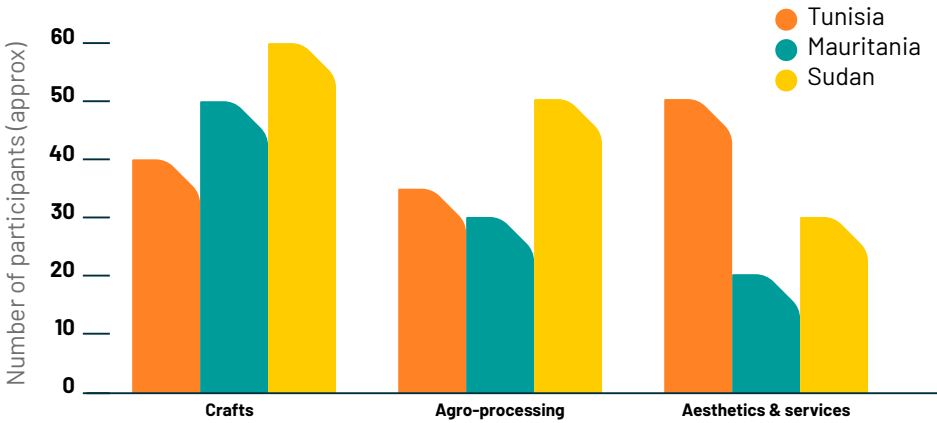
The varying interests of women and youth across the three countries are reflected in the types of micro-projects they aspire to launch. The chart below compares preferences for **crafts**, **agro-processing** and **service-oriented enterprises** by country, illustrating the diversity of economic aspirations captured during the consultations.

Women and youth

Reflected in the types of micro-projects they aspire to launch

¹¹Sources: [9] ¹²Sources: [5][9]

Preferred micro-project categories by country



5 Barriers and challenges¹³

Lack of start-up capital is the most frequently cited obstacle. Micro-credit institutions exist in Tunisia (e.g., **ENDA**, **Taysir**, **Banque Tunisienne de Solidarité**), but eligibility criteria often exclude youth and women who lack collateral or formal employment. Participants reported that interest rates are high and repayment schedules inflexible. Tunisian consultations underscored the need for **micro-credit at preferential rates**, seed grants and capital-seed funds. Mauritanian participants similarly requested **affordable loans** to purchase raw materials and equipment. In Sudan, financial exclusion is compounded by political instability, currency devaluation and high business taxes of **30%**, which discourage formal business registration. Women entrepreneurs rely on informal savings groups that provide small loans, but these do not meet larger capital needs.

30 % business taxes
In Sudan

¹³ Sources: [9]

5.2 Limited training and technical support ¹⁴

While many participants already possess craft skills, they lack formal training in **quality control, design innovation, financial management, marketing** and digital skills. The Tunisia report emphasized the absence of local training centres and the high cost of courses. In Mauritania, training opportunities are concentrated in the capital, leaving rural women without access. Sudanese entrepreneurs receive sporadic training from NGOs, but frequent displacement disrupts learning. Without technical support, micro-businesses struggle to meet market standards and scale their production. Participants also highlighted the need for **mentorship** to guide them through business planning and market entry.

5.3 Market access and value chains ¹⁵

Handicraft producers often sell their goods in **local markets** or through **family networks** at low prices. They lack connections to tourism outlets, export markets or online platforms. In Tunisia, the **Creative Tunisia** project demonstrates that linking cooperatives to international designers and fair-trade channels can transform incomes. However, similar mechanisms are rare outside pilot projects. In Mauritania and Sudan, poor transportation infrastructure, fragmented producer groups and absence of quality standards hinder access to wider markets. Women expressed interest in participating in **fairs, exhibitions** and **online marketplaces**, but they require organizational support and certification to do so.

In Mauritania, training opportunities are concentrated in the capital, leaving rural women without access



¹⁴ Sources:[9] ¹⁵Sources: [2][9]

5.4 Socio-cultural norms and gendered expectations¹⁶

Norms related to gender roles, mobility and decision-making remain significant barriers. Many participants reported that families prioritize the labour market opportunities of sons over daughters and expect women to focus on domestic responsibilities. In rural Tataouine, women face restrictions on travel, which limits their ability to attend training or sell products in distant markets.

In Mauritania, some communities discourage women from handling money or interacting with male buyers. In Sudan, conservative norms and security concerns further restrict women's movement. These norms also affect access to reproductive health services; women who depend on male permission or financial support may delay or forgo care. Participants stressed that economic empowerment programmes should incorporate **community sensitization** and engage men and religious leaders to shift attitudes.

