



The role of women in the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, Lebanon

Cultural landscapes and biodiversity in the
Mediterranean Basin

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CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN



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Summary

Al Shouf Cedar Society in Lebanon conducted a gender study analyzing cultural practices in the Shouf region. The study is part of the larger initiative: “Supporting the socio-economic sustainability of cultural practices in selected Mediterranean cultural landscapes.” This initiative is part of the M6 project funded by MAVA.

This report explores:

- Gender-differentiated division of labour and cultural practices
 - Economic and household contributions of women involved in cultural practices
 - Main obstacles women face in accessing economic opportunities
 - Recommendations to make women's work more visible
- Recommendations for developing and strengthening the market for rural products

Women of the Shouf Biosphere Reserve are highly involved in the region's cultural practices and agricultural sector. Throughout the region, women produce rural goods, foods and handicrafts. They are farmers, beekeepers, shepherds, owners of guesthouses, producers of handicrafts, manufacturers of traditional food products, leaders and members of agricultural cooperatives and associations, employees, managers, teachers and many other professions. They successfully run their businesses and are passionate about their work. Their economic participation is supported by the Shouf Biosphere Reserve (SBR), which empowers women and promotes a gender balanced approach to economic development.

Since increasingly participating in the workforce, women have demonstrated their contributions to biodiversity conservation, economic growth and gender equality. These women consider their work to be “green,” and their contributions to conservation take many forms.ⁱ They place a high value on ecosystem services that are linked to the livelihoods of the surrounding community, which helps strengthen moral values and highlights the importance of biodiversity and conservation in the value chains that facilitate traditional craft production. Women are also increasingly financially independent, creating a confident and energetic atmosphere for women in agriculture, food processing and handicraft production. It has also decreased the marginalization and exclusion of rural women in society.

On the other hand, women still experience gender equality issues. They lack equal access to opportunities and face barriers that decrease productivity. Women and young girls face an immense range of challenges, from an inability to access food, education and employment to the threat of gender-based violence. In many parts of Lebanon, women are legally and socially subservient to men, with no means of gaining financial or social independence. These challenges are mainly due to a lack of policies and laws to reduce discrimination and give equal opportunities to women. A key to tackling these challenges is ensuring that women are fully capable of carrying out their jobs and can meaningfully participate in decision-making. Any efforts to advocate for women must focus on creating legal and social conditions in which women and men have equal access to nutrition, health care, education, jobs, as well as the ability to control their bodies and freely choose a partner.

ⁱ These efforts include organizing afforestation and clean-up campaigns, buying organic products and encouraging their cultivation, constructing compost units in gardens and using compost as a natural fertilizer in agriculture, replacing chemical pesticides with organic and natural fertilizers in agriculture, raising poultry in agriculture lands, using cloth bags instead of nylon, volunteering in environmental associations and organizations, etc.

With the formation of a new government in Lebanon, organizations concerned with gender issues and youth must pressure political figures to enforce new laws that protect women against violence and support their full rights to land ownership, employment, financial matters and more. Legal authorities must work with communities to achieve gender equality.

The Shouf Biosphere Reserve (SBR) works to strengthen women's participation in environmental activities and other cultural practices. SBR further aims to address gender imbalances in decision-making by encouraging women's participation in committees on environmental protection, programmes and policies.

- Educated women can contribute significantly to bridging the gap between environment and development, and one of the basic needs of women in our study is enhancing their knowledge on certain technical and personal issues. SBR plans to introduce capacity building and mentoring programmes to address these needs. These programmes will help women develop skills, innovative techniques and methods around production, marketing and merchandising.
- Many products produced by local women are sold at the reserve park house and entrances. SBR also helped establish local farmers markets in the villages of Barouk, Jdeidet El Shouf and Damour, and these markets will include products and crafts made by local women.

Developing action plans and strategies that improve the lives of working women will strengthen their capacities and enable them to stand up for their rights. By eliminating the greatest obstacles that prevent women from equal participation in society, women are able to achieve justice, equality and dignity.

1. Region overview and study introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the Shouf region of Lebanon, women often face discrimination in all areas of life, especially due to gender segregation and discriminatory practices in the workforce and within the family. The employment of women is clearly impacted by these cultural and social systems, which influence many aspects of employment including work conditions, social contributions and remuneration.

Traditional views may contradict women's new roles in development, economic and environmental sectors. This study explores the problems women face in the labour market in a society with strong gender traditions. We examine the diverse dimensions of cultural and environmental practices of women in the Shouf region and the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, and further explore women's contribution to ecological preservation. We also aim to influence environmental, economic and social policy at the local and national levels. The study further draws on a gender analysis of employed women based on their opinions about discrimination and how they overcome societal obstacles. Ultimately, we aim to help institutionalize and support women's work and needs.

This study specifically evaluates:

- The extent to which the employment of women contributes to their social and economic roles
- If, and how, employment helps women build capabilities and proficiencies
- If employment either:
 - o enables women to make their own decisions, have more responsibilities, change the mentality of their families and free themselves from the dominance of men; or
 - o manifests as an extension of their traditional obedience to men in charge.

1.2 Topics covered

1. Gender differences in employment and challenges women face in agricultural production.
2. Contributions of women working in the agricultural sector to: household and rural economies; economic development; and the preservation of environmental values, heritage and traditional agricultural production.
3. Involvement of women in cultural practices, production and marketing of local products, and the impact of their work in terms of biodiversity, economic growth and gender equality.
4. The greatest obstacles and challenges women face in their work, and how to address these challenges.
5. Recommendations to improve opportunities for women in agricultural production, focused on: strengthening the market for rural products and raising awareness about the benefits of gender equality for agricultural production and rural economies.

These focus areas are critical for studying employment from a gender perspective. Women face multiple restrictions, including discrimination in the workforce, unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities, unequal promotion and wages compared to men, and societal challenges perpetuated by cultural and legal frameworks.

1.3 Characteristics of the surveyed area

The Shouf region is characterized by efforts to conserve the environment and preserve nature through collaboration with a wide range of villages, associations, municipalities and cooperatives. The region was the first to establish the principle of responsible and sustainable ecotourism. This was achieved by raising environmental awareness and by collaborating with schools and universities on the importance of preserving the environment from generation to generation.

These efforts helped illuminate the links between agriculture, tourism, economic development and job creation for women and youth. Women have played a major role in raising awareness; contributing to ecological, tourism and cultural services; maintaining a healthy environment; and supporting the development of women's skills and community revitalization.

1.4 Women's involvement in production, marketing and merchandising

This research focuses on gender dimensions in cultural practices in the Shouf region. We stress women's roles and responsibilities in the workforce, the societal constraints they face and solutions to overcome these challenges that can contribute to sustainable development at the local and national levels. Women exhibit a high degree of participation in Shouf's economy, especially in food production, farming, beekeeping and handicrafts. These women impart added value to activities in rural areas by preserving local cultural traditions.

