



## Near East and North Africa

### KEY GENDER ISSUES

The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region has made progress in social and economic development in recent decades, including improvements in gender equality. For example, women's literacy and life expectancy rates generally have improved faster than in other regions. Between 1980 and 2010, average female life expectancy increased by 14 years. Meanwhile, fertility rates and maternal and infant deaths have declined. Overall, the average fertility rate fell from 4.9 births per woman in 1990 to 2.7 in 2010. The gender gap in primary and secondary school enrolment has also been narrowing rapidly,<sup>1</sup> as has the literacy gap. In fact, women's secondary school enrolment rate rose from 46 to 69 per cent between 1991 and 2009. However, these achievements have not yet resulted in more equitable economic opportunities and benefits for women living in rural areas. The recent food crises, armed conflicts, and social and political upheaval and transition have undone some of the progress in the region and made it more challenging to address disparities.<sup>2</sup>

### Economic empowerment

Over the past 30 years, women's share of agricultural labour in the region has increased substantially compared to men's.<sup>3</sup> This is largely due to the fact that more men are seeking work in other sectors. Women also tend to engage more than men in informal labour, such as unpaid work on family farms or seasonal and temporary activities, none of which is sufficiently reflected in the statistics.<sup>4</sup> Women's economic opportunities are often limited by structural and cultural constraints, including restrictions on their mobility and the perception that men are the primary breadwinners and heads of households. This diminishes the benefits women derive from their contributions to agriculture and rural development through their knowledge, skills and labour.<sup>5</sup>

Egypt: Sabah Hassan Aldin and her husband, Gamal Derbeny, prepare threshed wheat for storage and transport.

Many countries in the region have laws and regulations that give women and men equal control over resources and property, including land. However, there are gaps in implementation, particularly in rural areas, where the cultural context and deep-rooted customs take precedence over both women's and men's awareness of their rights and obligations.<sup>6</sup>

### **Voice and participation**

Over the past decade, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia have introduced quotas for women in parliament and, in some cases, in other elected bodies.<sup>7</sup> Although women now have more decision-making opportunities at different levels across the region, their voice and influence remain limited in the agricultural sector, both at home and in the public domain. While there are regional differences, women still face problems obtaining financial support and accessing agricultural inputs, marketing opportunities and extension services, in large part because their mobility is restricted and they are allowed little or no contact with men outside the family.<sup>8</sup>

However, several countries, including Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, have made reforms to their legal systems that improve women's ability to make decisions about their lives.<sup>9</sup> There are also several organizations working to strengthen women's voice and influence in agriculture. One example is Tunisia's National Federation of Women Agriculturalists, which was established in 1990 by the National Union of Agriculture and Fishing of Tunisia, as one of the first local NGOs aimed at the advancement of women.

Furthermore, IFAD has been working continuously in the region to strengthen the role and voice of women leaders in rural organizations. Its ongoing programmes are aimed at giving a stronger voice and role in policy dialogue to grassroots women by building their capacity to express themselves, choose leaders and hold them accountable. The ultimate goal is to expand the presence of women leaders in rural organizations at all levels, and develop their leadership skills.

### **Workloads and benefits**

Studies carried out in selected countries of the NENA region show that, while the contribution of women and men in on-farm labour varies, women provide most of the manual agricultural labour for crop production and men do the mechanized work. However, women have yet to enjoy the full benefits of their contributions. Another study undertaken in the region found that, while women are heavily involved in crop production – contributing both their knowledge and their physical labour – it is men who do the marketing and keep control over all the income generated by everyone in the household.<sup>10</sup> Women are also responsible for household tasks, which are not considered economic activities but are crucial to family well-being.<sup>11</sup> Studies show that when men migrate from rural to urban areas or to neighbouring countries for work, women are left to care for their families and also take over the agricultural work once performed by men.<sup>12</sup> Women, men and children often lack safe and decent working conditions in agriculture, whether their work is paid or unpaid.

## IFAD STORIES FROM THE FIELD

### Improving women's economic opportunities and status in Sudan

Microfinance has a long history in Sudan but results have been limited, especially in rural areas. Since 2010, under the IFAD-supported Western Sudan Resources Management Programme, the Agricultural Bank of Sudan Microfinance Initiative has been offering sharia-compliant credit, savings and microinsurance programmes, particularly to rural women. Savings and lending groups have been established, built on the proven “village *sanadiq*” model. This creates group solidarity and credit discipline by providing group guarantees, leading to repayment rates of 100 per cent. The programme also provides training in business practices, improving participants' organizational and management skills. The average loan is about 550 Sudanese pounds (US\$125 in May 2013).<sup>13</sup> Rural women have established a savings culture and, over time, they have gained the confidence to engage in new economic opportunities. They have also experienced improved status in their communities.

