

Women's Economic Empowerment as a Mechanism to Support Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Algeria

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Abstract :

This study explores women's economic empowerment as a strategic mechanism to support sustainable development, with a specific focus on Algeria. The research highlights the theoretical foundations linking gender equity and economic growth and reviews previous studies that emphasize the impact of female participation in the labor market. Through analysis of Algeria's national policies, legal frameworks, and case studies of women entrepreneurs, the study identifies key barriers such as limited access to finance, cultural constraints, and low labor force participation. The findings suggest that comprehensive, gender-sensitive strategies are essential to ensure that women's economic empowerment becomes a real lever for inclusive and sustainable development in Algeria.

Keywords: Women's Economic Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Public Policy, Algeria

Jel Classification Codes: J16, Q01, H10 ,O55.

Introduction

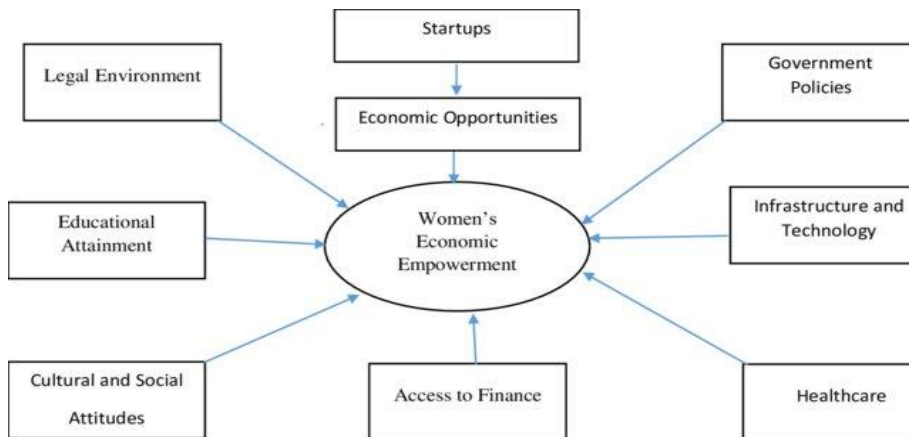
Women's economic empowerment is one of the fundamental pillars for achieving social justice and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth in modern societies. Various studies and scholarly literature have affirmed that women's participation in economic life not only improves their individual status but also directly impacts growth rates, human development indicators, and the overall stability of societies. In this context, since the early 2000s, Algeria has adopted a series of policies and reforms aimed at enhancing the status of women, particularly through their economic empowerment, in alignment with its international commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

Despite efforts made at both the legislative and institutional levels, Algerian women's participation in economic activity remains below expectations. Women continue to face numerous challenges related to cultural and social barriers, limited access to finance and markets, and a lack of targeted opportunities in certain

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productive sectors. This challenge is further intensified by the dominance of men in entrepreneurship, especially in traditional industries and technical fields.

Figure (01): Model for Women's Economic Empowerment In Algeria



Source: Mabrouk, K. O., & Boussad NAIT, I. (2024). Green startups in the traditional industries sector as a mean for Women's Economic Empowerment - Presenting successful international experiences. The second edition of the International Seminar: Domestic tourism and its role in achieving sustainable development, (pp. 1-2). Tunisia.

The diagram presents a conceptual model illustrating the interconnected factors that influence women's economic empowerment. At the center of the model is "Women's Economic Empowerment," which is positioned as the primary goal achieved through a set of interrelated elements. It begins with the provision of economic opportunities generated by supporting startups, which serve as an effective means of integrating women into the business world. The model also highlights the importance of government policies in creating a favorable legislative and regulatory environment, alongside the role of infrastructure and technology in facilitating women's access to markets and digital services. Additionally, healthcare is identified as a supporting factor in ensuring women's continued participation in economic activities. On another level, the model emphasizes access to finance as a fundamental condition for launching and expanding projects. It also underscores how educational attainment equips women with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective economic participation. The model does not overlook the impact of cultural and social attitudes, which may either enhance or restrict women's involvement in the economy, as well as the significance of the legal environment in securing economic rights and equal opportunities. Overall, the model reflects that achieving women's economic empowerment requires a comprehensive approach to structural, cultural, and institutional factors to ensure fair and effective participation of women in economic development.

