

Third cohort of Arab women scientists graduates from ICBA's regional fellowship program

Dubai, UAE, 7 March 2024 – The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) organized today a special ceremony to celebrate [International Women's Day](#) and the graduation of the third cohort of fellows of the Arab Women Leaders in Agriculture ([AWLA](#)) program at its headquarters.

Being the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa, AWLA is designed to empower women researchers from across the region to spearhead positive changes in agriculture, food production and environmental sustainability while addressing the challenges they face in their careers.

H.E. Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, UN Climate Change High-Level Champion for COP28, President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and Chair of ICBA's Board of Directors, said: "Although women constitute, on average, about 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, they have fewer rights and resources; less than 20 percent of the world's landholders are women. Alas, the situation in science is similarly disheartening. Approximately, 30 percent of the world's researchers are women. While these figures are sobering, they should not deter us from continuing to work towards our shared goal. If anything, we must intensify our efforts to address gender inequality in all its forms. After all, closing the gender gap will not only bolster sustainable growth and innovation, but is also considered an economic imperative."

AWLA serves as a platform for early- and mid-career women professionals across agricultural disciplines to exchange ideas and experiences and collaborate on various projects aimed at enhancing food, water, and nutrition security in the region.

Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Director General of ICBA, said: "The AWLA program supports the research showing that women are critical for innovation and opens doors for more opportunities in the research and development sector not only in the Middle East and North Africa but globally as well. This is tackled in the program by equipping women scientists from the region with skills and resources to advance their personal and professional growth. But we are also working on other initiatives that address gender issues at various levels. At COP28, we launched a new global initiative called the Women Alliance for Climate Action in Agriculture to mobilize efforts and partners for driving women-led climate action around the world."

Funded by the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), the third edition of AWLA included a mix of virtual and e-learning courses tailored to improve the fellows' research, leadership and project management skills, among others. A total of 20 women scientists from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia, and the UAE completed an eight-month program.

Mr. James Carty, Deputy Director for the Middle East & East Asia at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said: "Unlocking the full potential of women scientists across the Middle East and North Africa is essential for tackling the urgent global challenges we collectively face, in particular the challenges posed by climate change. We are excited to support AWLA as it helps to bridge the gender gap in agriculture and ensure more equitable outcomes."

Empirical evidence indicates that a disproportionately low number of women work in senior research and leadership positions in the region. The average share of women researchers across the region stands at 17 percent - the lowest in the world. This gap is most visible in the staffing of agricultural research and extension organizations. 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.

To narrow this gap, ICBA partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Islamic Development Bank ([IsDB](#)) to design AWLA in 2016 and launched the program with support from the two organizations and the CGIAR Research Program on Wheat in 2019. The first and second cohorts of fellows included 38 women scientists from seven countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and the UAE.

AWLA's long-term goal is to improve food security and nutrition in the region through empowering women researchers and helping them realize their full potential. The program contributes to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on Gender Equality (SDG 5), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life on Land (SDG 15), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is a unique applied agricultural research center in the world with a focus on marginal areas where an estimated 1.7 billion people live. It identifies, tests, and introduces resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies that are best suited to different regions affected by salinity, water scarcity and drought. Through its work, ICBA helps to improve food security and livelihoods for some of the poorest rural communities around the world.

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