By mid-2012, over 11,000 members – 90 per cent of them women – had joined 660 savings and credit groups across 250 communities in 2 states. Women held at least one of the elected positions in most community development committees.<sup>14</sup> Their strong participation is helping to improve the sustainability of the programme.

### Increasing women's community involvement in Egypt

Through its gender-inclusive approach, the Sohag Rural Development Project (2001-2008) helped to increase women's participation in project activities. Participants observed that before the project was implemented women did not attend meetings, but that afterwards at least half of the attendees were women. Women and men alike recognized that women often had a better sense of the priorities facing the community and therefore made valuable contributions. At the end of the project, women accounted for 27 per cent of those trained in a wide range of subjects, ranging from basic computing skills, environmental and health awareness to more in-depth technical training in project design and analysis, as well as training in savings and credit. Women also accounted for 33 per cent of committee members and 27 per cent of general board members of participating NGOs. The project helped about 18,000 women obtain identity cards, which gave them access to government services and the right to vote in elections.<sup>15</sup>

**IFAD GENDER POLICY**  
**Strategic objective 1:**  
**Promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and men to have equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, profitable economic activities.**

**IFAD GENDER POLICY**  
**Strategic objective 2:**  
**Enable women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations.**

Sudan: Zainab Abu Sin (centre) and the women she works with to restore community grazing lands.





**IFAD GENDER POLICY**  
**Strategic objective 3:**  
**Achieve a more equitable**  
**balance in workloads and**  
**in the sharing of**  
**economic and social**  
**benefits between women**  
**and men.**

*“Growing up, I travelled with my father and brothers in the grazing season and helped with the milking. I only had five years of schooling. I first started working with the project as a seasonal worker. I was so happy to get my first salary, I felt important and independent, and I was able to help my father. Later, I took health-care and food-processing courses. Now I’m a trainer and earn 100 Syrian pounds (about US\$2) a day.”*

*Samira Hassan (25), Shaddade village, Hassake province, Syrian Arab Republic.*

**Rehabilitating rangelands and reducing women’s workload in the Syrian Arab Republic**

The Syrian Steppe, or Badia, covers more than 55 per cent of the country. With poor soils and low rainfall, it is suitable only as grazing land. The Bedouin communities, some partially settled and some still nomadic, herd about 12 million animals, including sheep, goats and some camels, in this area. Women are responsible for many household and livestock-related tasks, such as herding, milking, processing milk, feeding livestock and cleaning animal pens. Nearly 80 per cent of women take part in sheep-rearing activities. After decades of intensive grazing and severe drought, the Badia had become severely degraded, which increased the community’s work burden.

From 1998 to 2011, IFAD supported the Badia Rangelands Development Project. The project began by rehabilitating the rangelands and providing good quality water to reduce women’s workloads. It also created economic opportunities for women through skills training. More than 7,500 women received training in food processing, and 4,800 gained skills in wool shearing. Over 10,000 women learned sewing, knitting and handicrafts. About 8,700 women were trained in first aid, with some 150 of them receiving special instruction in midwifery. As women began to sew for family and neighbours, the estimated return from the sewing courses, including savings and profits, was about 1,750 Syrian pounds (SYP) (US\$24 in May 2013) for each participant. Women with new food-processing skills were able to save about 4,000 SYP (US\$57 in May 2013) through preserving food and selling surpluses.

Women make savings on household expenditures by bottling food and making preserves, making clothes for their families and neighbours, and providing basic health-care services to friends and relatives free of charge.

These interventions increased women’s self-confidence and social awareness, helped them improve their incomes and well-being, and created the space for them to participate in the development of their communities.<sup>16</sup>

Syrian Arab Republic: women at work in a nursery cultivating herbs.



## LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

IFAD's Near East, North Africa and Europe Division has developed projects that address women's empowerment and gender equality in different ways. Some of the lessons learned and good practices implemented in the region include:

- **Improving women's economic opportunities.** Reducing women's workloads can open the way for them to participate in economic opportunities. This can be done by redistributing labour throughout households and communities, for example. Addressing environmental challenges such as land degradation and providing good quality water can free up women's time and improve inputs for production and processing. Group training in areas such as savings and credit can provide women with more skills and knowledge, broaden their livelihood options and strengthen their confidence.
- **Engaging men (including leaders).** Helping men understand the importance of women's participation in economic activities is critical for ensuring equitable and sustainable outcomes for everyone. One approach is to demonstrate how women's participation can benefit the household and community. Sensitizing men about gender roles and responsibilities, and encouraging them to support a fair distribution of tasks, can lead to more opportunities for women to take part in economic and community activities. With men's support, women often find greater social status and more influence in decision-making.
- **Promoting an enabling environment.** It is important to involve different stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, banks and credit providers, training colleges and community leaders, when addressing gender issues. This holistic approach can help make institutional environments more responsive to gender-differentiated needs, interests and challenges. It can also lead to more sustainable initiatives over the long term. IFAD's initiatives aim at empowering women and helping them to become organized at the local level, and thus influence policies from within.

The Agricultural Bank of Sudan Microfinance Initiative has a gender-targeting strategy to increase women's participation and access to services. This includes quotas for women's participation in community committees, consideration of women's time and availability, and the collection of gender-disaggregated data for monitoring and evaluation.

## OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

Several ongoing challenges remain and need to be addressed at all levels to ensure a greater level of inclusion and participation of women in the key decision-making processes that affect the social and economic life of the community:

- **Access to land and land rights.** When smallholders have access to land and tenure security, they are able to obtain credit and other agricultural inputs. Various laws in different countries protect women's rights to land and property. In practice, however, there is a gap between the laws in place and their enforcement, which is related to the cultural context and customary traditions. Enormous challenges must be overcome before women can realize these rights.
- **Access to credit.** With access to credit, smallholders are better able to improve farm production or to start and develop businesses. Although women in a number of countries have legal and de facto access to loans and credit, many still face discrimination when trying to obtain them. Reasons include restrictions on their mobility, their limited power in household decision-making and a lack of awareness of their rights.
- **Women's voice and leadership.** More efforts are needed to strengthen women's influence in the household, the community, the broader public realm and the private sector. It is necessary to develop partnerships with organizations working to increase women's decision-making roles. It is also important to provide opportunities for women and men to discuss and reflect on perceptions regarding each other's roles in different domains, including the household.

## THE STATISTICS AND WHAT THEY SHOW

The Near East and North Africa region is characterized by countries with different levels of human development and gender equality. While some countries have fairly strong economies (with GDP per capita of at least US\$4,000) others continue to struggle (with GDP per capita of around US\$1,000). While women across the region can expect to live longer than men, they continue to lag behind men in areas such as literacy (Table 1).

Most of the countries for which there are data fall below average on the Human Development Index. All but two fall below average on the Gender Inequality Index (Table 2). This demonstrates that there are ongoing challenges to progress for women particularly in the key areas of empowerment and labour markets and income.

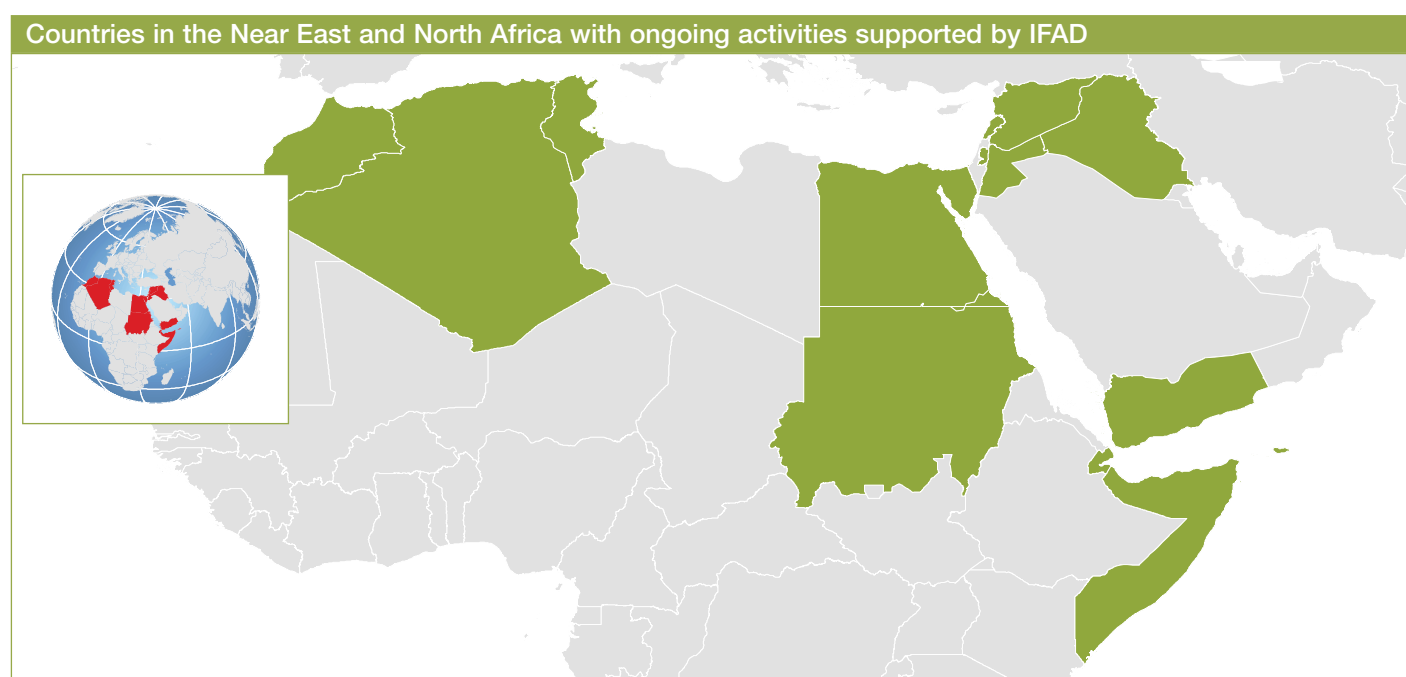
Countries in the region continue to struggle with discriminatory social practices that reinforce gender inequality and restrict women's legal rights or the recognition of those rights in areas such as ownership or access to resources like land and credit. Furthermore, economic opportunities for women continue to be limited, as indicated by their relatively low rate of labour participation (Table 3).