Shouf Biosphere Reserve

The Shouf Biosphere Reserve (SBR) supports the socio-economic development of low-income villagers, especially local women. Their support helps empower women and leads to a more gender balance in forestry sectors. Currently, 82 locally produced products carry the SBR label; this label indicates traditional production by local communities.

There are three ateliers in the Shouf. In these ateliers, women are directly involved in the production process while a programme coordinator is in charge of distribution, marketing and procuring raw material and other supplies including jars and bottles.ⁱⁱ Women in the ateliers are particularly concerned with marketing their products, not only in the Shouf region, but in Lebanon as a whole.

Women's cooperatives

Many working women have founded women's associations and cooperatives which provide high quality food and agricultural products to villagers. Cooperatives also facilitate the production and distribution of local farmers' products and participate in wholesale and retail activities. Women are involved at every stage: from planting and harvesting raw materials to managing agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives are also active in the organic, high quality production sector, including the Cooperative of Barouk/Fraydis, Cooperative of Mrusti and Bater (Women Farmers' Cooperative). In addition, agricultural cooperatives offer training sessions in collaboration with several international and local entities (such as USAID and FAO) to provide farmers with specialized skills and knowledge to better manage organic farms. The Bater

ⁱⁱ The products produced are mainly: jams (apricot, bitter orange, grape, almond, fig, mulberry, walnut), honey (Cedar honey, Oak honey, honey with beeswax), syrups, distilled water (orange blossom, rose), vinegar, herbs (pollen seeds, sumac, thyme with sesame, thyme and wild pine, coriander capsicum and garlic), dairy and olive products (Labneh) and molasses.

Cooperative specifically highlighted efforts of Shouf cooperatives to reduce the use of toxic pesticides in local agriculture.

Education and training

Women are receiving more education around agriculture and food production. They have high participation rates in SBR workshops, and use their knowledge to help revive and maintain cultural practices and sustainable agricultural methods.

In 2017, SBR launched a new ambitious programme with the financial support of the MAVA Foundation and AICS (the Development Agency of the Italian government). This new project places special focus on empowering the weakest sectors of the rural society, namely women and youth, and promotes value chains of high-quality products.

As part of this study, SBR helped to build the capacity of women at the community level and supported the creation of small businesses around sustainable forest-based workⁱⁱⁱ through farmer-to-farmer training. In addition to these trainings, female farmers were professionally trained on forest thinning, forest restoration planting techniques, dry stone wall construction, compost production, charcoal production, rehabilitation of water reservoirs and the construction and conditioning of nature trails and other ecotourism related infrastructure.

The training programmes were organized in cycles with periodic sessions over several months, and included a gender equity and poverty alleviation focus. In 2018, there was a total of 376 participants, of whom 67.5% were Syrian refugees. There were 88 women (23.4 percent of the total) and 69 of the women were Syrian refugees.

Based on evaluations after the programme, the women have acquired more confidence and are generating income to support their family needs. A number of trainees were able to find jobs beyond the project scope. The trainees were also able to access a specific small credits scheme - "Cedar Loans" - made available by SBR for the launch of new enterprises. An important positive outcome of these training cycles is that women are more motivated and work more efficiently.

This study also analyses the behaviour of couples and evaluates their attitudes and opinions of the transformations and structural changes that are permeating Lebanese society. We monitor outcomes, including positive impacts and challenges, including project links to gender equality in the Shouf region's labour market.

Other industries

In addition to agriculture, women are active in hospitality and artisanal sectors. For instance, nearly all the guesthouse managers in the region are women. They serve Lebanese dishes to visitors and show them around their homes and farmland. This is not just their job, but their lifestyle. Female artisans of the Shouf are known for their diverse, authentic techniques and knowledge of handicrafts.^{iv} They are also reviving traditional cookware—"the traditional cook – Tabbakh"—a homemade pottery-like cooking implement.^v

ⁱⁱⁱ Including non-timber forest products, handicraft, tourism-related services and biomass energy production.

^{iv} These include pottery, needle art work, sewing, embroidery, cross-stitching, wood art work, painting and manufacturing olive oil soap.

^v Some of the handicrafts produced are: traditional handmade cooking fire set (Kanoon/Tabbakh), traditional olive oil soap, pottery items (imprinted, painted, decoupage), souvenir plates, magnets, coasters, pottery

Role of this study

To evaluate the status of women in the Shouf, it is important to document women's jobs, if their rights are respected in the workplace and if they are aware of their rights. Gathering this information can help improve the situation of working women, enhance their capacities, eliminate obstacles which prevent equal participation in the economic sphere and achieve social justice and gender equality.

It is also important to note Lebanon's commitment to gender equality and investigate if this commitment is matched by real-world implementation. Are roles, responsibilities and household tasks equally distributed between a husband and wife? Is employment subjected to a gender biased standard in the workplace? Our goal was not only to monitor the number of women employed, but to study the positive and negative impacts of their work.

1.5 Research methodology and tools

This section outlines how we selected research participants and the methods and techniques used in the study. The women who participated in the study (in focus groups and responding to our questionnaires) were treated with respect, and their responses were treated confidentiality. We followed a road map to conduct the fieldwork and to gather and classify all information to construct an analytical model.

We first developed a questionnaire to collect personal and business-related information from the Shouf women. The questionnaire addressed women's employment, decision making, gender equality, family income, attitudes of working women, the many obstacles they encounter and their responses to these challenges. We gave the questionnaire to 50 women of different backgrounds and opinions, all from the Shouf region. We contacted these women by phone, and organized one-on-one meetings in their homes to further explain the questionnaire and study goals.

Questionnaires were given to women, not to men. Wives answered questions related to their husband's opinion on certain matters; for example, the husband's perspective on a woman being a manager and working late at night. During our conversations, women gave positive feedback and showed lots of collaboration. We analysed the questionnaire results which helped us evaluate gender in the region and link the results to explanatory variables.

The questionnaire included an identity card with personal information such as: age, social status, number of children, level of education, profession, family income, husband's profession, place of residence and who they live with.

The questionnaire addressed the following:

- Division of household tasks, distribution of roles and responsibilities within the family, extent to which the husband shares in chores and family matters and extent to which women contribute to decision making
- Impact of work on families, division of roles between spouses (outside and inside the house), problems that result from this division and who is in charge of taking care of an elderly relative or a person with disabilities (if present)

serving balls, various artisanal and needle work (glasses case, makeup trousse, iPad case, postman bag) and bio-herbal infusion sets.

- Impact of discriminatory education and masculine mentality on the relations of couples and their repercussions on daily marital life, stereotypes about gender, couples' perception of gender equality and the difference between personal convictions and demands of society
- Women's contributions in the economic, environmental and cultural fields in their local communities; personal and working skills which some lack; knowledge of women rights; and support for the development of working women.
- Personal experiences women faced which caused conflicts or success stories in their field of work.