Gender roles

Restrictions on travel

Labour market expect women

Discourage women from handling money

Interacting with male buyers

Male permission

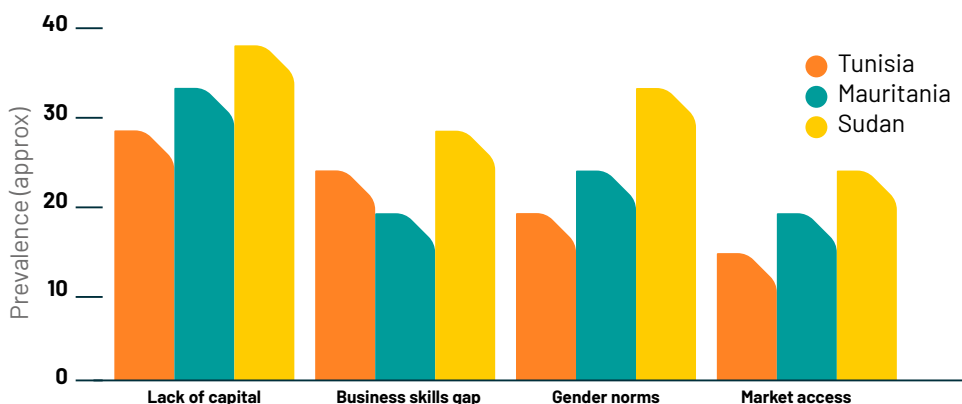
¹⁶ Sources:[9]

5.5 Policy and regulatory obstacles¹⁷

At the policy level, micro-enterprises suffer from **fragmented legal frameworks** and **bureaucratic burdens**. In Tunisia, civil society organizations depend heavily on donor funding and have limited access to domestic financing. The regulatory environment for cooperatives and social enterprises is still evolving, and many producers remain informal. In Mauritania, there is no dedicated law for social enterprises, and the tax code does not incentivize small businesses. In Sudan, high taxes and unclear regulations discourage formalization and hamper access to credit. Participants called for simplified registration procedures, tax incentives for micro-enterprises and official recognition of cooperatives.

Before turning to opportunities and success stories, it is helpful to visualize how the main obstacles differ by country. The next chart compares the prevalence of the four principal barriers identified across Tunisia, Mauritania and Sudan, **lack of capital**, **business skills gap**, **gender norms** and **market access**. The chart underscores that while these barriers are common to all three contexts, their relative importance varies and thus calls for differentiated strategies.

Major barriers faced by women & youth micro-entrepreneurs by country



¹⁷ Sources: [9]

6 Opportunities and success stories¹⁸

Despite the challenges, numerous success stories and emerging opportunities demonstrate the potential of handicrafts and micro-enterprises to transform lives when supported appropriately. Across Member Associations (MAs), social enterprises (SEs) have become powerful vehicles for change, combining innovation with sustainability to serve communities and reinforce essential health services.

These success stories go beyond profitability. They illustrate the creation of enduring social value, the empowerment of local communities, and the delivery of critical services in areas where they are most needed. The selected examples of successful initiatives led by IPPF MAs worldwide, outlining the key characteristics of success, the pivotal elements that enabled progress, and the lessons learned throughout their implementation:



Mauritania



Tunisia



Sudan

¹⁸ Sources: [8]

Bhutan – RENEW’s Hybrid Social Enterprise

Overview:

RENEW SE exemplifies a hybrid business model that integrates economic empowerment with social impact. It combines traditional Bhutanese craftsmanship with contemporary design, producing culturally rich products that appeal to modern markets. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also generates sustainable income for women and marginalized groups.

Key Features:

- **Job Creation:** Provides flexible employment for survivors of domestic violence and persons with disabilities, fostering independence and resilience.
- **Sustainability:** Embeds eco-friendly practices through the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) principle, appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.
- **Surplus Diversification:** Expands market reach through tourist outlets and retail partnerships, reinvesting profits in skills development, income generation, and social causes.

Success Factors:

- Empowerment and inclusivity as core values.
- Strategic partnerships with the Royal Textile Academy and the Gyalum Charitable Trust Fund.
- Capacity-building and continuous training to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Innovative marketing strategies and a scalable business model.
- Achieved a **14.5 % increase in surplus (June 2023–June 2024)**.

Impact:

RENEW SE demonstrates how cultural preservation, economic empowerment, and sustainability can be effectively combined. Its success underscores the potential of socially responsible business models rooted in tradition but driven by innovation.

Nigeria – PPFN’s Diagnostic Laboratory

Overview:

In the densely populated community of Mpape, Abuja, the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN) established a diagnostic laboratory that addresses critical healthcare access gaps. Operating as a social enterprise, the facility channels profits into reproductive health outreach and education.

Key Features:

- **Access and Affordability:** Provides essential diagnostic services in previously underserved areas, reducing delays in treatment.
- **Community-Centric Approach:** Combines advanced technology with professional care to deliver rapid and accurate results.
- **Integration:** Supports broader health programmes and family planning initiatives.

Success Factors:

- Efficient operations and high-quality service delivery.
- Deep community trust and reputation for patient-centered care.
- Strong financial performance, with a 35 % increase in sales in 2024.
- Clear strategic vision for expansion across Nigeria.

Impact:

PPFN's laboratory has become a vital component of community healthcare, proving that a well-managed, mission-aligned enterprise can address both social needs and financial sustainability.

Somaliland – SOFHA's Diyaar Initiative

Overview:

In Hargeisa, the Somaliland Family Health Association (SOFHA) is redefining community well-being through the Diyaar Initiative, which integrates healthcare with sustainable food production. This model demonstrates how social enterprises can simultaneously tackle malnutrition, poverty, and limited access to healthcare.

Key Features:

- **Health-Nutrition Integration:** Produces nutritious flours and porridges from locally sourced grains while providing clinical services.
- **Revenue Reinvestment:** Uses income from clinic fees and food sales to finance expansion and service improvements.
- **Community Outreach:** Extends healthcare through mobile clinics and delivers nutrition education in rural areas.