**Table 1: Key development indicators across the region**

Country	GDP per capita (current US\$) (2011)*	Life expectancy at birth (years) (2011)•		Literacy rate, ages 15+••	
		Female	Male	Female (% of females)	Male (% of males)
Algeria	5 244	75	72	-	-
Djibouti	1 203**	59	56	-	-
Egypt	2 781	75	71	64*	80*
Jordan	4 666	75	72	89*	96*
Lebanon	9 413	75	70	-	-
Morocco	3 054	74	70	44**	69**
Somalia	-	53	50	-	-
Sudan	1 435	63	60	62*	80*
Syrian Arab Republic	2 893*	85	74	77*	90*
Tunisia	4 350	77	73	71***	86***
Yemen	1 361	67	64	47*	81*

Source: World Bank database (2008-2012). •Accessed 14, 27 June 2013. ••Accessed 25-26 September 2013.

Notes: \*2010 data; \*\*2009 data; \*\*\*2008 data.



The statistics point to ongoing gender inequality and discriminatory practices that continue to limit women's economic and social opportunities. Consequently, it is important to conduct robust gender analyses to identify the challenges facing women and men and use the findings to inform policy and programme design and implementation.

**Table 2: Human development and gender inequality across the region, 2012**

Country	Human Development Index (HDI)* (186 countries) Source: UNDP	Gender Inequality Index (GII)** (148 countries) Source: UNDP		Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)*** (86 non-OECD countries) Source: OECD
		Value	Rank	
Algeria	93	0.391	74	-
Djibouti	164	-	-	-
Egypt	112	0.590	126	65
Jordan	100	0.482	99	-
Lebanon	72	0.433	78	-
Morocco	130	0.444	84	17
Somalia	-	-	-	82
Sudan	171	0.604	129	85
Syrian Arab Republic	116	0.551	118	75
Tunisia	94	0.261	46	22
Yemen	-	0.747	148	83

Sources: UNDP HDI; UNdata 2012, GII; SIGI, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2012. Accessed 14, 27 June 2013.

Notes: \*The HDI is a composite measure of health, education and income and an alternative to purely economic assessments of national progress (e.g. GDP growth). Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/>.

\*\*The GII is a composite measure that reflects inequality in achievements between women and men in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The index ranges between "0", which means women fare equally well, to "1.0", which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all dimensions measured.

Source: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/68606.html>.

\*\*\*The SIGI was launched by the OECD Development Centre as an innovative measure of the underlying drivers of gender inequality. It captures discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, discriminatory inheritance practices, violence against women, son preference, restricted access to public space and restricted access to land and credit.

Source: <http://genderindex.org/ranking>.

