



النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development

Raising Tomorrow's Leaders

*The Role of Family and Social Norms
In Shaping Young Women Leadership
in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt*



**She
LEADS**



The African Women's
Development and
Communication Network



**STOP
CHILD
EXPLOITATION**
Terre des Hommes
Netherlands



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Scope of the Research

The action research report builds on the program and activities of the « She Leads » project, a joint program of Plan International Netherlands, Defense for Children - ECPAT Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT), African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), and Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH) targeting social norms in formal and informal institutions in East Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya), West Africa (Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia) and the Middle East (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt). The report draws upon and is informed by the considerations and findings of the « She Leads » activities, and supports the effective identification of key lines of investigation. It also represents a starting point for a larger research component under the « She Leads » project that examines family, community, and institutions.

The report aims to:

- 1- Provide insights and recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders on **how families can contribute to and support young women's leadership in Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon.**
- 2- Inform policymakers and stakeholders on **enablers of and barriers to women's leadership in society**, to support a more effective role of girls and young women in their families and communities, as well as strengthen their leading capacity.
- 3- Understand **how shifts in social dynamics and regional trends influence leadership roles for girls and young women in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt**, broadening the comprehension of how social norms evolve.

Methodology

The research resorted to **qualitative methodologies** to collect data from both primary and secondary sources. Specifically, **23 semi-structured interviews** were conducted with girls and young women from the three targeted countries. Alongside, **5 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with fathers and mothers from the three countries investigated the family's, specifically the parents', roles in fostering women leaders. The qualitative approach has been strengthened and validated by a thorough review of existing literature, local and international documents, and up-to-date reports regarding the main topics tackled in this report.

Country Distribution of Respondents

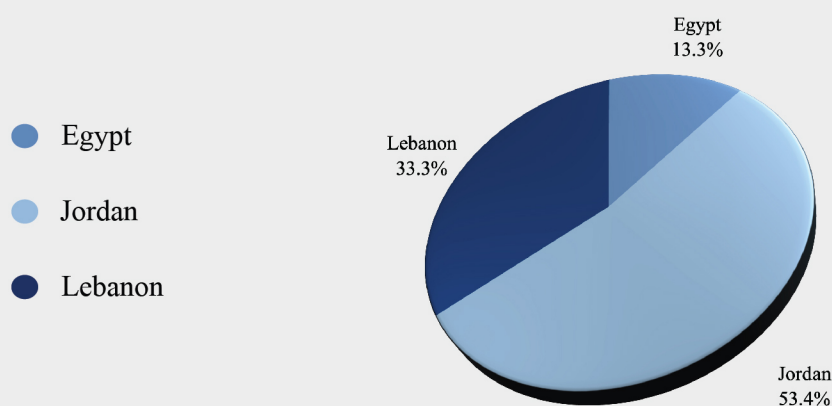


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
The Role of the Family in Shaping Female Leadership	2
Why Is the Family's Role Important for Women's Leadership?	3
1. Family Support for Women's Public Engagement	4
Cultivating Leadership: Family and the Community	4
Economic Realities: Family and Social Dynamics	5
2. Influential Role Models: Paving the Path Way Young Women's Leadership	6
Learning Leadership at Home: The Mother as a Role Mo	6
Learning Leadership Beyond the Household Context	6
Bridging Generation Gaps Through Digital Inclusiveness	7
3. Family, Education, and Intergenerational Change	8
Nurturing Leadership and Change Across Generations	8
The Transformative Power of Education	9
Conclusions and Recommendations	10
References	14



Executive Summary

The Role of the Family in Shaping Female Leadership

Family plays a crucial role in fostering female leadership in the Arab world, providing emotional, financial, and psychological support that enables young women to navigate societal challenges and pursue leadership roles. Acting as the primary support system, families shield young women from community judgment and foster environments fertile for success. This support is crucial in societies where traditional norms might sometimes limit women's opportunities in the public sphere.

Key Findings

Family support is integral to the leadership development of young women in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. The research indicates that all the girls and young women (GYW) interviewed receive various forms of support from their families. This support is vital, as it helps them leverage their potential, navigate challenges, and actively participate in leadership activities. Families often provide a buffer against societal pressures and community judgment, enhancing young women's confidence and ability to engage in public life.