Success Factors:

- Holistic approach addressing both healthcare and food security.
- Strong community trust through participatory education initiatives.
- Commitment to local sourcing and sustainability.
- Remarkable **291.6 % increase in Diyaar sales (2023–2024)**.

Impact:

SOFHA's model exemplifies the transformative potential of integrated health and nutrition enterprises. By coupling service delivery with local production, it strengthens community resilience and promotes long-term self-reliance.

Thailand – Baan Hormlamduan ECC

Overview:

At Baan Hormlamduan Elderly Care Centre in Thailand, holistic, person-centered care is transforming lives. A notable example is the rehabilitation of a stroke survivor who regained mobility and speech through consistent therapy and compassionate support.

Key Features:

- Focused rehabilitation programmes tailored to individual needs.
- Multidisciplinary care teams fostering physical and emotional recovery.
- Supportive community environment encouraging independence and dignity.

Impact:

This case demonstrates the power of holistic care models within IPPF's ecosystem. Beyond medical treatment, such initiatives restore confidence, strengthen social inclusion, and exemplify the human-centered values at the core of IPPF's social enterprise approach.

The success stories presented above reveal common principles underpinning effective social enterprises:

- Integration of social missions with sound business models.
- Investment in human capacity and community engagement.
- Adoption of environmentally and financially sustainable practices.
- Reinvestment of profits to expand services and strengthen impact.

These experiences highlight that social enterprises thrive when they align community needs, economic sustainability, and social justice, the same principles guiding IPPF's vision across all Member Associations.

7 Integration of health services and economic empowerment

One of the central premises of this mapping is that linking health services with economic empowerment produces a **mutually reinforcing effect**. When women have the means to earn income, they are more likely to seek health care; conversely, access to quality health services improves their productivity and autonomy. Several integrated approaches emerge from the consultation reports and external literature:

7.1 Mobile clinics combined with enterprise training¹⁹

Participants in Tunisia proposed **mobile units** that visit remote villages to provide health consultations and simultaneously offer **craft workshops, digital skills training** and **business mentoring**. Women suggested that these sessions be held on market days when mobility is easier and combined with childcare services to increase participation. The model echoes successful programmes in Morocco and Egypt where mobile health services are paired with micro-credit and vocational training.

¹⁹ Sources: [9]

7.2 Multiservice centres at MA clinics²⁰

The **ATSR** in Tunisia and the **SFPA** in Sudan operate clinics that could be transformed into **multiservice centres**. Such centres would provide reproductive health consultations, psychological support, legal counseling, business development services and access to micro-finance under one roof. The Tunisia consultations emphasized the need for incubators hosted by associations that can provide shared equipment (e.g., sewing machines, pottery wheels) and mentorship. In Sudan, community sessions already combine health education with guidance on micro-projects and financial literacy.

7.3 Cooperatives and networks as delivery platforms²¹

Cooperatives and women's savings groups can serve as **entry points** for both health services and economic opportunities. Tunisian and Mauritanian participants advocated for the formation of **handicraft cooperatives** that would facilitate access to micro-credit and markets and also serve as venues for health information sessions. The Creative Tunisia cooperative and Mauritania's ecotourism cooperatives illustrate how collective structures enhance bargaining power and provide peer support. In Sudan, savings and loan associations enabled women to finance home gardens and to share information about reproductive health.

7.4 Integrated financing and health products²²

MAAs could explore the production and sale of **health-related crafts** such as **reusable menstrual pads, herbal remedies, nutritional snacks** and **decorative items with health messages**. Revenues could subsidize health services, and the products themselves could promote healthy behaviors. Women trained in sewing could produce pads, while herbalists could develop natural supplements. Links to cooperatives and micro-finance would ensure quality and scale.

²⁰ Sources: [9] ²¹ Sources: [9] ²² Sources: [9]

7.5 Opportunities, barriers and actions ²³

Table 1 summarizes key opportunities, main barriers and recommended actions for each country based on the mapping findings and the consolidated social enterprise report. The table emphasizes cross-cutting issues while acknowledging contextual differences.

Country	Key opportunities	Main barriers	Suggested entry points & actions
Sudan	Integrate handicraft training with clinic visits; leverage clinic-based demand aggregation for household crafts; develop linkages with pharmacies and outreach channels.	Political instability and insecurity; high business taxes and regulatory uncertainty; limited infrastructure and marketing channels.	Provide training on business planning and marketing; partner with microfinance institutions to offer loans with flexible terms; develop cooperatives that combine craft production with health outreach; advocate for simplified tax regimes and recognition of social enterprises.
Mauritania	Diversify products beyond contraceptives (e.g., herbal remedies, handicrafts); develop integrated economic and health units; exploit ecotourism to market crafts; strengthen cooperatives with stable supply chains.	Low literacy and business skills; weak infrastructure and market access; limited regulatory framework for social enterprises.	Expand training to include design innovation and quality standards; support cooperatives to access tourism and export markets; formalize the contraceptive resupply enterprise and explore additional product lines; create incubators linked to MA clinics.
Tunisia	Leverage rich tradition of textiles, pottery, leather and wood crafts; benefit from Startup Act incentives and growing digital payments; tap into tourism channels and international design networks.	Limited domestic funding; reliance on donors; fragmented producer groups and quality standardization; lack of export knowledge; socio-cultural norms restricting women's mobility.	Establish MA-hosted maker workshops and pop-up markets tied to health campaigns; build partnerships with designers, fair-trade networks and tourism operators; provide training on digital marketing and export compliance; collaborate with microfinance institutions to tailor credit products to craftspeople.

