Project Brief

Arab Women Leaders in Agriculture

Ongoing

Duration

9 Months

Beneficiaries

Women scientists and professionals in agriculture and related fields from Arab countries

Objectives

The Arab Women Leaders in Agriculture (AWLA) fellowship program aims to:

- Facilitate fellows' access to leadership roles and promote research excellence and impact;
- Encourage gender-responsive work cultures and enabling environments;
- Provide Arab women scientists and professionals in agriculture with platforms to showcase their intellect, capability and contribution.

SDGs

Regions

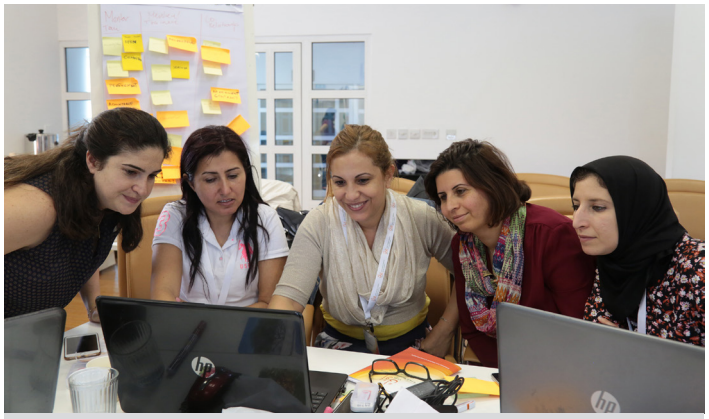
Middle East and North Africa

Funders

The Islamic Development Bank;
the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation;
CGIAR Research Programs on Maize and Wheat

Funding

250,000 USD



Originally called Tamkeen, the program was designed in 2016 with funding from the Islamic Development Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the inception phase of the program was completed in 2017.

Background

Agriculture forms the backbone of many economies in the Middle East and North Africa. Nonetheless, most countries in the region depend on food imports due to a host of reasons, including underinvestment in research, development and innovation in agriculture. As the region faces a range of risks to food and water security, including climate change, it is important **to invest in developing human capital in science and technology** to transform agri-food systems and make them more sustainable and resilient.

Unfortunately, there is **a disproportionately low number of women in science in the region,** especially in senior research and leadership positions. It is estimated that the average share of women scientists across the region stands at **17 percent, which is the lowest in the world.**

This gap is most visible in the staffing of agricultural research and extension organizations although women make up **more than 40 percent of the sector's labor force.** This means that policy and investment measures in agriculture might not be as effective as they could be because they do not fully reflect gender perspectives.

There are also other implications of women's underrepresentation in research and development. Studies indicate that **gender-balanced teams improve innovation and productivity and that women are critical for innovation.** Science is also more likely to be breakthrough as a larger number of women researchers in teams facilitates greater creativity and innovative thinking. Not only are women great innovators, but they are also excellent leaders. Research shows that the more women there are in senior management, the better organizations perform. This is particularly true of organizations that are focused on innovation.

Bringing more women into research is an effective way to stimulate scientific progress and innovation in the region. However, low financing for research and development means there are not many attractive career options. There are also few training and development opportunities for women scientists and professionals in agriculture.

As part of the program, fellows also get opportunities to attend scientific conferences and undertake research visits.

Fellows from the 2021-2022 cohort attended a special graduation ceremony at the Expo 2020 Dubai.

To address this gap, ICBA offers fellowship opportunities to women scientists and professionals from the region under the AWLA program.

AWLA is a result of collaboration between ICBA, **the Islamic Development Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the CGIAR Research Programs on Maize and Wheat.** Originally called Tamkeen, it was designed in 2016 with funding from the Islamic Development Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the inception phase of the program was completed in 2017.

Activities

During **the 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 editions** of AWLA, ICBA organized a series of in-person and online workshops for **38 fellows** on a wide range of topics, including leadership, team building, design thinking, gender equality, project development, monitoring and evaluation, innovation in agriculture, and value chains.

These workshops were designed to enhance fellows' hard and soft skills and build up their confidence in their ability to achieve professional and personal goals.

As part of the curriculum, fellows were also given access to Coursera and FAO's e-Learning Academy to complete courses of their choice to expand their knowledge. Fellows were also divided into groups to develop capstone projects with support from scientists at ICBA.

Moreover, they were provided with opportunities to attend conferences, training courses and conduct scientific visits in different countries.

Outcomes

A total of 38 fellows from seven countries - **Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and the UAE** – have graduated from the program since its launch, with fellows from the 2021-2022 cohort participating in a special graduation ceremony at the Expo 2020 Dubai. One of the highlights was that fellows completed proposals which can help them secure funding for research and development in agriculture, food security, nutrition and environmental sustainability, among other things. Moreover, some of the fellows prepared research papers in collaboration with scientists from ICBA.

The program also helped some of the fellows to start collaborative projects with scientists at ICBA and facilitated closer cooperation between ICBA and their institutions.

Fellows from several countries also established a regional network to support rural women and provide advisory services to them.

In 2020 ICBA launched the **AWLA Alumni Association – 2952** to serve as a networking and supporting environment where former fellows can discuss various issues, exchange knowledge and share their experiences and updates about their professional and personal development.

Future Directions

ICBA aims to continue to work with various partners to offer AWLA fellowship opportunities to women scientists and professionals from the Middle East and North Africa. The center will also continue connecting AWLA fellows with their peers in other regions and thus create opportunities for collaboration in science and innovation. The program will also focus on equipping fellows with skills and knowledge to establish their own agri-businesses.

AWLA's long-term goal goes beyond capacity development and includes improved food security and nutrition, a better research and development landscape, and economic and social benefits of a narrowed gender gap in the region. AWLA is in line with ICBA's commitment to boosting women's role in and contribution to agricultural advancement and development, especially in marginal environments.

To achieve this goal, ICBA will continue to mobilize support for AWLA through various forms of partnership and collaboration.