- **Mothers** are frequently identified as the primary role models, embodying sacrifice and dedication that inspire their daughters. The presence of a supportive mother figure is particularly influential, providing not only a model of resilience and commitment but also protection from external judgment and negative social pressures.
- **Education** emerges as a transformative force in the lives of young women, with parents highlighting the importance of educational attainment and understanding its fundamental role in overcoming societal barriers and enhancing leadership capabilities.
- **Financial independence** is another factor highly valued by families and is seen as essential for the personal and professional growth of young women.
- **Digital inclusiveness** and access to technology are vital for developing leadership skills among young women. The research highlights the positive impact of digital literacy and technology on leadership development.

Recommendations

- *The development and funding of initiatives that recognize and promote the critical role of family support in women's leadership development is of utmost importance.*
- *Promoting positive role models is also crucial. Mentorship programs that leverage the influence of mothers and other female role models should be implemented.*
- *Creating forums for intergenerational dialogue can bridge gaps between parents and children regarding aspirations and challenges.*
- *Fostering digital inclusiveness for young women and their families by promoting digital literacy programs and ensuring equal access to technology through innovative policies and financial support is essential.*

By addressing these areas, policymakers and stakeholders can significantly enhance the leadership capabilities of young women in the Arab world, driving cultural, economic, and social progress.

Why Is the Family's Role Important for Women's Leadership?

The Arab world today is a complex and transformative environment where, despite different cultural, economic, and social barriers, girls and young women strive for leadership opportunities and are determined to express their full potential in various decision-making arenas, from family to community-based organizations and beyond. In the last decades, a strong emphasis has been placed by governments and communities on mobilizing and maximizing this potential and talent, with greater support for women's leadership and participation in all spheres of public life and within the household, both from the immediate caregivers and the broader network of relatives. Indeed, being the main safety net and provider of common values, social norms, stability and networking opportunities, **family plays today a critical role in supporting and shaping young women's opportunity to become leaders.** This support can take different shapes: it may be financial, emotional, or psychological, with both parents being instrumental in their daughters' success, and fostering their growing participation in the public sphere. **Family can be determinant in creating an environment conducive to women effectively assuming leadership positions within and beyond financial, social, and cultural norms.**

With the support of their families and by bringing diverse and unique perspectives, women leaders address challenges and foster innovation, ensuring through their involvement that development initiatives benefit society as a whole and inspire future generations, all crucial steps of sustainable progress and a renewed cultural and intellectual revitalization of the Arab world. Women's leadership is indeed a vital element for this renaissance, as women are fundamental drivers of economic growth and equality, as well as peacebuilders and enhancers of political and social stability. Women's leadership is understood here not so much as the ability to reach high-ranking jobs or become a political leader, but more as **the potential for girls and young women to make their voice heard, speak up for themselves and others, effectively take on leading positions, administering their finances, making use of their intellectual and practical skills, navigating everyday challenges and obstacles, and producing meaningful results for themselves and others.** Although difficult, women's leadership is a prerequisite to achieving true gender equality and a full realization of their aspirations. Understanding the interplay between family and social norms in fostering women's leadership is crucial to better understand the broader transformations within the dynamic Arab world of today¹.

Parents' Role in Young Women's Leadership

Category	Supporting Factors	Hindering Factors
Public/Civic Engagement	Encourage daughters to participate in public and civic activities.	Imposing movement restrictions.
Overcoming Stereotypes	Challenge traditional gender roles and encourage pursuit of diverse careers and leadership roles.	Reinforcing traditional gender roles and discouraging career aspirations.
Learning Opportunities	Provide access to and support for educational and learning opportunities, including extracurricular activities.	Limited access to educational resources due to geographical marginalization.
Protection	Ensure daughters' privacy is respected and protected	Overprotection due to fear of harassment or violence, limiting engagement in public activities.
Sharing responsibility	Share household responsibilities equitably, teaching balance and mutual support in personal and professional life.	Promoting the idea of women's sacrifice, prioritizing family over personal ambitions.
Intergenerational Dialogue	Engage in open, constructive conversations with daughters, valuing their opinions and building confidence.	Limited communication and not giving enough time for meaningful exchanges.

¹ Changes in the traditional family structure are happening globally, fostered by economic, social, and political features. For a comprehensive understanding, see Al-Khraiif, R., Salam A. B., and Rashid F. A., Family Demographic Transition in Saudi Arabia: Emerging Issues and Concerns, "Sage Journal", Vol. 10(1), 2020.