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is widely recognized as a key driver of sustainable development. It refers to the capacity of women to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from economic activities on equal terms with men. The empowerment of women economically not only enhances gender equality but also contributes to poverty alleviation, improved livelihoods, and inclusive growth. In the context of Algeria, a country with significant socio-economic transformations and strategic development goals, WEE plays an essential role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This research paper aims to examine the current state of women's economic empowerment in Algeria by analyzing the general framework of existing policies and practices, identifying the main challenges that hinder women's effective participation in the economy, and reviewing successful international experiences that could inform the development of an effective and sustainable national model for women's economic empowerment—particularly through the promotion of green entrepreneurship and startups in traditional sectors.

Research Problem : Despite Algeria's efforts to enhance women's legal status and integrate gender-sensitive development strategies, women's participation in the economy remains significantly low. Structural, cultural, and institutional barriers continue to hinder the full economic empowerment of women, limiting the country's progress toward achieving inclusive and sustainable development .

This raises the question: **To what extent can women's economic empowerment serve as a practical mechanism to support sustainable development in Algeria?**

Research Objectives :

- Examine the relationship between women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.
- Assess the current state of women's participation in Algeria's economy.
- Analyze the effectiveness of existing public policies and legal frameworks supporting female economic inclusion.
- Identify the major barriers and propose policy recommendations to enhance women's economic participation in Algeria.

Significance of the Study : This study is significant because it sheds light on the multifaceted role of women in driving sustainable development, particularly in the Algerian context. It contributes to academic discourse by linking gender economics with development theory and offers evidence-based insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and civil society. By identifying the gaps and challenges facing women in Algeria's economy, the research provides actionable recommendations that can strengthen inclusive growth and gender equity at both national and regional levels.

1. Theoretical Framework of Women's Economic Empowerment

Theoretically, women's economic empowerment is rooted in human development theory and feminist economics. These frameworks highlight the importance of equitable access to resources, control over assets, and the ability to make strategic life choices. Particularly relevant is Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach, which

focuses on individuals' freedom to pursue lives they have reason to value—an idea that encompasses economic autonomy and agency².

From a development perspective, women's economic empowerment is instrumental in achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). When women participate actively in the economy, households experience greater stability, economic growth accelerates, and societies become more resilient and inclusive³.

1.1. Empowerment Theory

This theory emphasizes that empowerment is a multidimensional process involving capacity building, increased self-confidence, expanded opportunities, and control over economic and social decision-making. In this context, women are not seen as passive recipients of aid, but as active economic agents capable of driving change within their communities.

Empowerment refers to a distinct approach to developing interventions and creating social change. It directs attention toward health, adaptation, competence, and natural support systems. This approach also embodies the belief that many social problems stem from the unequal distribution of resources and unequal access to them. Some individuals are best supported through mutual assistance, helping others, or advocating for their rights, rather than relying on having their needs fulfilled by a benevolent professional⁴.

The empowerment approach goes beyond merely alleviating the negative aspects of a situation by seeking out its positive elements. Thus, enhancing wellness instead of simply fixing problems, identifying strengths instead of cataloging risk factors, and looking for environmental influences instead of blaming victims are all characteristics of the empowerment perspective.

1.2. Definition of Women's Economic Empowerment

Women's Economic Empowerment refers to the process by which women gain the ability to participate fully in economic life, access and control economic resources (such as income, assets, employment, and credit), make decisions that affect their economic well-being, and influence broader economic policies and institutions. It involves not only improving women's access to economic opportunities, but also removing structural and social barriers that hinder their full economic participation and agency.