²³ Sources: [9]

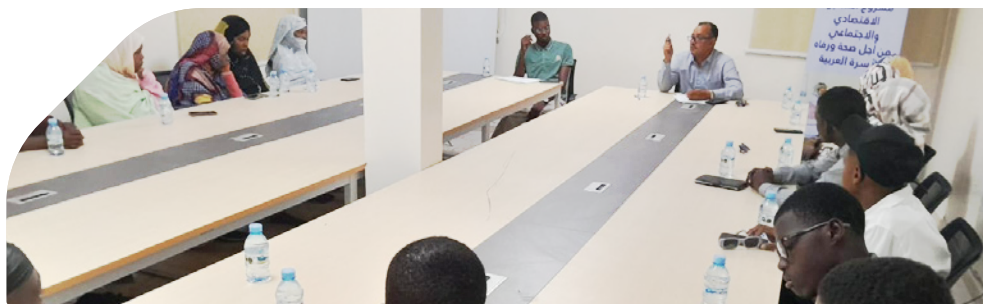
8 Policy and programme recommendations²⁴

8.1 For IPPF AWRO and national member associations²⁵

- 1 ■ Create integrated health–economic empowerment hubs.** Transform MA clinics into multiservice centres that offer health consultations, counseling, business training and access to micro-credit. Pilot mobile clinics that combine health and craft workshops to reach remote communities, ensuring childcare and safe transport. Use training materials adapted to local languages and literacy levels.
- 2 ■ Strengthen partnerships with microfinance institutions.** Negotiate with microfinance providers (e.g., ENDA, Taysir, BTS in Tunisia; savings associations in Mauritania; community banks in Sudan) to develop **gender and youth responsive credit products** with low interest rates, flexible repayment schedules and minimal collateral. Integrate financial literacy training into health education to ensure responsible borrowing.
- 3 ■ Support cooperatives and market linkages.** Facilitate the formation of women’s cooperatives focused on crafts, agro-processing and services. Provide legal assistance for registration, train cooperatives in governance and quality standards and connect them with tourism agencies, design networks, fair-trade organizations and online platforms. Encourage cooperatives to host health education sessions, creating a virtuous circle of health and income.

²⁵ Sources: [9]

- 4 Invest in digital literacy and marketing. Develop training modules on digital marketing, e-commerce and social media for artisans and service providers. Support the creation of e-commerce platforms or partnerships with existing ones to sell crafts internationally. Provide training on product photography, storytelling and customer service to enhance visibility. Encourage the use of digital tools for health information dissemination.
- 5 Embed gender and social norms transformation. Integrate community dialogues, men's engagement and religious leader involvement into economic empowerment programmes to address restrictive norms. Use participatory theatre, radio programmes and peer education to challenge stereotypes and to normalize women's economic participation and health rights. Promote positive role models of successful women entrepreneurs.
- 6 Ensure programme sustainability and scale-up. Develop cost-recovery models (e.g., resupply businesses, membership fees) to fund ongoing training and health services. Document and disseminate lessons learned to attract donor and government support. Use data collection systems to monitor outcomes in health, income and empowerment and adjust programmes accordingly.




Mauritania

8.2 For policy makers and donors²⁶

- 1**  Adopt supportive legal frameworks for social enterprises. Draft and enact legislation that recognizes social enterprises and cooperatives, provides tax incentives for micro-businesses and simplifies registration. Align regulations with the Startup Act in Tunisia and explore replicating similar policies in Mauritania and Sudan.
- 2**  Invest in infrastructure for crafts and micro-businesses. Improve transportation, energy and digital infrastructure to facilitate market access. Build community centres equipped with workshops (sewing machines, kilns, food-processing equipment) and provide access to water and sanitation. Integrate these centres with health facilities to promote holistic well-being.
- 3**  Expand education and vocational training. Incorporate entrepreneurship, digital skills and financial literacy into school curricula and adult education programmes. Partner with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions to develop courses tailored to crafts, agro-processing and service sectors. Provide scholarships and stipends to encourage women and youth participation.
- 4**  Facilitate cross-border learning and regional markets. Encourage knowledge exchange among AWRO member associations and with other African and Middle Eastern countries that have successfully integrated economic empowerment with health services (e.g., Morocco's mobile Health units and Egypt's micro-credit and health programmes). Support participation in regional fairs and e-commerce platforms to access broader markets. Harmonize standards and certification to facilitate exports.

²⁶ Sources: [9]

- 5  Address underlying social determinants. Complement economic interventions with policies that address education, nutrition, child care and gender-based violence. For example, subsidize childcare services so that women can attend training and work; implement social protection schemes for informal workers; and enforce laws against early marriage and gender-based violence. Ensure that micro-enterprise programmes are embedded within broader strategies to achieve gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

8.3 Country-specific actions²⁷

Sudan: Prioritize programmes that combine **food security** and income generation, such as supporting women farmers with inputs and training to produce food crops and process them for sale. Expand HEALTH outreach through savings and loan groups and provide conflict-sensitive business training. Advocate for tax reductions for micro-businesses and for simplified licensing procedures. Support digital payment systems to mitigate the impact of currency fluctuations.