Family, Social Norms, and Young Women's Leadership

1. Family Support for Women's Public Engagement

In the contemporary Arab world, young women increasingly aspire to showcase their skills and participate in decision-making processes in their families, communities, and countries, indicating a positive cultural shift in a region today strongly driven by the fourth Industrial revolution². In this context, social norms are the informal guidelines that shape people's behaviors, significantly impacting both public and private spheres, and influencing individuals' access to resources, power, and self-perception of their abilities³. The role of social norms in society can be significant and suggests a complex interplay that invites further exploration and discussion⁴. The following section sheds light on the relationship between the family's role in supporting female leadership and the social norms shaping the public sphere, with a specific focus on the role of the community, the social dynamics, and the economic aspects in each target country.

Cultivating Leadership: Family and the Community

Based on the data collected, all 23 girls and young women⁵ engage, to a different extent, in some form of leadership in their communities. All of them strongly acknowledged having received crucial support from their families to leverage their potential, navigate challenges or difficult situations, administer their financial resources, and actively participate in experiences that help their voices – and those of others – get amplified. This high-level participation of young girls in activities that help their leadership skills develop is mirrored in their families' active engagement in the public sphere in only 3 cases out of the 23 in this research; the remaining respondents suggested not engaging with these opportunities either for lack of time or resources. Still, this difference does not prevent families from learning and internalizing concepts and knowledge about leadership, female empowerment, and self-development through their daughters' life experiences. This produces a fruitful and positive change in the household which may prove beneficial for society in the years to come. Over half of the respondents highlighted the positive attitude of their families regarding issues like financial support, travel and movement, and active engagement as leaders in their community and the public sphere. While acknowledging the weight of social norms (particularly in neighborhoods, small villages, and among relatives), GYW admitted that they are allowed to go out, participate in social activities (recreational, sport, activism), receive financial support, when available, to sustain their aspirations, or commute to university and schools even if in other villages or cities, as their parents recognize the importance of gaining experience for the fulfillment of their future goals. This is mainly the case with Lebanese respondents, while Jordanian GYW identify some difficulties in traveling around the country without being accompanied by brothers or fathers. In Egypt, 7 out of 7 GYW interviewees suggest having some form of movement restriction (from mildly restrictive to very restrictive).

“Regarding traveling and freedom of movement, I encourage it as long as she stays strong and capable in her goals; we have confidence in her. In our society, many girls travel for work or to study abroad.”

(Father, Lebanon)

Alongside families showing interest in supporting girls and young women's leadership aspirations, also the community has a determinant role in leadership dynamics, being a major element guiding social behaviors. Indeed, there is a greater understanding, on the part of the community and the broader family of the importance of movement and experience for girls and young women who seek to reach financial independence, career attainments, and contribute to the family's well-being. Only in very few cases do parents mention episodes of restrictive community behavior vis-à-vis their decision to let girls and young women study, work, move alone (even at night), or follow unconventional career pathways. In those cases, parents always strongly asserted their willingness to overcome

² Female Political Participation Inspires Confidence in Female Political Leadership in ARAB WORLD, “Arab Barometer” 2023 <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2023/03/Arab-World-citizens-change-their-views-on-gender-political-roles-as-they-age-2/>

³ UNICEF, *Defining Social Norms and Related Concepts*, November 2021.

⁴ Institute for Reproductive Health, *Social Norms and AYSRH: Building a Bridge from Theory to Program Design. Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change*, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., 2019.

⁵ From now on GYW.

stereotypes and keep supporting their daughters beyond community pressure. Various actors (UN and civil society) in the region have reported that different forms of violence may prevent GYW from accessing community spaces, training opportunities, and, most importantly, jobs that are not close to their residential areas. In those cases where families restrict daughters' movement, this is justified not so much by social norms or preoccupation for shaming and blaming from their community, but more often by very concrete fears regarding the public space, in particular violence or possible incidents that may occur outside the household.

In general, the family and the community understand the importance for GYW to engage in public space to improve and widen their career opportunities and empowerment. This is made clear in GYW's responses, in which they acknowledge the great support received from their families and their closer communities to actively engage in the public sphere and push their limits, whether as activists, in educational settings, cultural organizations, or sports.

Economic Realities: Family and Social Dynamics

Irrespective of the different economic circumstances, the financial freedom of GYW is highly valued by families in 17 out of the 23 cases, with both parents in all three countries financially supporting their daughters. When available, young people are free to administer their finances and receive economic support as parents highly value the importance of their duties and responsibilities. Close collaboration in the family, with fathers and mothers sharing incomes and financial obligations, has also been the case in all the interviews with parents from Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon.

"A major concern for my parents is freedom of movement, especially at night."