² Sen, Amartya. (1999). Development as freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 1-5.

³ World Bank. (2012). World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development. World Bank. Conceptual Turning Point – But No Change in Practice?
https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/BP_2.2012.pdf

⁴ Gallant, R., Cohen, C., & Wolff, T. (1985). Change of older persons' image: Impact on public policy results from Highland Valley Empowerment Plan. Perspectives on Aging, 14, 9-13.

According to Kristof and WuDunn (2009)⁵, Empowering women is not only a moral or humanitarian duty, but also an economic and developmental necessity for any society that seeks progress and advancement.

According to the⁶, women's economic empowerment is achieved when women "have the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions."

1.3.The Importance of Women's Economic Empowerment

- **Improving Living Standards** : According to UN Women, women reinvest up to 90% of their income into their families, compared to 30-40% for men, leading to better health, education, and welfare outcomes for children⁷.
- **Achieving Justice and Equality** :The World Bank reports that economic empowerment is a key driver for achieving gender equality and reducing the gender economic gap⁸.
- **Stimulating Economic Growth** :If women participated in the labor market at the same rate as men, global GDP could increase by up to 26% by 2025⁹.
- **Enhancing Autonomy and Decision-Making** : Independent income strengthens women's ability to make critical decisions about their personal, health, and educational matters¹⁰.
- **Reducing Poverty** :Women's economic empowerment plays a crucial role in reducing multidimensional poverty, especially among female-headed households¹¹.

⁵ Kristof, N. D., & WuDunn, S. (2009). Half the sky: Turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide. Alfred A. Knopf.p.192.

⁶ OECD. (2011). Women's economic empowerment. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org/social/gender-development/47561694.pdf>

⁷ UN Women. (2017). Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work. United Nations.

⁸ World Bank. (2020). Women, Business and the Law 2020. World Bank Group. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32639>

⁹ McKinsey Global Institute. (2015). The Power Of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion To Global Growth. McKinsey Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

¹⁰ Kabeer, N. (1999, December 16). Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435-464.

¹¹ Chant, S. (2008). The 'Feminisation of Poverty' and the 'Feminisation' of Anti-Poverty Programmes: Room for Revision? *Journal of Development Studies*, 44(2), 165-197.

- **Promoting Social Stability** :Societies where women have equal economic opportunities tend to exhibit higher levels of social stability and sustainable development ¹².

2. Literature Review :

Several studies have addressed the topic of women's economic empowerment, each contributing to a deeper understanding of this important issue. Among these studies, we cite the following:

Numerous studies highlight the positive correlation between women's economic participation and sustainable development ¹³ argued that access to work and income enhances women's self-esteem and social status. In North Africa, studies by the International Labour Organization (2020) show that while progress has been made, structural challenges persist in women's access to labor markets and entrepreneurship.

In the Algerian context **Ammar, K., & Bentalha, S.** ¹⁴, emphasize that the strategic goal of women's entrepreneurial activity is not to attain leadership for its own sake or to participate in decision-making processes per se, but rather to contribute to development through their position as leaders.

Bourourou, D., & Berreziga, A. ¹⁵ concluded that to encourage and enable women to initiate and become successful in their own business ventures, the barriers mentioned in this study need to be removed through increasing awareness, providing vocational training and skill development not only to women but also behavioral training to men so that they understand and acknowledge the importance of women becoming entrepreneurs, and respect them for it.

The study of **Sadik** ¹⁶ demonstrate that the economic empowerment policy for Algerian women has created opportunities for them to enter the business world. However, it has not yet reached the desired level, as male entrepreneurship continues to dominate the market.

¹² Sen, A. Op.Cit

¹³ Kabeer, N. (2012). Women's Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Development. Centre for Development Policy & Research, School of Oriental & African Studies(29).