Mauritania: Institutionalize the social enterprise module and expand it to include **health-related crafts**. Strengthen the **Ra'idat** programme by offering incubation and seed funding beyond the competition and by linking winners to export markets. Integrate ecotourism with craft promotion in new regions and invest in community radio to disseminate health and business information.

Tunisia: Create **maker spaces** within MA clinics where women can access equipment, receive mentorship and sell their products. Leverage the Startup Act to attract private investment and support high-potential crafts. Develop partnerships with design schools and universities to encourage student engagement with traditional crafts. Advocate for micro-finance reforms that reduce interest rates and collateral requirements for young women and encourage the inclusion of health education in entrepreneurship programmes.

²⁷ Sources: [9]

9 Additional case studies and enabling environment

9.1 Hodere Pinnal cooperative: food processing and digital marketing²⁵

The **Hodere Pinnal** cooperative in Nouakchott, Mauritania provides a compelling example of how women can combine local food processing skills with savings, gardening and digital marketing to build sustainable businesses. The cooperative comprises 20 women who transform local grains (millet, corn and beans) into a **nutritious powdered** mix that can be prepared quickly for breakfast or snacks. Sales are particularly high during **Ramadan**, when households purchase up to **20 jars per day**. Each member contributes 50 MRU per week to a **savings group** that finances business operations and allows them to lend small amounts to each other for emergencies and new projects. In addition to producing food mixes, the cooperative maintains an **urban vegetable** garden where they grow tomatoes, carrots and peppers for sale and household consumption. With support from World Vision Mauritania, the women improved packaging and hygiene, learned basic accounting and started marketing their products via **TikTok and other social media**, significantly increasing orders. Members report that the cooperative has enabled them to feed, clothe and educate their children and has inspired other women to join or form similar groups.

9.2 COOPI's PACAO project: strengthening cooperatives and tackling poverty²⁹

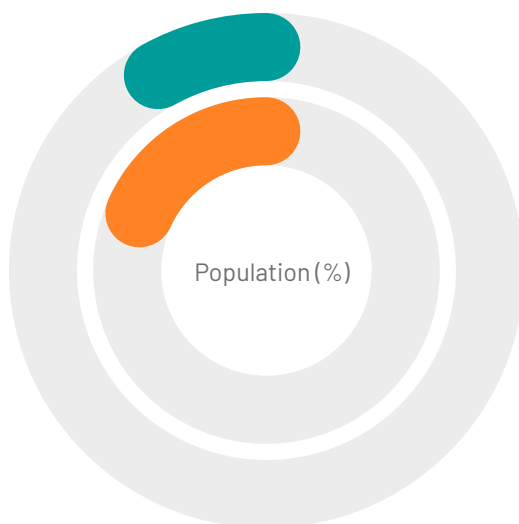
The **PACAO** project (Programme d'Appui aux Coopératives Artisanales) implemented by Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) and SOS Sahel and funded by the European Union illustrates how targeted support can revive traditional crafts and reduce poverty.

²⁵ Sources: [9]

The project worked with **nine women's** cooperatives involved in **leather and wood crafts** in Mauritania, including the long-standing **Antiquité Jadis** cooperative in Nouakchott. Members received training in **cooperative management, governance and accounting** and were provided with **high-performance sewing machines** and **leather-working** tools. The project also facilitated access to regional craft fairs and fair-trade networks. According to COOPI, **31%** of Mauritania's population lives below the poverty line and **16.6%** lives below the extreme poverty line, and the leather crafts sector suffers from a **lack of investment and difficulty accessing credit**. By helping cooperatives formalize, improve product quality and access markets, PACAO strengthened women's incomes and resilience. The project demonstrates that modern equipment and management training are critical complements to traditional skills.

Poverty rates in Mauritania

31%
Overall
poverty



16,6%
Extreme
poverty

²⁹ Sources: [9]

9.3 Digital financial inclusion and e-payment reforms³⁰

Access to financial services remains a major constraint for women artisans and micro-entrepreneurs. In Mauritania only 20 % of adults have any type of financial account and just 4 % use mobile money accounts. There is also a 5-point gender gap in financial access. Recognizing these challenges, the Central Bank of Mauritania adopted a new law on electronic payments in 2021 that opened the market to non-bank providers and simplified licensing requirements. This regulatory reform allows mobile operators and fintech companies to offer digital wallets and e-money products, potentially expanding access for women entrepreneurs who struggle to open bank accounts. Coupled with micro-credit and savings schemes, digital payments could reduce transaction costs, improve security and facilitate online sales of crafts. Similar reforms are needed in Sudan and Tunisia; for example, Sudan's informal adoption of mobile money has been hampered by the political crisis, while Tunisia's regulatory sandbox has yet to fully support peer-to-peer payments. Programmes that teach women how to use mobile wallets, manage digital transactions and integrate them with social media sales channels (e.g., Facebook Marketplace, Instagram) could significantly enhance financial inclusion.