(Girl, 25, Lebanon)

"In difficult economic times, daughters and sons should depend on themselves without necessarily contributing to the house expenses [...] girls should study and work to be able to cover their needs if the family cannot, not the other way round."

(Mother, Jordan)

"The financial situation is bad for everyone, but I do my best not to let my children lack anything."

(Father, Egypt)

"[...] I stopped my education because of marriage, but now times have changed. Everyone now is called to work, and many families in Lebanon encourage girls to do so."

(Mother, Lebanon)

"In terms of financial status, in Lebanon girls now work and help with household finances more than before because of the difficult situation."

(Father, Lebanon)

Respondents from Lebanon shared more in-depth how the economic crisis in their country fosters a particular form of women's leadership and family support for young girls interested in pursuing careers or seeking jobs. According to the Lebanon Economic Monitor 2021, the major blast that occurred at Beirut Port in 2020 exposed the precarious situation of the country, situation already aggravated by the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic and by the worst global economic crisis since the mid-nineteenth century. As financial hardship is hitting families hard, the dynamics of the distribution of workload and gender roles in the household and the public sphere are being partially redefined, even in more conservative and less-developed areas of the country.

Institutional and Legal Frameworks

Important institutional steps have been recently taken to fight violence against women in the public sphere. For example, in 2023, Jordan **approved the amendment of Art. 29, Clause 6 of its Labor Law**, integrating “sexual harassment” in the provision and including a fine of up to JD5,000 should it occur at work⁶. Similarly, in 2023, Egypt **amended the penal code, toughening the penalties in cases of sexual harassment and bullying**⁷. If sexual harassment occurs at work or utilizing public transportation, the law now imposes no less than three years in prison and a fine of 300,000 Egyptian pounds.

2. Influential Role Models: Paving the Way for Young Women’s Leadership

The issue of leadership role models in the Arab World reflects a transforming reality. The presence of such a pivotal figure within the household, often the mother, is a starting point to look at how women’s leadership is perceived both in the private and public spheres and specifically in the three target countries. Similarly, how this mutating scenario around the concept of women’s leadership is embraced and understood between generations is a useful aspect to consider, useful to understand today’s Arab region peculiarities.

Learning Leadership at Home: The Mother as a Role Model

In the preliminary phase of this research, many young respondents involved in the “She Leads” Program from the three targeted countries identified their mothers as the main role model. The mother is generally seen as a hero, ready to endure and sacrifice everything for the good, wealth, and education of her children. The effectiveness and recognition of role models regarding women’s leadership appears thus to be closely linked to their proximity, with almost the majority of GYW explaining how having a supportive role model in the family had particular influence on their decisions. Such a figure can indeed provide privacy, protection, and distance from poor interactions with and negative interferences from distant relatives, neighbors, and close communities. This initial finding suggests wide recognition of women as leaders in the household, while partially reflecting a persisting idea of mother’s sacrifice and dedication to the wellbeing of her offspring. Interviews with both GYW and mothers enabled us to understand this issue more in-depth and shed some light on recent concepts and understandings of role models also outside the household context.

Learning Leadership Beyond the Household Context

As evidenced by the semi-structured interviews, most of the GYW respondents identified leadership models outside the familial context as having had great influence on their leadership pathway. If in almost all the cases the mother was identified as the main role model within the household, in 7 cases GYW identified leaders of small local organizations, CBOs, and WLOs – both women and men – as very influential role models; 3 out of 23 identified them in the educational context (school and university), 2 in the media field, while 3 respondents did not provide any answer. Interestingly, 4 respondents identified leadership models at institutional and political level in their respective countries. Overall, GYW respondents expressed general optimism for the future of women and youth representation and participation in the political sphere, recognizing that a transformative dynamic is occurring in the Arab World that challenges the historical perception of political space as an exclusive male and elite domain. The historical absence of women and youth from political life is only partially the result of their lack of interest in politics; more importantly, it underscores the systematic underrepresentation of the whole youth cohort in

“As for my daughters, society did not expect anything from them because they are girls and disabled. But I want to show the world the opposite: they will become leaders. Institutions have a big role to play, and now the situation is much better.”