¹⁴ Ammar, K., & Bentalha, S. (2023, july 31). Female entrepreneurship in Algeria: between challenges and ways of development, based on international experiences. Family and Society Journal, 11(1), 393-416.

¹⁵ Bourourou, D., & Berreziga, A. (2020). Characteristics, motivations, and challenges of Algerian Women. Economic and Management Research Journal, 14(3), 1-18.

¹⁶ Sadik, S. (2024). Mechanisms of Economic Empowerment of Algerian Women and their impact on Female Entrepreneurship. Russian Law Journal, 12(1), 738-742.

Hassini¹⁷ found that the level of economic empowerment among Algerian women remains low, despite various efforts and policies implemented in recent years. The findings highlight that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires the adoption of more effective measures and mechanisms. Since the launch of the 2030 Agenda in 2016, Algeria has struggled to make meaningful progress-failing to fully achieve even one of the 17 SDGs. The study examines the current state of women's economic empowerment in Algeria within the framework of the SDGs, emphasizing the urgent need for alternative strategies to promote gender equality and inclusive development.

3. Women's Economic Empowerment as a Mechanism to Support Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Algeria

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are directly or indirectly related to women's economic empowerment are numerous, as women's economic empowerment is considered a fundamental pillar for achieving comprehensive and equitable development.

3.1.Sustainable Development Goals

Women's economic empowerment is a fundamental pillar for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda¹⁸. This empowerment intersects with several key goals aimed at building more just and inclusive societies. Goal 5: Gender Equality is at the forefront of those directly linked to women's economic empowerment, as it calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women, ensuring their full and effective participation in economic and public life, including equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making. It also promotes the recognition of unpaid care and domestic work¹⁹. Likewise, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth fosters a supportive economic environment for women by promoting entrepreneurship, ensuring equal opportunities in the labor market, and addressing gender wage gaps, which enhances the integration of women into the productive economy²⁰.

Moreover, women's economic empowerment is strongly tied to Goal 1: No Poverty, as economically empowering women-especially in vulnerable regions and female-headed households-provides a direct path to improved living conditions and

¹⁷ Hassini, D. (2024). Economic empowerment of women in Algeria in light of the Sustainable Development Goals. *Journal of Economic Growth and Entrepreneurship JEGE*, 7(3), 1-10.

¹⁸ UN. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations. United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

¹⁹ UN Women. (2017). Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work. United Nations. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/MS_ForumCSW61.pdf

²⁰ International Labour Organization. (2016). Women at Work :Trends 2016. ILO . https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_457317/lang--en/index.htm

reduction of multidimensional poverty²¹. Goal 4: Quality Education is also crucial, as education builds women's capacities and expands their economic choices, being closely linked to employment opportunities, income, and financial independence²². In addition, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities emphasizes the social and economic inclusion of marginalized groups, including women, through policies and strategies aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities²³.

Women's economic empowerment is a key driver for achieving broader development goals. It requires inclusive policies that integrate gender perspectives throughout planning and implementation for sustainable progress.

3.2.The Five Main Priorities for Accelerating Progress for Women and Girls in Algeria Over the Past Five Years through Laws, Policies, and Programs

Over the past five years, Algeria has enhanced women's status by fostering an environment that supports their empowerment. Key steps include the 2020 constitutional guarantee of gender equality and the 2021 law enforcing gender parity in electoral lists.

The state has also taken steps to promote gender parity in the labor market and encourage women's access to leadership positions within institutions and public bodies²⁴.

Furthermore, the protection of women from all forms of violence—whether in the public or private spheres—has been constitutionally recognized, alongside the protection of the family in all its members and a commitment to the best interests of the child, both boys and girls.

In parallel with this legal framework that supports the acceleration of women's and girls' advancement, several key priority areas have been addressed, including:

- Primary and lower secondary education are compulsory and free in public institutions. In 2023, the enrollment rate of girls of school age reached 11.99% in public schools²⁵.