Tunisia

³⁰ Sources: [9]

Financial inclusion in Mauritania

20%
**Any financial
account**

5%
**Mobile
money**

4%
**Gender gap
in access**



Unemployment rates by gender in Tunisia (2023)

22,2%
**Female
Unemployment**

13,8%
**Male
Unemployment**



9.4 Cash grants and micro-finance:

UN Women's interventions in Sudan³¹

Amid Sudan's economic crisis, cash grants have proven to be an effective means of jump-starting small businesses. A **UN Women** and Red Sea University programme provided **SDG 1 000 000** (approximately US\$500) to each of **80 women** in the town of **Port Sudan**. Recipients used the funds to **restart or expand micro-enterprises** producing perfumes, decorative handicrafts, traditional foods and folklore items. One woman reported earnings **300 000 SDG** (around US\$150) in profit within a month of relaunching her incense business. The programme included training on accounting, marketing and sourcing raw materials and linked women to local markets and cooperatives. These grants illustrate the transformative impact of small amounts of seed capital when combined with training and market access and highlight the importance of gender-responsive social protection in fragile contexts.

9.5 Cultural markets and role models:

Omdurman women's market³²

The **Omdurman women's market** in Sudan exemplifies the vibrancy and resilience of informal economies. The market hosts dozens of stalls where women sell **palm-leaf baskets, woven trays, homemade peanut butter, spices, traditional perfumes** and **hand-embroidered clothing**. An article in *Andariya* magazine underscores the importance of role models such as **Awadeya Samak** and **Silvana Naji**, who run successful juice stalls and herbal-medicine shops and who advocate for women's rights despite inflation, currency depreciation and the threat of market bombings. Their visibility inspires other women to start businesses and to use markets as spaces for social support and health education. Programmes that partner with market associations to deliver **HEALTH** information and business training could leverage these existing social networks and trusted leaders.

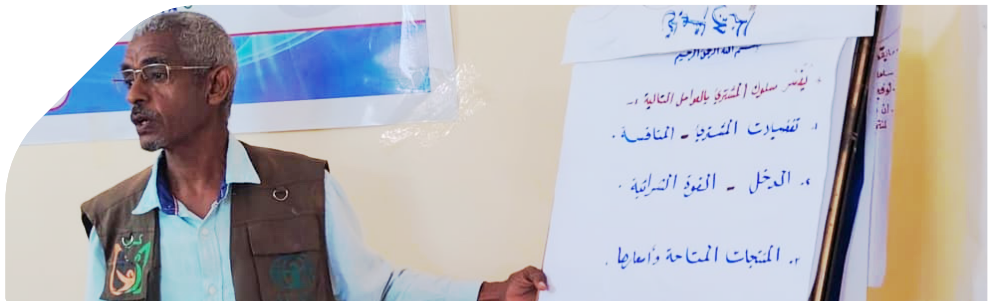
³¹ Sources: [12] ³² Sources: [6]

9.6 Climate-resilient entrepreneurship:

UNITAR's digital training programme³³

Climate change adds another layer of complexity to livelihood strategies in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. To address this, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) launched the Rapid Assistance for Sudan livelihoods development programme in August 2024. Phase I reached over 250 women and youth who completed online and in-person modules on innovation, climate resilience, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence, blockchain and digital finance. The programme delivered 24 webinars and asynchronous courses and prepared participants for a boot camp and hackathon scheduled for 2025. By integrating climate-resilient technologies with digital entrepreneurship, the programme aims to equip women and youth with the skills to launch businesses that can withstand environmental shocks and economic volatility. Incorporating HEALTH messaging into such digital-skills training could broaden the reach of health education while empowering youth to tap into global markets.

These additional cases illustrate the diverse contexts in which handicrafts and micro-businesses operate and emphasize the importance of enabling environments such as digital finance, climate-resilient training and supportive policies. They also demonstrate that small interventions – whether in the form of equipment, cash grants, training or digital tools – can have outsized impacts when tailored to local needs.



Sudan

³³ Sources: [13]

10 Policy environment and legal frameworks

10.1 Labour laws and gender equality³⁴

Structural inequalities in labour markets constrain the participation of women and youth in economic life. In Sudan, only 3 % of companies have a woman as a top manager and 8 % include women among the principal owners. These figures reflect deep-seated gender biases in hiring, promotion and ownership and highlight the need for affirmative policies and enforcement of equality laws. Mauritanian women face similar exclusion from formal employment and leadership, and although Tunisia has enshrined gender equality in its constitution, its labour market remains highly segregated by sector and occupation. Without clear targets for women's representation on boards, transparent hiring processes and accountability mechanisms, micro-enterprise programmes risk reinforcing existing hierarchies. Engaging ministries of labour, chambers of commerce and employers' associations to reform labour codes and to promote women's leadership is therefore essential. Programmes can complement these efforts by providing leadership training and mentorship for young women entrepreneurs.

10.2 Micro-finance, savings groups and taxation³⁵

Access to affordable finance is a persistent challenge across the three countries. In Sudan, the government doubled the business tax to 30 %, while corruption and regulatory uncertainty add layers of risk for entrepreneurs. Such fiscal pressures discourage formalization and push women into informal activities where they lack legal protections. Conversely, community-based savings and loan associations have proven effective. In the UNDP livelihoods programme, 500 women in Sudan formed savings groups that enabled them to purchase seeds, tools and household supplies and to invest in micro-projects.