**Table 3: Key gender indicators across the region**

Country	Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births) (2010) Source: World Bank	Women's access to land* (2012) Source: OECD	Women's access to bank loans** (2012) Source: OECD	Labour participation rate, ages 15+ (2011) Source: World Bank	
				Female (% of females)	Male (% of males)
Algeria	97	0	0	15	72
Djibouti	200	-	-	36	67
Egypt	66	0	0	24	74
Jordan	63	-	-	16	66
Lebanon	25	0.5	0.5	23	71
Morocco	100	0.5	0.5	26	75
Somalia	1 000	0.5	1.0	38	77
Sudan	730	1.0	0.5	31	77
Syrian Arab Republic	70	0.5	0.5	13	72
Tunisia	56	0.5	0	26	70
Yemen	200	0.5	0.5	25	72

Sources: World Bank database (2008-2012); SIGI, OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2012. Accessed 14, 27 June 2013.

Notes: \*Women's legal and de facto rights to own and access agricultural land: 0: Women have equal legal rights with men to own and access land; 0.5: Women have the same legal rights to own and access land, but are restricted due to discriminatory practices; 1.0: Women have few or no legal rights to access or own land, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

\*\*Women's legal and de facto access to loans and credit: 0: Women have equal rights to access credit and bank loans with men; 0.5: Women have rights to access some kinds of credit (e.g. microcredit), or have equal rights but face discrimination in accessing bank loans and credit; 1.0: Women have few or no rights to access bank loans or credit, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.



## KEY RESOURCES

- <sup>1</sup> World Bank. 2012. *Capabilities, Opportunities and Participation: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa Region. A Companion Report to the World Development Report (Overview)*. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank), p. 1.  
Available at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/World\\_Development\\_Report\\_2012\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_Development\\_Overview\\_MENA.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/World_Development_Report_2012_Gender_Equality_Development_Overview_MENA.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> IFAD. 2012. "A time of transition: Agricultural development and rural poverty reduction in the Near East and North Africa", pp. 1-2. Available at: <http://www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/pn/factsheets/nen.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11. Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, (Rome: FAO), p. 9.
- <sup>4</sup> Abdelali-Martini, M. 2011. "Empowering Women in the Rural Labor Force with a Focus on Agricultural Employment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)." UN Women, Expert Group Meeting: Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment: Institutions, Opportunities and Participation, Accra, Ghana, 20-23 September 2011, p. 2. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Martini-EP-9-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> Badr, K. 2010. "Rural women and agriculture in the MENA." CIHEAM Briefing Notes No. 66, p. 1. Available at: [http://www.ciheam.org/images/CIHEAM/PDFs/Observatoire/NAL/nal66\\_badr.pdf](http://www.ciheam.org/images/CIHEAM/PDFs/Observatoire/NAL/nal66_badr.pdf).
- <sup>6</sup> Abdelali-Martini. 2011. "Empowering Women in the Rural Labor Force", p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2012. "Regional Overview for the Middle East and North Africa. MENA Gender Equality Profile: Status of Girls and Women in the Middle East and North Africa", p. 4.
- <sup>8</sup> World Bank. 2012. *Capabilities, Opportunities and Participation*, p. 13.
- <sup>9</sup> World Bank. 2012. *Capabilities, Opportunities and Participation*, p. 12.
- <sup>10</sup> Abdelali-Martin, M., et al. "Gender dimension in the conservation and sustainable use of agro-biodiversity in West Asia." *Journal of Socio-Economics*, Volume 37, Issue 1 (2008): 365-383. In Abdelali-Martini. 2011. "Empowering Women in the Rural Labor Force", p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Abdelali-Martini. 2011. "Empowering Women in the Rural Labor Force", p. 4.
- <sup>12</sup> Augustin, E., R. Assad and D. Jaziri. 2012. *Women's Empowerment for Improved Research in Agricultural Development, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer in the West Asia/North Africa Region*. (Amman, Jordan: AARINENA), p. 31.
- <sup>13</sup> IFAD. 2012. "ABSUMI Credit and Financial Report", 31 December 2012.
- <sup>14</sup> IFAD. 2012. "Republic of the Sudan: Western Sudan Resources Management Programme: SD-655 Supervision Mission", 30 September to 21 October 2012, p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup> IFAD. 2013. IFAD in Egypt [online]. Available at: <http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/home/tags/egypt>.
- <sup>16</sup> IFAD. 2012. *Syrian Arab Republic: Thematic study on participatory rangeland management in the Badia*. (Rome: IFAD, Near East and North Africa Division), p. 25. Available at: <http://www.ifad.org/pub/pn/badia.pdf>.

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## LINKS

IFAD policy on gender equality and  
women's empowerment  
[http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/  
gender\\_e.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/gender_e.pdf)

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