Prior to implementation, we conducted a trial by piloting the questionnaire with a selected sample of women. Based on the results of the trial, we modified some questions and added others.

After we distributed the questionnaire, we conducted two focus groups with a selected group of the same women who took the questionnaires. We also included men in the focus groups to make the discussions more dynamic (the number of participants in the focus groups was around 10 women and four men). The topics discussed during these groups and the feedback of the attendees is further elaborated in the report.

1.6 Sample selection

Existing research and data around the roles of women in the workforce and the effect on women and families, as well as a statistical database on employment in Lebanon, provided a baseline for comparing our results. We conducted a "random selection" of women workers in the region, producing a research community of 50 participants.

Data collection: A list of women working in the reserve and its vicinity was prepared, based on certain criteria and sociological variables related to our research objectives.

Place of residence: The research group included women from different villages of the Shouf that are geographically, socially and religiously diverse. This diversity provided a wide range of data and allowed us to better assess similarities and differences across research topics.

Table 1: Villages of surveyed women

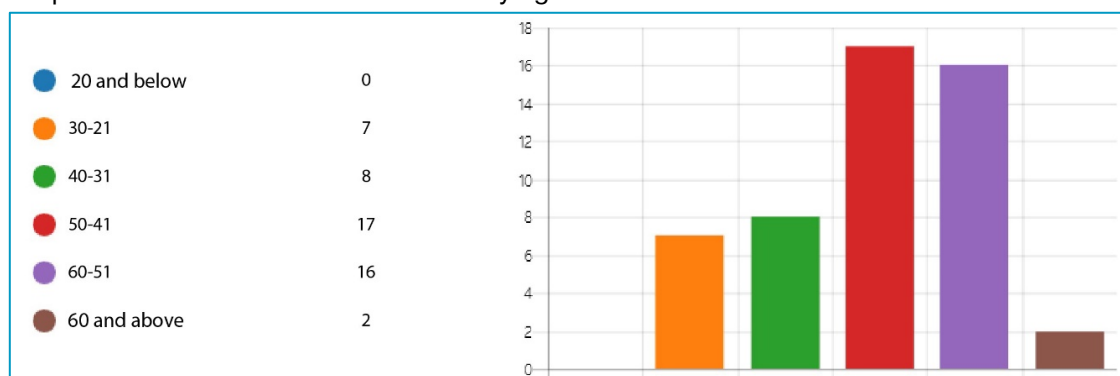
Number of women interviewed	Villages	Number of women interviewed	Villages
2	Ain Qani	5	Mrusti
2	Baaqline	1	Baadarane
1	AinDara	6	Maasser El Shouf
4	AinZhalta	1	Ammatour
6	Barouk	4	Bater
4	Batloun	4	Niha
7	Jdeidet El Shouf	1	Mazraa
2	Kfarhim	50	Total women interviewed

Education level: In order to evaluate the impact of education on women and their work, the selected groups included university and non-university education.

- Total women: 50
- Non-university: 15
- University education: 35

Age: To study the effect of age on variability, mentalities and behaviours of working women, the selected groups included women with different ages.

Graph 1: Distribution of female workers by age



Marital status: We also evaluated the impact of marital status on women's attitudes and beliefs.

- Total women: 50
- Divorced: 1
- Single: 7
- Married: 42

Occupation: We collected data on occupation to explore gender dimensions of cultural practices, including the roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities for women in the Shouf region. We further compared behaviour of women in different professions and careers including those who work in agriculture and food production.

Table 3: Distribution of surveyed working women according to their profession

Total	Profession
9	School teacher
4	Handicrafts
4	Tour guide
2	Engineer
8	Owner of a guesthouse (this includes farming and implementing agricultural practices in their private lands as well as food production and perhaps marketing of their products)
13	Employee
10	Self-employed (this indicates the women who are members of organizations and agricultural cooperatives, for example, Bater Cooperative, ateliers, Jdeideh Women Organization, etc.)
50	Total

Husband's profession: We also analysed impact of the husband's profession and mentality on women (we assume that this variable informs the mind-set of couples).

Table 4: Husband's profession

Un-employed	Deceased	Retired	Self employed	Employee
		Previously employed	Construction	Ogero (a telephone company)
		Soldier	Maintenance	Electricity company
			agriculture	Accountant
			Electronics	Manager at SANITA
			Farmer	Employee at NESTLE
			Car centre	Art Director, UNHCR
			Farm	Soldier
			Garage owner	Engineer
			Carpenter	Banker
			Restaurant owner	Construction, Contracting
				Tele company
				Technician
				Guard
2	3	13	14	18

Family Income: Low family income is one reason women work (we assuming this variable impacts a woman's decision to work).

Graph 2: Household Income Level in Lebanese Pounds (L.B.P)



2. Gender differences in division of labour, roles and responsibilities

Gender determines the identity of a human being. Although gender can influence our behaviour and actions, the roles of men and women can change over time and vary widely within and across cultures. In this section, we address cultural, social and legal factors that can burden women in the Shouf region. The gender differences in the division of labour and the constraints women suffer are highlighted, revealing a discriminatory gender reality.

2.1 Legal background

National Lebanese laws

Lebanon has committed to a number of international conventions and treaties related to gender issues and women's rights. Most importantly, Lebanon is part of the 1996 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Commitment to this convention has held Lebanon responsible in the eyes of the international community, pressuring Lebanese officials to adhere to international agreements.

However, women continue struggling to gain equality with men. National laws which aim to protect women are not properly implemented. For example, in 2014, the Lebanese Parliament introduced Law 293 to protect women and other family members from domestic violence and physical abuse. This law was a response to the need for a legal tool to addresses domestic violence, highlighted by civil society and advocacy organizations. The draft law faced political and religious obstacles, but civil society advocacy helped to push the law through to the legislative committee of the Parliament and later to the final legislative session.

Law 293 is meant to protect women from domestic abuse, but has only been moderately effective; only 175 protection orders were released between 2014 and 2016 compared to the significantly greater number of domestic violence cases that occurred in that time.¹ Lebanon has witnessed several cases of husbands beating their wives to death; 25 women were killed by family members between 2010 and 2013, and 14 women were killed between 2014 and 2016 due to domestic abuse. KAFA, the leading Lebanese NGO advocating for women's rights, receives 2,600 calls to its domestic abuse helpline each year. According to a survey conducted in 2016, 31 percent of women in Lebanon had experienced intimate partner violence and 24 percent of men claimed responsibility for it. These statistics pose serious questions about the effectiveness of Law 293 in protecting women and the ability and readiness of women to use it.

Gaps in law 293

The first problem is economic resources. Lebanese women exposed to domestic violence are not able to fully rely on Law 293 due, in most cases, to economic obstacles. Filing a case against an abusive/violent husband would require an amount of economic independence that is absent among most abused women, who would lack financial resources in the absence of their husband. In these cases, women do not take legal action, especially if they and their children are economically dependent on the husband.