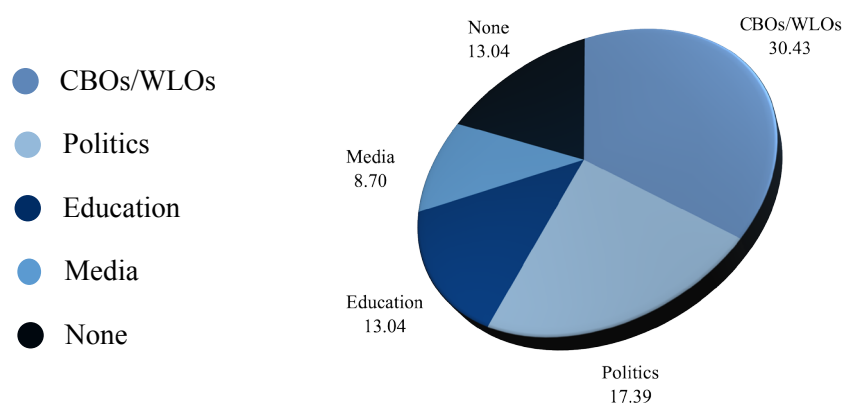
(Mother, Jordan)

⁶ Jordan News, *Lower House approves up to JD5,000 fine for sexual harassment at work*, 07/03/2023. <https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-109/News/Lower-House-approves-up-to-JD5-000-fine-for-sexual-harassment-at-work-27394>

⁷ Nabila el-Gaafari, *Egypt Toughens Sexual Harassment Penalty to 10 Years in Prison*, «The New Arab», 15/11/2023.

the Arab World for different reasons. One reason is the importance accorded to age (and consequent lack of experience) as well as other patterns of exclusion like gender and/or disability. Special needs and specific conditions often pose additional obstacles to GYW growth as leaders, as they must prove themselves not only as girls in male-dominated milieus, but also, in some cases, as people with special needs in highly inaccessible environments. Family can have a significant role in positively shaping the intergenerational dialogue to include youth, thus also supporting a wider representation of women in public and political arenas.

Distribution of GYW's Role Models Inside and Outside the Family



Bridging Generation Gaps Through Digital Inclusiveness

Women's representation and effective participation in the public sphere in leadership positions can also be fostered by more equitable access to new media. Indeed, the role of social media in fostering opportunities for women leaders and providing role models for GYW in the region appears to be – in the words of the respondents – a field in constant transformation. Despite acknowledging a smaller online representation of Arab women leaders when compared to Western ones, most of the GYW involved in the data collection are optimistic about the prospect of higher online presence in the future, identifying positive examples and factors contributing to this change, particularly the fast-paced technological transition. Also, as almost all parents interviewed suggested, the ability of GYW to access and handle technology and its devices represents an opportunity for the whole family as well, as women's access to the workforce, exhaustive digital education, and lifelong learning experiences have all direct consequences on the wellbeing of the entire family.

Indeed, digital inclusiveness represents a concrete opportunity for the whole family as well, and in many cases, respondents suggested that parents are willing to attain digital literacy through an exchange of knowledge with their daughters and sons. Nonetheless, the benefits of technology are still not equally distributed, due to lack of infrastructure, geographical marginalization, lack of digital culture and unaffordability of devices, which in turn marginalize mainly small and poor communities, the elderly, and people with disabilities⁸. Extensive inclusion of digital technologies in institutional, educational, and public apparatuses would greatly help leverage countries' competitiveness, increase their citizens' technology literacy, grant access to wider knowledge, and help the youth enter the market field as jobseekers, workers, or entrepreneurs.

⁸ PWC, *Bridging the Digital Gap: The State of Digital Inclusion in the Arab World Region*, 2022. <https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/publications/bridging-digital-gap-state-digital-inclusion-Arab-World-region.html>

Institutional and Legal Frameworks

The poor political representation of women is being addressed by a growing **introduction of the quota system in half of the countries of the Arab League (11 out of 22)**⁹, with different electoral systems introducing seats for women since the early 2000s to effectively encourage wider female participation in the political sphere and wider parliamentary representation. The last decades witnessed a growing **number of women in parliament in the Arab region**. The introduction of the quota system was central to the government's efforts to promote youth participation, and factors like presence in new media, are opening the space to a growing cohort of youth and women's political participation. In 2021, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Report on youth participation in national parliaments, **16.4% of MPs in the Arab World were under 40**¹⁰, with major room for improvement in the years to come.

3. Family, Education, and Intergenerational Change

This section explores the evolving dynamics within generations regarding gender roles, education, and leadership. Through interviews, the research revealed a significant intergenerational change in attitudes, illustrating how today's parents are learning from their daughters and supporting their ambitions in unprecedented ways.