Algeria has witnessed a significant decrease in the female illiteracy rate, dropping by 3 percentage points, from 86.7% in 2019 to 86.4% in 2022, according to estimates by the National Office for Literacy and Adult Education²⁶.

According to data from the higher education sector, the average percentage of female university students between 2019 and 2023 reached 62% of the total student

²¹ Chant ,S.Op.Cit.

²² World Bank.Op.Cit.

²³ UNDP. (2016). Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone. United Nations Development Programme.
<https://library.mdim.ac.in/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=12068>

²⁴ UN Women, A. (2024). In the implementation of the national report on the progress achieved. UN Women Algeria.

²⁵ Ministry of National Education, Algeria. Récupéré sur <https://www.education.gov.dz/> le 10/07/2025

²⁶ Ministry of National Education, Algeria.Op.Cit.

population. Female students have shown commendable academic performance, with graduation rates surpassing those of their male peers.

In the academic year 2021/2022, women accounted for 66% of all graduates from universities and institutes, and 63% in the 2022/2023 academic year²⁷. The state has worked to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, intensify maternal and child health programs, and expand reproductive health and family planning services, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These services are provided free of charge in more than 85% of public healthcare institutions²⁸.

The realization of this right has led to the presence of women in 45,30% of various public administration positions within the civil service (public sector) by the end of 2022. Women are strongly represented in key sectors such as communications, education, health, justice, national solidarity, social affairs, labor, social security, environment, tourism, traditional industries, and commerce²⁹.

Among the government's key priorities for 2021 was the empowerment of women in entrepreneurship, as outlined in its Action Plan, which focused on promoting employment and fighting poverty and unemployment through an economic approach. This approach emphasized the creation of income-generating economic activities, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, and supporting women entrepreneurs in accessing the business world through facilitated financing mechanisms.

Various ministerial departments have worked to simplify women's access to and use of microfinance loans. These financial instruments have seen broad uptake among aspiring women entrepreneurs, leading to a dynamic wave of women-led ventures. For example, the National Agency for the Management of Microcredit (ANGEM) has financed over 63% of total funded projects for women since its inception until the first quarter of 2023. Furthermore, as of March 31, 2024, the National Trade Register Center recorded a total of 193,023 registered female traders, including 176,050 natural persons and 16,973 legal entities³⁰.

3.3. Algeria's Approaches to Women's Economic Empowerment

Over the past decades, Algeria has adopted a set of policies and programs aimed at enhancing women's economic empowerment, in alignment with its national and international commitments to gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

One of the key strategic directions has been improving women's access to the labor market, by encouraging their employment in both public and private sectors and

²⁷ Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Récupéré sur : <https://www.mesrs.dz/index.php/en/home/> ; le 10 /07/2025.

²⁸ Ministry of Health. Récupéré sur <https://sante.gov.dz/>; le 06/07/2025.

²⁹ DGFP. Récupéré sur <https://www.dgfp.gov.dz/> ; le 15/07/2025.

³⁰ Ministry of Trade. Récupéré sur <https://www.commerce.gov.dz/fr>; consulted on 15/07/2025.

providing professional training and vocational education tailored to market demands-particularly in non-traditional fields. The state has also worked to support female entrepreneurship through dedicated financing mechanisms, such as the National Agency for Entrepreneurship Support and Development (ANADE, formerly ANSEJ), and the National Unemployment Insurance Fund (CNAC). These instruments aim to encourage women to establish their own businesses, especially in rural and inland regions³¹.

At the heart of this dynamic, the National Agency for the Management of Micro-Credit (ANGEM)³² plays a pivotal role, having granted 63.28% of its loans to women entrepreneurs, amounting to 611,420 funded projects. This exceptional performance demonstrates the effectiveness of targeted public policies. According to the most recent statistics, the National Agency for Entrepreneurship Support and Development (NESDA)³³, formerly known as ANSEJ-although showing a more modest rate of 11% of projects led by women, has financed 42,062 initiatives launched by women, mainly in the services sector and liberal professions.