The second problem is child custody. Child custody in Lebanon is a sensitive matter, both in religious and societal contexts. It falls entirely under the authority of religious courts, with different rules in each religious sect. If the mother decides to protect herself an abusive husband, she does not receive custody of any minors. In civil governance, law 293 is implemented under the purview of the Courts of Urgent Matters, which have limited capacity to issue orders and handle domestic violence due to their heavy workload.

The third problem is Lebanon's legal definition of violence, which considers just physical violence. Few judges expand the definition of violence to include verbal, emotional, sexual and economic violence. If such an expanded definition is used, it pertains only to an individual judge's ruling and not to the entire law.

Given that an amendment to Law 293 is not currently on the agenda of the Lebanese Parliament, advocacy groups are focusing on societal change to increase women's rights.

Lebanese Labour Law

Despite Lebanon's commitment to UN conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to uphold and respect social justice and gender equality, gender discrimination is still prevalent in the country. Violence against women and girls is still reported, and labour laws continue to discriminate against women. Lebanese Labour Law^{vi} excludes some marginalized groups, including wage earners in agriculture, which means that women farmers do not benefit from social security benefits.

Maternity Leave

The Labour Law was amended^{vii} in 2014 to ensure 10 weeks of maternity leave with full payment. However, companies must pay wages for women on leave, rather than the payment coming from social security. This policy disincentivises companies from hiring women. One woman in our focus group said,

“When I was pregnant, the school I work at asked me to quit my job, thinking that pregnancy would adversely affect my work at school and wanted to appoint a man instead. I worked hard at home despite the limited time I had to prove to the school that women can handle all issues without failure.”

According to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), motherhood serves a social function. Therefore, maternal care is a collective responsibility, and the circumstances of a working mother must always be considered. Policies must be enacted to protect the mother during pregnancy and immediately after childbirth, and to allow her to reconcile maternity duties with occupational burdens. Fathers should be involved in child care as well.

Sexual harassment at work

The National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls in Lebanon refers to the presence of sexual harassment in the workplace, governmental organizations and associations. Migrant workers and those who work in houses are especially exposed to violence. Family laws – which govern the affairs of the family and the relationship between its members – also play a fundamental and dangerous role in determining social relations.

^{vi} Clause 7, paragraph 1.

^{vii} Constitutional clauses 28-29, in line with clause 26.

Other discrimination

The Labour Law reveals additional discrimination. A man can add his wife to his social security, while a woman cannot add her husband until he is 64 or unless he has a specific disability.^{viii} Furthermore, women can only benefit from maternity leave if they have received social security for over ten months before delivery.^{ix} Additionally, women whose children are registered for a social health benefit are obliged to re-register their children every four years, while men do not need to do this.

2.2 Cultural and social background of gender differences

Employment can increase economic independence for women and men, but it can also perpetuate discrimination and gender exploitation. Gender-based discrimination against women is linked to their poor access to economic resources.

Focus groups: overview

We held two focus groups, both attended by men and women and led by a professional psychologist who began by presenting the main topics of the discussion:

- Are women protected under Lebanese law?
- Is there any exploitation of women in our society and how does society restrict women's freedom?
- What is the impact of the work of an employed woman on her family?
- Are the jobs carried out by women of value, and do they contribute to the economy?
- What are the major conflicts women face in society?
- What are the husband's opinions?

During the focus group meeting, women explained the customs and traditions existing in the Shouf region that shape people's behaviour and prevent women from working freely. These customs, such as religion, beliefs, school and media, tend to limit women's initiatives and aspirations. For example, it is not common for a woman to work in a hotel, during a night shift, or even far from home. On the other hand, because of economic difficulties, women's work is being perceived as a necessity that brings more income to the family. Most husbands are convinced that they need the help of their wives to support the family.

Stories from the focus groups (below) are evidence of the struggles women go through to convince men that they are qualified for good jobs and can be successful in the working world. Women in the workforce are causing a shift in the balance of power between men and women, and all are trying to cope with these changes. Women's employment has created new opportunities for them to integrate into society, hold more responsibility and most importantly to be financially independent. However, the division of responsibilities at home has always been an issue because many men refuse to assist their wives with housework.

Women's traditional roles and house tasks are still seen as their main responsibility. Men have claimed that a woman's niche at home is in the kitchen and that it is difficult for men to succeed in housework because women were born to serve men.

^{viii} Clause 14

^{ix} Clause 16

Focus groups: case studies

Tour guide at the Reserve

A young widow who participated in the focus group could not stop herself from crying when she revealed the sufferings and difficulties she had faced after her husband's death. She had to play the role of father and mother to three children, one of whom was only ten months old. Her husband had worked as a tour guide at the reserve, and she took his place to support herself and her family. Because most tour guides are men, she was ashamed of being employed and often sat aside or hid from visitors. She was criticized by the villagers, leading to low self-esteem, and she felt that she neglected her family due to her long working hours.

She tried to ignore the criticism as much as possible and focus on her work. She shared a story: "I was confronted with a visitor from the Gulf countries who had stereotyped ideas about the role of women in the division of labour. He was very surprised to see that a woman was going to give him a tour in the reserve. After the tour finished, he thanked me for accompanying him although he didn't like the idea much."

This woman has made an extraordinary effort to transcend the values of society. Most likely, the community's mind-set considers women to be fragile, as traditional Arab society can promote the idea that women need protection and cannot guard themselves physically or socially.

These beliefs reinforce gender stereotypes. It is acceptable for men to be mean and tough toward their wives, and women must tolerate the consequences and be patient, obedient and calm. If women have other qualities, their husbands are criticized, mocked and blamed by other men.

Another woman shared her experience with her husband who refused the idea of her working outside the house. No woman in his family had ever worked outside the home, and a woman working in public places was not familiar to him. Many problems arose between the two, and the woman continued to argue and fight for her rights.

Societal pressure

One woman explained the difficulties she has faced from society. "I faced many challenges with some relatives because my husband is dead. No one wanted me to leave the house or even to live alone. Most of them criticized me when I left to work; however, their criticism did not stop me from working hard, instead, my confidence kept on growing bigger."

Cleaner

A 55-year-old Syrian woman who works in a cleaning business participated in the focus group. She spoke of suffering because her husband has no appreciation for her work. He has an eye problem which prevents him from working, but although she is the wage earner for the family and is responsible for all of her son's expenses, she also does all the house chores. Her husband does not help because he considers house work to be only for women, and that it is shameful for a man to help his wife around the house. She had repeatedly tried to confront him and convince him to serve at least himself during while she is working, but unfortunately failed. "Most men in our society believe that men and women are not equal, and that the man has the final word in most situations, mostly because they

were brought up on these beliefs since they were young," she said. Some couples have no willingness to change their behaviours and habits, and their perception of gender roles will not change.