³⁴ Sources: [9] ³⁵ Sources: [5][9]

Similarly, the Hodere Pinnal and PACAO cooperatives operate rotating savings schemes to finance equipment and working capital. Policymakers should remove bureaucratic barriers to forming savings groups, regulate interest rates to prevent predatory lending and provide incentives (such as tax deductions or grants) for micro-finance institutions that prioritize women and youth.

10.3 Financial inclusion and digital payments ³⁶

Financial inclusion remains extremely low. In Mauritania only **20%** of adults have a financial account and just **4%** use mobile money. Women are significantly less likely than men to own a bank or mobile money account, resulting in a **gender gap of around five percentage points**. The adoption of Mauritania's **electronic payments law** in 2021 opens the market to non-bank providers and could catalyze digital finance services. For digital payments to benefit women artisans, however, programmes must provide practical training on using mobile wallets, pricing and negotiating, and integrating digital transactions with online marketing. In Sudan, the political crisis has slowed the rollout of mobile money, but humanitarian agencies and community groups have piloted mobile cash transfers to displaced families. Tunisia has a more mature banking system but still exhibits barriers to small borrowers, including high collateral requirements and limited outreach of micro-finance institutions. Harmonizing regulations across the three countries and investing in digital infrastructure could create a more enabling environment for craft enterprises.



Mauritania

³⁶ Sources: [9]

10.4 Social enterprise frameworks and cooperative laws³⁷

The social enterprise concept is still emerging in Mauritania and Sudan. There is no dedicated law for social enterprises in Mauritania, and existing cooperative statutes do not accommodate hybrid models that reinvest profits into social missions. In Sudan, social enterprises are not legally recognized, and cooperatives are governed by outdated legislation that restricts their autonomy and fund-raising. Tunisia fares better with its Startup Act, which provides tax exemptions and easier access to foreign currency for certified startups, but this law primarily targets technology firms rather than artisan cooperatives. Advocates should work with legislators to draft comprehensive social enterprise laws that define eligibility, provide tax incentives, ensure accountability and enable blended financing. Harmonizing cooperative laws to allow social enterprises to operate across sectors (health, crafts, agriculture) would also facilitate the integration of health services with micro-enterprise development.

10.5 Regional coordination and knowledge exchange³⁷

Finally, cross-border collaboration can accelerate progress. AWR0's MAs can learn from each other's experiences and from successful programmes in other regions. For instance, Morocco's mobile health clinics paired with micro-credit and Egypt's youth entrepreneurship hubs offer transferable models. Establishing a regional forum for social enterprises and cooperatives to share best practices, market information and policy advocacy strategies would amplify their voice and improve negotiating power with governments and donors. Harmonizing quality standards and certifications for crafts could also facilitate regional trade and participation in international fairs.

³⁷ Sources: [8][9][11]

11 Conclusion

This mapping has demonstrated that handicrafts and small/micro-enterprises hold significant potential to empower women and youth who access reproductive health services in Sudan, Mauritania and Tunisia. The rich craft traditions of the three countries, combined with emerging opportunities in agro-processing, aesthetics, digital services and urban agriculture, offer multiple entry points for entrepreneurship. However, financial constraints, limited training, market access challenges, restrictive norms and unfavorable policies currently impede progress. Integrated models that link health services with economic empowerment through multiservice clinics, mobile units, cooperatives and social enterprises have shown promising results. By implementing the recommendations presented in this report, IPPF AWRO, national MAs, policy makers and donors can support women and youth to build sustainable livelihoods, improve their health and contribute to the broader development goals of gender equality and economic inclusion. The success stories and data presented here illustrate that when provided with the right resources and supportive environments, women and youth are not only beneficiaries but also drivers of change in their communities.

Appendix: Additional Data

Additional Statistical Indicators³⁸

To complement the country profiles presented in Section 3, this appendix collates other relevant indicators that shed light on the socio-economic and health contexts of the three countries. According to the World Bank, Mauritania has a poverty headcount ratio of **31%**, with **16.6%** of the population living in extreme poverty; unemployment is particularly high among youth and rural women, and literacy rates remain below **60%** for adults. Sudan faces widespread food insecurity, with nearly **84%** of women reporting insufficient dietary intake. Only **3%** of companies have a woman as a top manager, reflecting pervasive gender inequality in the formal sector. Tunisia has higher literacy rates (over **91%** for young women) and lower maternal mortality, but female labour force participation remains around **26%**, indicating persistent structural barriers.

Digital inclusion is uneven. In Mauritania, roughly **4%** of adults have mobile money accounts, and women are less likely than men to own a mobile phone. Sudan's rollout of mobile banking has stalled due to conflict, yet humanitarian agencies are piloting cash transfers via digital wallets. Tunisia has a more developed digital ecosystem with growing e-commerce and online payment systems, but rural areas still face connectivity challenges. These digital divides underscore the importance of combining micro-enterprise support with investments in digital infrastructure and training.

In Mauritania,

60% of adults
literacy remain below

4% of adults
have mobile money
accounts

Tunisia

³⁸ Sources: [9]

This appendix presents two illustrative case studies of women-led cooperatives that demonstrate how combining traditional skills with training, cooperative governance and market access can transform livelihoods. These examples show the potential of handicrafts and agro-processing ventures to empower women when adequate technical and marketing support is provided.