Nurturing Leadership and Change Across Generations

The research revealed a growing tendency, among families, to accept and encourage women's leadership, also supported by different economic, cultural, and social factors. In almost all cases, leadership characteristics were equally attributed to both men and women, highlighting the non-gendered nature of the concept in the respondents' view. Only a small percentage of GYW revealed the persistence of social beliefs and gendered discriminants regarding what a leader is and who is entitled to be called so. Moreover, during the interviews, both parents and GYW highlighted a strong intergenerational change happening in the three targeted countries.

GYW and parents identified similar characteristics essential in a leader, with only a few differences related to the gender element. In 5 cases out of 5, parents said that in the past they totally lacked knowledge about women leadership or women's engagement as leaders at various levels in society, suggesting a recent understanding and development of its conceptualizations. Notably, mothers in all KIIs stressed that they were able to define and understand leadership thanks to their daughters' experiences, underlying an important connection and exchange of knowledge between different generations of women in all three targeted countries.

“There is a big difference between our generation and my daughter's generation. The customs were stricter, and it was a shame for girls to study and work. Our ambition was to be housewives and hold together the family. But now things have changed.”

(Mother, Jordan)

“In the past, we did not have any opinion [on leadership], but my daughters are my friends, and their opinions are heard.”

(Mother, Jordan)

9 Eleonora Banfi, *Quota System in the Arab Region: Rationale, Advantages, and Challenges*, Women's Leadership Blog Series, ARDD, Amman 2023.

10 Inter Parliamentary Union, *Youth participation in national parliaments*, 2021 <https://www.ipu.org/youth2021>.

“I can push her to learn new things that I do not even know myself, educate myself to help her while she continues her path. I am doing it with her and will pass it on to her brothers and family.”

(Father, Egypt)

In this context, fathers are equally interested or involved in their daughters’ aspirations and acquisition of skills, revealing the same connections and willingness to overcome social norms, beliefs, and cultural barriers to women’s ability to access, engage in, and leverage their leadership skills.

“I used to take them wherever they needed or wanted to go myself because he (their father) rejected the idea that they are disabled. Because of their fathers’ disdain, my role became the main one. Now, he is so proud of what they have accomplished.”

(Mother, Jordan)

The Transformative Power of Education

This intergenerational change is particularly evident in the emphasis all interviewed parents put on the role education plays in young women’s lives today, compared to personal experience¹¹. Similarly, almost all GYW’s said their parents and their broader family greatly appreciate educational attainments as fundamental to self-growth, success, and financial safety. In parents’ opinion indeed, education plays a fundamental role in enabling girls and young women to access new spaces of leadership, as the visible presence of girls in training, meetings, or activities related to self-improvement, leading opportunities, and knowledge acquisition shows. A positive shift is also evident in the growing number of youths in higher education in all three countries analyzed.

The GYW’s presence in the public space as active and powerful societal actors represents a learning opportunity for parents as well. Indeed, as suggested by 5 out of 5 parents, their daughters’ education and personal achievements (in terms of leadership) have a fundamental role in helping them overcome negative perceptions and widen their knowledge. This parents’ willingness to learn regards a variety of correlated matters, mostly disability – in two specific cases –, as well as digital literacy and formal education. Supporting women’s leadership growth may represent a learning opportunity for the whole family, both for male and female components, thus contributing to developing a more equitable and just society starting at the family and community level.

“In my family, education was not prioritized, and I was the only one who received some education. I had to halt my studies due to marriage, as I was expected to cater to my husband’s wishes. This lack of openness was different from the current environment.”

(Mother, Lebanon)

“I did not finish my education as a personal choice, but my siblings did. In the past, there were no possibilities and no access to knowledge as now.”

(Mother, Egypt)

¹¹ For a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational changes, see Arab Barometer, Youth Outlooks: Life Quality and Economic Conditions (Part I), 14/07/2023 and Youth Outlooks: Life Quality and Economic Conditions (Part II), 25/07/2023. <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2023/07/youth-outlooks-life-quality-and-economic-conditions-part-i/>