Male participants

Some of the attendees in the focus group opposed the idea of women working, especially in fields requiring physical effort. A male participant said: "Women do not bear the burdens of life as men do, they use their money for personal expenses and needs such as clothes and make-up." One of the women disagreed: "Today, women compete with men in professions and positions because women's abilities and qualifications enable them to obtain the highest positions." Women are also more caring and tender towards their parents, and daughters care for the elderly more often than sons.

Another man in the focus group spoke of how a woman working outside the home leads to neglect in raising children. "A working woman will not be able to devote all of her time to her children," he said. "I refuse my child going to kindergarten, instead, a mother should stay with her child for at least three years before getting a job. I think that even if a woman's income doubles that of the man, she should sacrifice for the sake of her children." One woman disagreed, saying that a woman can handle both her job and her children. She gave an example of her daughter, who is a housewife, and whose child is spoiled. Meanwhile, her daughter-in-law's son is in kindergarten. The child who went to kindergarten seemed quieter, well-behaved and more social. Although the mother worked long hours outside her house, she was able to give more time to her child.

Jana Albasateen association

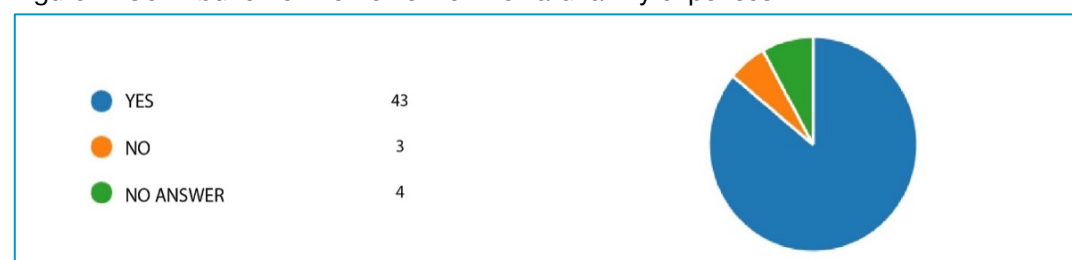
Women from "Jana Albasateen," an association that works on manufacturing and marketing local agricultural products, also joined the focus group. When they established the association, the founding women received no support from the men of their village. These women were accused of leaving the house all day for recreational reasons, and not for work. They had very little encouragement from their families and neighbours, and yet they continued their efforts. Their determination and persistence made this association a well-known and competitive one in the market.

Focus groups: analysis

Women's contribution to family income

The majority of the women believe that their work contributes to the family income. 43 out of 50 women confirmed that most of their income goes to their family.

Figure 2: Contribution of women's work toward family expenses

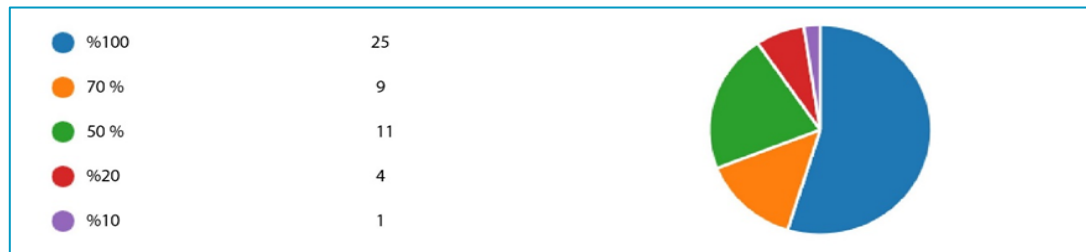


The figure below (Fig. 2) shows the percentage of salaries which are spent on house needs and family matters. So, 100% refers to spending all income on the family, 70% refers to spending 70% of income on family and the rest (30%) on personal needs. The chart shows that:

- Half of the surveyed women spend all their income on their families
- Nine spend 70% of their salaries on their families
- 11 spend half of their salaries on their families
- Four spend 20% on their families
- One spends 10% of her salary on her family

These ratios confirm that women are capable of handling family financial issues.

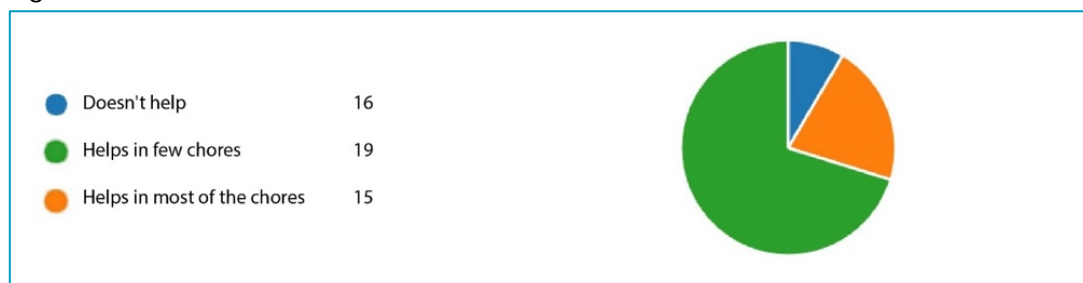
Figure 3: Percentage of contribution



Division of housework

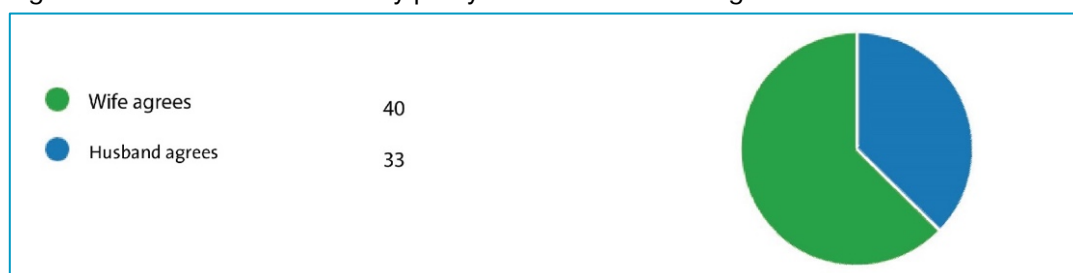
Women bear a massive workload. Only 15 men in the households of women in our study help regularly with house work; 16 do not participate at all; and 19 men (the largest portion) participate just a little. Despite some changes in society and a trend towards more gender equality, men still consider household chores to be the responsibility of women only.

Figure 4: To what extent does the husband share in the house chores?



Out of 50 women, 40 think that a woman's work should be partly dedicated to raising her children while 33 men out of 42^x agree.

Figure 5: Can women's work only partly focus on child-raising?



^x 42 of the surveyed women are married.

2.3 Land rights and rules of inheritance

Religious law

It is important to consider land rights and rules of inheritance in Lebanon. Inheritance rules vary from one religion to another. Due to the large number of officially recognized religions in Lebanon, Lebanese family matters are governed by at least 15 personal statute codes. As a result, Lebanese women suffer discrimination under 15 different personal status laws.