The National Unemployment Insurance Fund (CNAC)³⁴ also contributes to this momentum, with 10.7% of its funding allocated to women-led projects. The data reveals an interesting sectoral distribution: liberal professions dominate with 49.4% of the projects, followed by crafts (22.5%) and industry (22.1%). This sectoral diversification reflects the ability of women to invest across various fields of activity. Moreover, Algeria's legal reforms, such as the Law on the Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises and measures to improve the business environment, reflect a clear political will to strengthen women's participation in economic life. The National Gender Equality Strategy, developed in partnership with UN Women, identifies women's economic integration as a key condition for achieving sustainable development. The Algerian government also emphasizes gender mainstreaming in public policies, through better gender-disaggregated data collection and participatory approaches in designing economic strategies³⁵.

3.4. Employment and Entrepreneurship: Encouraging Women to Enter the World of Business

Women's economic participation receives special attention within the framework of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as it contributes to economic growth at both local and national levels. Algeria has worked to support the integration of women into the labor market through legislation and laws that prohibit any form of discrimination or exclusion based on gender in employment, as well as through a

³¹ UN Algeria. (2020). Annual Report. United Nations Algeria.

<https://algeria.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Rapport%20NU%20EN%20V4-6-21.pdf>

³² ANGEM. Récupéré sur <https://www.angem.dz/fr/> ; consulted on 18/07/2025.

³³ NESDA. Récupéré sur <https://www.nesda.dz/> ; consulted on 18/07/2025.

³⁴ CNAC. Récupéré sur <https://www.cnac.dz/> ; consulted on 18/07/2025.

³⁵ UNDP Algeria. (2021). Gender and Development in Algeria: Progress and Challenges. United Nations Development Programme. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/algeria-human-development-report>

policy of free education and training for girls and women. This has facilitated their integration into the labor market and encouraged them to enter the world of work³⁶. By promoting the principle of equal rights and opportunities for both men and women in employment, women have been granted the same chances to contribute to all economic activities, particularly with the aim of achieving inclusive social and economic development and enabling women to access the field of economic investment.

The employment policy, integration programs, and economic promotion initiatives have contributed to reducing poverty and unemployment among both men and women, especially rural women and housewives. This has been done by implementing programs that promote innovation and entrepreneurial spirit among them, to create enterprises or productive income-generating activities that help create job opportunities. These efforts are supported by state financial aid through microcredit loans provided by various agencies and institutions, which in turn help improve the living conditions of families, especially women.

For example, the number of beneficiaries of microcredit loans provided by the National Agency for the Management of Microcredit (ANGEM) reached 915,051 people (as of March 31, 2023), including 578,711 women (representing 63.28%) and 336,340 men (representing 36.72%). This initiative enabled the creation of 1,420,109 job opportunities.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain, such as high female unemployment rates, under representation of women in leadership positions in economic sectors, and the gap between declared policies and actual implementation. Nevertheless, Algeria's overall direction reflects a growing commitment to expanding women's role in the national economy and promoting their financial independence as a vital component of inclusive development.

Conclusion :

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic pathway toward inclusive and sustainable development. In the Algerian context, commendable progress has been made through legislative reforms, educational access, and financial support mechanisms. However, despite these advancements, entrenched socio-cultural norms, structural inequalities, and regional disparities continue to hinder the full realization of women's economic potential.

Empowering women economically goes beyond job creation—it is about fostering autonomy, strengthening social equity, and enhancing national productivity. To transform women into active economic agents, Algeria must adopt a comprehensive and intersectional approach that tackles the multiple layers of exclusion women face, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.

³⁶ UN Women, A. (2024). In the implementation of the national report on the progress achieved. UN Women Algeria.

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