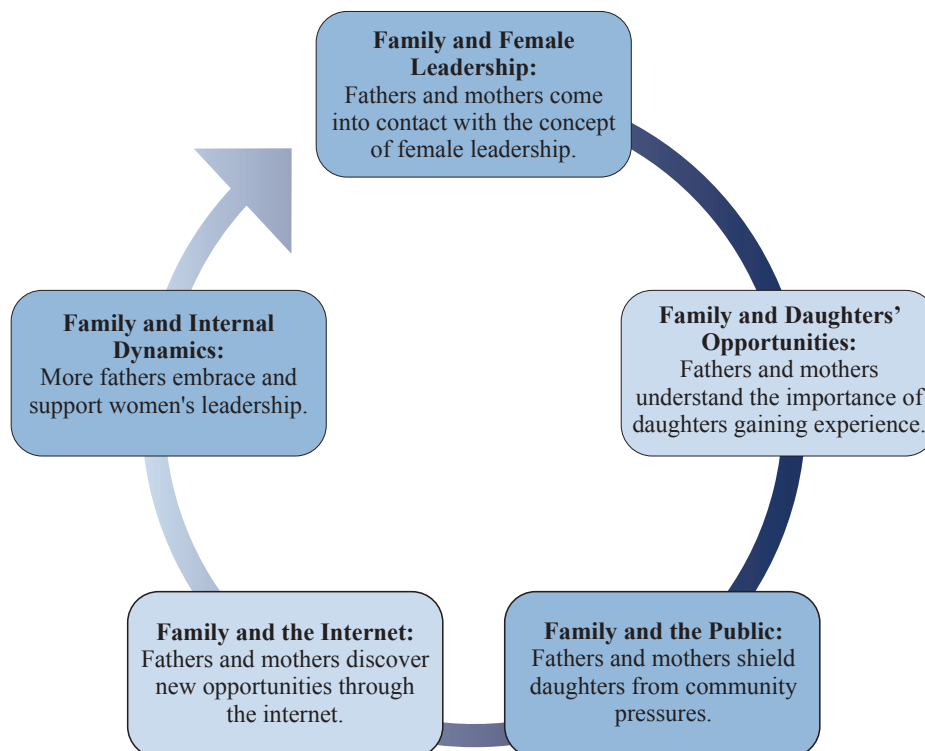
Institutional and Legal Frameworks

Despite crucial for families and society's well-being, education is still far from formally support youth and fill employment voids, allowing well-educated citizens to substantiate their studies with a corresponding job. For this reason, in the last years **the Jordanian Ministry of Education** has embarked on an ambitious initiative to **reform its education system, in accordance with its Education Strategic Plan 2018-2025 and SDG4**. Similarly, **in 2018, Egypt started a comprehensive education reform under the Education 2.0 initiative¹²**, aimed at transitioning from traditional learning to a system that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy. Also **in Lebanon**, despite the structural challenges faced by the country, **the government is working on updating the curricula, improving school infrastructure, and enhancing teacher training programs**. Important steps have already been made, nut there is still room for improvement of educational institutions to provide young generations with useful skills that respond to the market needs. Expanding inclusion in economic production and improving the quality of education could help young girls and women enter the labor force, promote their businesses, use their skills, become financially independent, and increase their presence in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Family'S Transformative Journey Towards Embracing Female Leadership

This cycle illustrates the evolving role of families in supporting and nurturing the leadership potential of young women, highlighting the various stages and aspects of this transformative journey.

Conclusions and Recommendations



¹² UNICEF, *Education 2.0: skills-based education and digital learning (Egypt)*, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/documents/education-20-skills-based-education-and-digital-learning-egypt>

The present action research brings to attention issues specific to the three different countries targeted in the project, namely Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt. The overall picture coming out from the data collected shows signs of **transitioning processes from a recent past, marked by adherence to traditions and social norms, to contemporary approaches, stimulated by general or contingent factors**. Changing political situations, conflicts, digitalization, and globalization are all major factors driving change. Affected by these changes first and foremost is, as clearly seen, the family. Historically representing both a safety net and a framework for its members in terms of habits, behaviors, adherence to traditions and social norms, this fundamental part of society is inevitably transforming today. This dynamic is particularly interesting if looked at from an intergenerational perspective, which helps one understand how families' perspectives changed, specifically regarding women in leadership position, as noticeable in the fathers' and mothers' responses.

1. Family Support for Women's Public Engagement

- All 23 GYW are engaged, to a different extent, in some form of leadership in their communities.
- All 23 GYW receive different forms of support from their family (emotional, financial). Women's financial freedom is especially valued, driven by specific economic factors in the three countries.
- All 23 GYW and all 5 parents assert that the family operates as the main support system for the girls, shielding them from community judgment, shame, or blame. When some restrictions persist (for example, on *movement*), these reflect concrete fears related to public space (violence or possible incidents that may occur outside the household) rather than strict social norms.