For example, under the personal status law for Sunni Muslims, a male heir receives twice as much as a female heir (i.e., a daughter receives half the amount that a son receives). A woman in the focus group spoke of inheriting properties from parents. She gave an example of her family and said: "After the death of my father, all of his belongings were inherited to his only son, keeping only one land to his four daughters. In his will, the daughters have the right to only invest the land and no right to sell it, which means that this land is not actually ours."

The majority of women in our study considered gender inequities in property division to be unfair to women. A participant said, "I equate my sons with my daughters on the issue of inheritance." Another woman supported this statement and stated that she would also practice equality between her children.

The Druze denomination handles inheritance in a similar way to Sunni Muslims, though 2017 amendments to Druze personal status law made a significant change benefiting the daughter of the deceased. If the deceased had only a female child, she can inherit the entire estate. If there is more than one girl in the family, the shares are distributed evenly.

Civil law

Because of differences in religious laws, civil laws should be used to address domestic violence issues or to reform the personal statute laws. The Civil Law of Inheritance of 23 June 1959, which applies to non-Muslims, provides that women and men enjoy equal inheritance rights. According to the Lebanese Constitution (Article 7), women (married and unmarried) have the same rights as men to enter contracts and own and administer property.

However, in practice, male family members usually make decisions relating to property even if it is owned by a woman. Land is often registered under the male name even if it contradicts the inheritance rules of the relevant religion, so as to keep wealth in the family. Women's limited access to land affects their access to loans, which limits their investment capacities. Personal status laws do not recognize a wife's contributions to the marriage, including the concept of marital property, and therefore women are deprived of a share of family property upon divorce.

Shortcomings in civil law

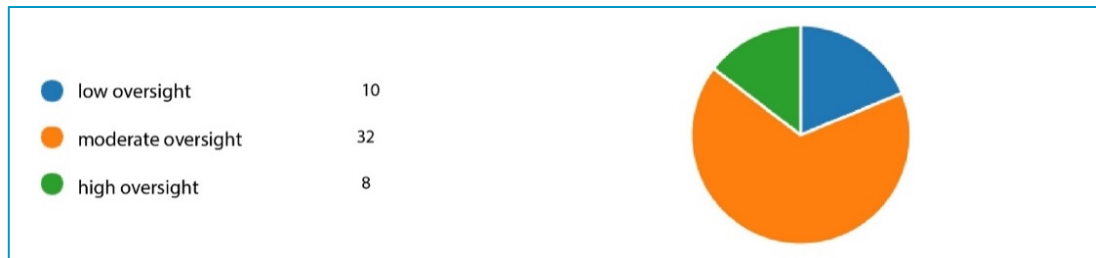
The Civil Law is incomplete and needs further amendments and enforcement. The law calls for special family-violence units within the police and a fund to assist victims of domestic violence, but these changes have not yet been implemented. Furthermore, many lawyers, judges and victims are confused about how to use the Civil Law, and many others are unaware of its existence.

Activists, lawmakers and civil society have voiced their anger over the law's inadequacy to remedy such grave issues. The religious diversity of Lebanese society and the power of religious figures who do not

support women's rights are slowing down efforts to produce a better law. Political corruption in Lebanon is further leading to the prioritization of political issues over social issues.

A lack of a strong Civil Law has a clear impact on discrimination against women in families. Few women are aware of gender equality and the rights they must fight for to achieve equality. Results from our study are shown below:

Figure 6: Level of women's awareness/oversight regarding their work rights



Results indicate that few women (eight out of 50) are completely aware of their rights, 32 are somewhat aware, and 10 have little knowledge. This means that women are frequently unaware of rights violations in the workplace.

Husbands and wives have different opinions around gender equality. Results from our study show that gender conflict remains a problem among couples and that some women try to convince their husbands that women have a right to equality.

Figure 7: Who is more convinced about gender equality and its relevance in all circumstances, the husband or the wife?



Some men do not see gender equality as a pressing societal issue. It is important to raise awareness about the benefits of a more gender-equal society and the negative consequences of gender inequality. Awareness raising can change attitudes, behaviours and beliefs; generate a favourable space for debate; increase political interest; and encourage political mobilisation. In this way, women can gain broad support and political will for implementing gender mainstreaming and equality policies.

3. Women's contributions to the family and rural economy in the Shouf region

This section addresses the multiple roles played by women in the economy, environment, tourism, agriculture and health sectors. Women are not paid for all the work they do. While the prevailing attitude in society is that women cannot handle jobs and housewives are not workers, there is an increasing number of women who produce goods and gain income by selling their products in local markets.

We conducted a SWOT analysis to analyse women's work in the Shouf region. The analysis evaluated the strengths and needs of these women, identified work opportunities and identified threats and challenges women face at the workplace which hinder their improvement and progress.

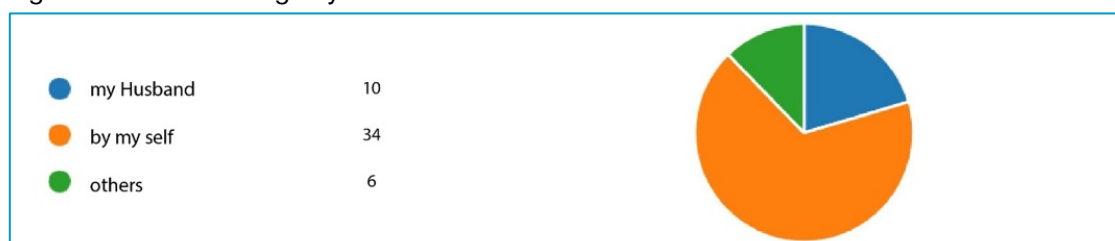
3.1 Lebanese women's strengths and needs

Role of confidence

One woman in our focus group told a story about facing criticism. Many women in the Shouf own "tables d'hot," which they use to welcome guests for homemade food in their home. The guests order and eat homemade dishes, and get to know the lifestyles of these women. One woman was criticized by villagers because she welcomed men as guests in her house during her husband's absence. Gossip spread around the village. "Society has not changed at all. It constantly criticizes and restricts women's work; however, I have become much stronger and more confident than I used to be." Then she explained the positive impact of her work on herself and on her family, saying: "having this job helped build my personality and became more social. Even my income exceeds that of my husband's." She also refused to accept gender restrictions in construction and farming. "The house I live in was built by my husband and I. I used to carry cement buckets and tiles. I see no difference between women and men even physically."

Figure 8 indicates that the majority of women choose to work by their own accord, showing their desire to join the labour market. This means that women feel more confident, and are able to make their own decisions, ignoring society's pressure and influence. They realize that work improves their well-being and independence.

Figure 8: who encouraged you to work?



Jdeideh Woman Organization

A woman in the focus group described her experience founding the "Jdeideh Woman Organization" with her co-workers. Villagers were sceptical of the organization, not believing that women had the capacity to work outside the home. When the association began to show signs of success, the villagers changed their minds, especially when the women succeeded in supplying electricity for homes in the village.