PACAO leather and wood cooperatives (Mauritania). In Mauritania, the EU-funded PACAO project supports nine women's cooperatives in the leather and wood sectors. According to COOPI, the project trains members in cooperative management, accounting and product design, provides high-performance sewing machines and encourages diversification into accessories and decorative objects; The article notes that 31 % of Mauritians live below the poverty line and 16.6 % live in extreme poverty, yet the leather sector suffers from a lack of investment, limited access to credit and little innovation . By equipping women with new skills and tools, the project seeks to boost incomes and reduce the gender gap in the craft economy.

Hodere Pinnal grain cooperative (Nouakchott). In the neighborhood of Nouakchott, the Hodere Pinnal cooperative groups 20 women who transform local grains, millet, sorghum, corn and cowpeas into a nutritious powdered mix for babies and adults. A World Vision story explains that each member contributes 50 MRO (about US\$1.40) weekly to a savings group that allows them to invest in packaging and ingredients, and they also run a community garden to grow vegetables.. The women market their products through social media, posting videos on TikTok, and during Ramadan they sell up to 20 jars per day. Members report that the income helps them feed and educate their children and that the cooperative has raised their status within the community.

³⁹ [14][15]

Digital financial services and innovation programmes are critical enablers for handicraft and micro-enterprise development. Recent initiatives in the three countries highlight both progress and continuing gaps.

Mauritania's e-payments law and financial inclusion. A United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) policy brief explains that only 20 % of Mauritanian adults have a financial account and a mere 4 % have mobile money accounts. Women are less likely than men to access financial services, resulting in a 5 percentage-point gender gap. The 2021 law on electronic payments opened the market to non-bank providers and aims to spur digital finance, but capacity building is needed to ensure artisans can use mobile wallets for sales, savings and receiving remittances.

Cash grants for Sudanese women. A UN Women news feature reports that the Red Sea University and UN Women provided cash grants of SDG 1000000 (about US\$500) to each of 80 women entrepreneurs in eastern Sudan. The women used the grants to start or expand businesses in perfume and handicrafts, and one beneficiary earned SDG 300000 in profit, demonstrating the impact of flexible finance. Such cash transfers can serve as a bridge to more formal financial services when combined with business coaching.

Entrepreneurship amid displacement. An African Arguments article portrays women displaced by the Sudan conflict who run restaurants, beauty salons, cosmetic stands, galleries and clothing shops in camps. Beyond income, participants say that running a small business provides them with purpose and helps them process trauma. The stories underscore the importance of psychosocial support and community networks in entrepreneurship programmes.

⁴⁰ Sources: [12][13][16][17]

Digital and innovation training. A UNITAR report notes that over 250 Sudanese women and youth completed a digital and entrepreneurship training programme funded by Japan, which includes webinars on innovation, artificial intelligence and climate resilience, as well as a planned hackathon. These trainings aim to build climate-resilient businesses and prepare participants to adopt digital tools for marketing, management and product development.

F. Cross-Country Lessons and Future Research

This mapping underscores several common themes across the three countries and points to areas where further investigation could enhance programme design. First, integrated models that link health services with economic empowerment such as multiservice clinics, mobile outreach units and cooperatives show promise in increasing uptake of contraceptives while also improving livelihoods. The success of the Hodere Pinnal grain cooperative demonstrates that when women see economic value in visiting health centres, they are more likely to access health services, return for follow-ups and become advocates in their communities. Second, training alone is insufficient: beneficiaries need access to capital, markets and supportive legal frameworks. Women potters and leather artisans flourish when they have both equipment and fair contracts with buyers, while farmers and caterers thrive when linked to micro-finance and digital payments. Third, the digital divide reflected in low rates of financial inclusion and internet access limits the potential of e-commerce and online marketing, especially in rural Mauritania and conflict-affected Sudan. Investments in mobile networks, affordable data and digital literacy are essential.

Looking ahead, several research questions merit attention:

⁴⁰ Sources: [12][13][16][17]

- 1 **Impact evaluation:** What are the long-term health and economic outcomes of integrating health services with micro-enterprise training and financing? Randomized or quasi-experimental studies could assess changes in income, savings and social norms among participants.
- 2 **Digital finance adoption:** How do women artisans and traders adopt mobile money and digital payment platforms once regulatory barriers are removed? Qualitative research could explore user experiences, trust, literacy and the role of agents.
- 3 **Climate resilience:** How can handicraft and micro-agriculture enterprises adapt to climate shocks and contribute to climate mitigation? Case studies of cooperatives that use renewable energy, recycle waste or promote sustainable tourism could provide insights.
- 4 **Mental health and well-being:** What psychological benefits do entrepreneurship and cooperative membership confer for women and youth in fragile settings? Mixed-methods research could measure changes in self-efficacy, social connectedness and coping strategies.
- 5 **Cross-border trade and regional value chains:** How can MAs support artisans to access regional and international markets? Market mapping, product standardization and digital marketing strategies should be explored.

Answering these questions will require collaborative research involving local universities, MAs and international partners. By generating evidence on what works, IPPF AWRO can design more effective programmes, attract investment and scale up the integration of economic empowerment with reproductive health services.

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Annexes (Attached)



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