Recommendations:

- **Develop and fund initiatives** that strengthen the family support system, recognizing its crucial role in women's leadership development. These can include activities that acknowledge and raise awareness about the key role of parents, raising the profile of the most supportive of them and ensuring their involvement in relevant and specific activities.
- **Improve public safety** through better lighting and safe transportation options. This can help allay families' fears about women's safety in public spaces, enabling greater freedom for engagement in the public sphere. Involving girls and young women in decentralization programs when being implemented might contribute to addressing these public safety concerns as well as other issues related to sexual harassment and other forms of GBV.
- **Promote**, through targeted information, education, and communication (IEC) campaigns, the central role families play in fostering women leaders, highlighting positive stories of families and women leaders, and emphasizing their contribution to community development.



2. Influential Role Models: Paving the Way to Young Women's Leadership

- More than half of GYW identify the mother as their main role model, although related to a general idea of sacrifice. Having this model at home is considered particularly influential by the GYW on their future decisions, also providing protection against external judgment and poor community interactions.
- The majority of GYW identify their role models as working in CSOs and CBOs, seeing them as fundamental for the betterment of society.
- More than half of GYW define the political sphere as a space for growing youth and women representation, maintaining an optimistic view of the future and recognizing that the Arab world is undergoing a transformative dynamic.
- All 23 GYW say social media and female online presence can have an impact on their aspiration to leadership position. Despite the lack of such presence, GYW maintain an optimistic view about the future. Also, almost all parents recognize the importance of digital transition, inclusive technology, life-long learning opportunities, and equal access to digital devices, underlying the benefits of these in leveraging both families and daughter's leadership capabilities.

Recommendations

- **Develop mentorship programs** that involve mothers who are role models in their communities. These programs can help other families and the community recognize the importance of women leadership, as well as leverage the role of mothers as influential figures.
- **Establish a network** of CBOs and families that encourages and considers mothers' contribution to the promotion of a more effective social and cultural change vis-à-vis women leadership in the family and the community.
- **Foster collaborations and networking** with influencers and media outlets to create and share inspiring stories of women leaders from the region that show the supportive role mothers or fathers played. **Encourage** content creation that features successful women leaders of all ages in various fields (media, education, entrepreneurship, politics, etc.), helping society recognize and celebrate their achievements, to inspire younger generations and shift cultural perceptions.
- **Create and promote digital literacy programs** that empower girls and young women to use social media and online platforms safely and effectively for leadership and advocacy; also **ensure equal** access to technology for families through financial and material support and innovative policies that facilitates their access to knowledge, training opportunities, and technological devices, stressing the importance of digital inclusiveness for all.

3. Family, Education, and Intergenerational Exchange

- Almost all GYW and all parents equally assign leadership characteristics to both women and men, highlighting a general inclusive understanding of the concept in the three countries.
- All parents stressed the crucial role education currently plays in young women's lives, compared to theirs, mirrored in the growing presence of women and youths in higher education in all three countries. All 23 interviewed GYW indicated educational attainment as a priority and a fundamental tool of success and leadership for their parents.
- All parents see their daughters' education and personal achievement as crucial to helping them overcome negative perceptions of women in leadership position and widen their knowledge around female empowerment. All mothers pointed to their daughters' influence on their increased ability to define women's leadership. Also, all fathers are equally interested in their daughters' aspirations and willing to overcome cultural barriers about women's access, engagement, and leveraging of their leadership role in society.

Recommendations

- **Offer leadership training programs** that emphasize an inclusive approach. Ensure these programs are accessible not only to women but also to men and provide them with knowledge and skills to advocate for women's leadership in society.
- **Support the review** and betterment of school and university curricula with the involvement of young women and men, mothers, and fathers in the process, and aligning them with the most inclusive standards and market demands.
- **Create forums for intergenerational dialogue** where parents and children/youth can discuss aspirations, challenges, and the importance of education and leadership. This can help bridge generation gaps and build mutual support within society.
- **Develop initiatives** that involve fathers in supporting their daughters' educational and leadership pursuits. Provide resources and training for fathers to become advocates for gender equality in their families and in their communities.

In conclusion, it may be affirmed that family today plays an incredible and fundamental role in raising future women leaders in the Arab World. Inevitably, social, political, and economic factors keep posing challenges for both girls and their families and must be addressed by policymakers and public institutions as they are central to their countries' advancement in the next decades. Increasing women's leadership equals improving the countries' cultural, economic, and social competitiveness. That is today an incredible challenge, but doing so will benefit the Arab states that seek to improve the life of their communities and make local voices heard on regional and international stages.



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