Jdeideh Woman Organization, in cooperation with the Al Shouf Cedar Society and Jdeideh municipality, launched a farmers' market called "Souk El Ghalli." The market aims at eliminate middle men and sell fresh produce directly from the producer to the consumer. "All of the work we did helped us gain trust and confidence from people, for we proved ourselves successful and showed that women have many qualifications and capabilities." These women contribute to the economic development of their village and help meet peoples' basic needs. They are motivated to pursue their goals, and in turn feel appreciated by their community for their efforts.

Women and the environment

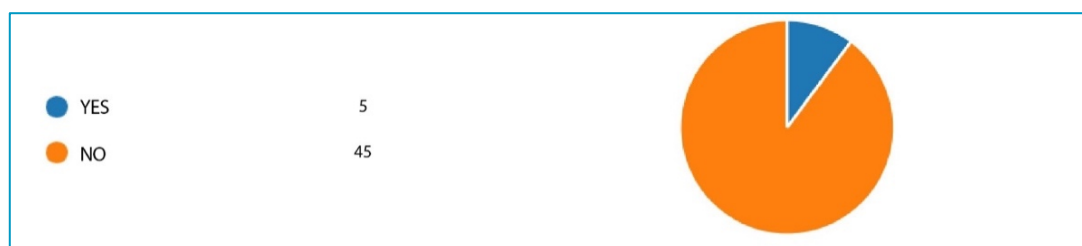
In an open-ended question on how women contribute to environmental conservation in their region, women had many responses, from environmental clean-up campaigns to attending agricultural workshops and promoting sustainable tourism.^{xi} These activities are done by both men and women.^{xii} Women are trying to influence and encourage their husbands to be part of conservation. Most people are aware of the environmental crisis and are taking measures to try to save the environment as much as they can. Environmentally conscious activities have contributed to the development of the region, especially in promoting investments in economic and human environment. The progress of Shouf in comparison with other regions is evident.

Changes in traditional roles

Women have proved that they have the responsibility and intellectual capacity to carry out any type of work. They also demonstrate skills in childcare and parenting. As working mothers, they place high importance on spending quality time with their children. Perceptions about roles and concepts of femininity and masculinity are responding to today's needs. Women have become more aware that childcare is a shared responsibility between a mother and father. There is evidence that women and men can play both unconventional and participatory roles. The graphs below demonstrate this change.^{xiii}

Results show that the majority of husbands respect women's efforts outside and inside the house. This means that the work of women outside the house has changed the division of tasks and the distribution of roles between spouses. The changed distribution of roles between women and men caused few conflicts in families and resulted in many positive impacts on women.

Figure 9: is there any conflict between the husband and wife because the husband does not respect his wife's efforts inside and outside the house?



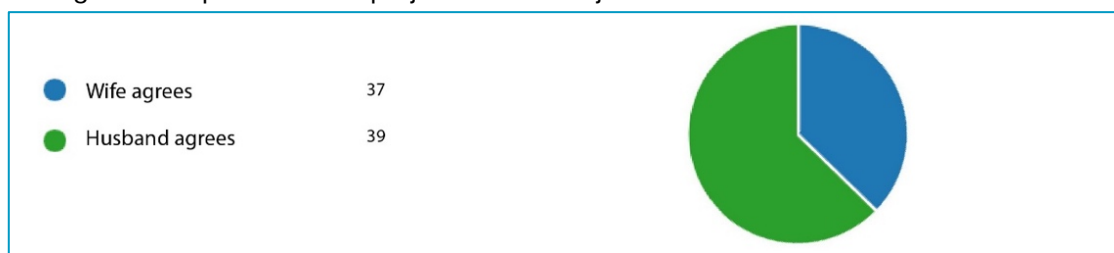
^{xi} The full list of responses can be found in Annex 1.

^{xii} Both men and women work hard to preserve cultural practices; participate in clean-up campaigns and reforestation activities organized by the reserve and other organizations; attend awareness raising workshops; volunteer in environmental associations; use natural fertilizers on their lands; and implement other activities which contribute to protecting nature.

^{xiii} Questions were also asked related to decision making in the family, selection of friends, place of living, leisure activities and house economy management. Results reveal that the majority of the decisions are taken by the husband and wife together, indicating that there is no control of one group over the other.

The below figure shows that a female manager at work would be accepted by both men and women.

Figure 10: Do you and your husband agree that a woman can successfully be a general manager or a manager of a department or a project in a former job?



Role in culture and community

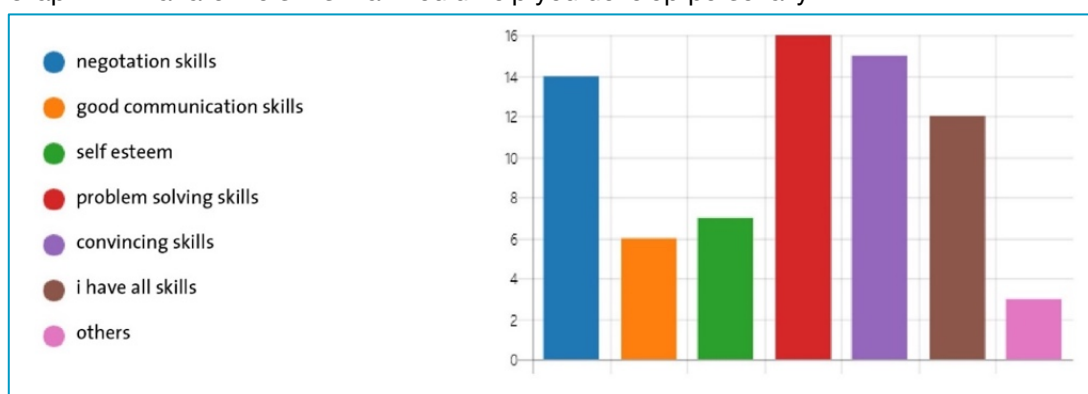
Asked about their contributions to the development of values and culture in their community, the answers were as follows:

- Disseminating principles and values to our children and preserving those we have inherited from our ancestors
- Learning, reading and working on spreading education on cultural practices
- Attending workshops and being part of awareness-raising campaigns
- Participating in environmental, charitable and social organizations
- Engaging in the community and doing social work
- Preparing awareness campaigns and activities for children during which they learn to spread culture
- Participating in festivals, seminars, environmental awareness campaigns, associations, scouts and others.

Skills and competencies

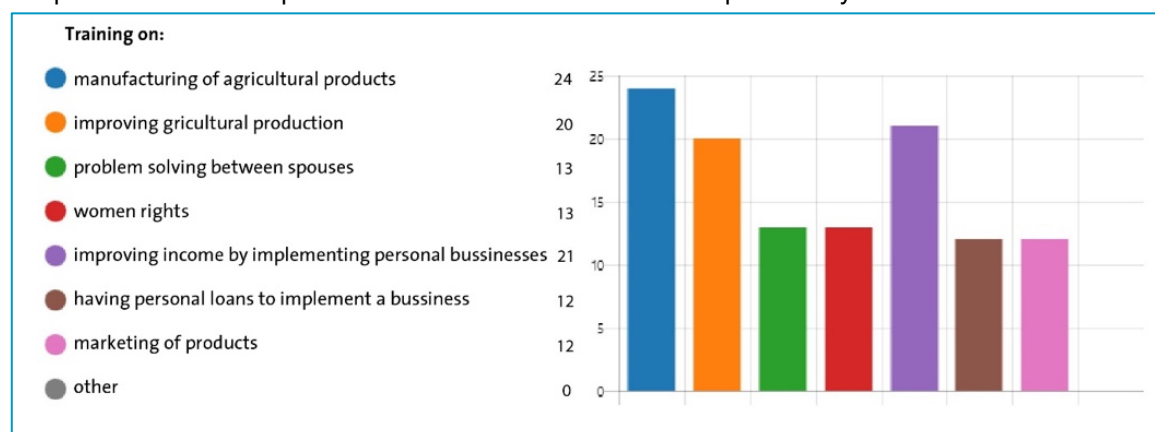
The data below shows some of the skills these women lack and the assistance they desire:

Graph 2: What are the skills that would help you develop personally?



Graph 3 shows the trainings women would like to have, including agricultural processing, improving agricultural production, enhancing individual initiatives to improve personal income, management of marital disputes, knowledge of their rights and others. These women would like to attend workshops where they learn innovative techniques and procedures that help develop and enhance the productivity of their work.

Graph 3: What are the priorities that contribute in the development of your business?



Women thrive when they have confidence and financial independence. After succeeding in several tasks and working hard to develop their skills, women in the study reached a level of professionalism and were able to fight gender discrimination in their families and society. Through continuous empowerment and self-development, women persevere and make efforts to change the prevailing mind-set in their communities.

On the other hand, women sometimes consider their work as temporary, waiting for marriage instead of working and developing professionally. After marriage, women's employment can be interrupted by family issues, such as having children and performing house chores. This can lead to women neglecting their professions. Statistics and studies show that discrimination in wages, as well as economic and occupational violence, are still practiced against women and can exacerbate this trend.

Historic division of gender roles has been linked to the traditional perception of each gender, with women staying in the home and men earning a living. This perception has contributed significantly to gender-based discrimination and violence, which has undermined gender equality and reinforced traditional roles for men and women. There are signs that this situation is improving for women, though they still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality.

3.2 Opportunities

Economic development has positively affected women, especially in the rural world. Lebanon's government, in partnership with international organizations, has sought to develop programmes and policies to alleviate the marginalization and exclusion of rural women through initiatives that have brought about development projects that reduced poverty and social vulnerability.

Not only has economic development encouraged and supported women in rural areas, but it has also created a dynamic environment for women in agriculture, food, processing and handicrafts. It has further provided opportunities for business women to engage in agricultural and food production. Women have been empowered and trained to take managerial and leadership positions in rural development planning and policy, production and marketing, and cooperative work. In addition to providing small grants to encourage women to run small businesses, in 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture, in partnership with the European Union, allocated € 3.5 million in small loans to finance agricultural projects for young and women farmers.

These initiatives support rural women to contribute to local economic development. They also encourage women to get jobs and to participate in a variety of sectors. Women's active involvement in the workforce has led to investments in their capacities, development in rural areas and increases in income and economic resources. In addition, women provide a good example to children about the value and importance of work, learning how to make decisions and sharing the financial burdens in the family.

Civil society also plays a key role in de-isolating rural areas through cooperatives, obtaining loans, forming small businesses and marketing their products. They train women on their rights, legal developments, combating violence and the dangers of early marriage, and encourage women to participate in politics.

3.3 Risks

Risks lie in the challenges and obstacles faced by working women in rural areas. The majority of the villages surveyed suffer from a lack of social and health services and low standards of living. Most training programmes aimed at empowering rural women are still of a traditional nature and do not meet the needs of women to acquire skills for modern income-generating activities. Inequalities abound in rural areas. The difference in the earnings between women and men in agriculture is 21 percent.² Women lack equal access to health, education, employment and social security resources.

As rural women continue to be chiefly responsible for family care, they lack opportunities to engage in income-generating economic activities. Initiatives by women entrepreneurs to produce sustainable projects in rural areas are limited, mainly due to a lack of technical assistance and microcredit facilities. Because inheritance and land ownership goes to males, women face more difficulties accessing credit at banks.^{xiv}

One of the women in the focus group described financial difficulties that hindered her work. "One of the challenges I encountered when establishing my atelier in Khreibeh was a financial one, for the bank did not grant me a loan on the pretext that I am young and in my twenties. On the other hand, and despite that many did not encourage me, I managed to gain the confidence of people through hard work and through cooperation with traders to market the products."

The lack of policies and laws to reduce discrimination and give new opportunities to women has negative impacts across sectors. Another woman expressed the challenges she faced as a member of the Municipal Council: "The municipality members gave me a hard time at work; they did not accept the fact that a woman can be part of a municipal committee. I tried to resolve all problems with patience, proving myself through determination and hard work." Men's reactions towards women's accomplishments conceal their fear that their male power is decreasing.

Gender equality must also apply to sharing household tasks and family responsibilities. Many husbands refuse to work at home, so wives carry the burden of household work. Men believe that household tasks are their wife's responsibility. Men who disapprove of women working outside the home can lead to problems and tension between the couple. Some women are forced to quit jobs in order to dedicate their time to house chores and children.

In terms of policy formulation and implementation to bridge the gender gap and reduce violence against women, Lebanon's government has failed to bring about change and address political and economic

^{xiv} Without property ownership, women have nothing to bet on to gain credit, making them lack funds to invest in business endeavours.

challenges. Other chronic issues – such as unemployment, poverty, weakness in the productive sectors, geographical disparities and lack of social protection – exacerbate gender inequities.

In 2008, the Ministry of Agriculture established the National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas; however, there are no disaggregated and up-to-date data on women's participation in the agricultural sector. There are also no national surveys that accurately census rural areas and the needs of the people there. Furthermore, there is a lack of coordination between various official institutions responsible for gathering information to develop appropriate policies and to improve the situation of rural women. These factors limit the development of women in rural society.

Women account for half of the rural population. They are active members of the community, contribute to sustainable development and represent an essential pillar of family life. Women in the countryside are excluded and marginalized economically, socially, culturally and politically. The government should use legislation to raise the status of women. It is the role of the government to seek and formulate policies that contribute to the basic needs of citizens, reduce discrimination and promote equality.

3.4 Recommendations to reduce gender gaps

Actions must be taken to prevent violence and discrimination against women and to highlight and support their role in economic development. This section includes recommendation for the Shouf region, for legislators and for civil society.

Specific recommendations to be implemented in Shouf

- Strengthen women's participation in environmental activities and other practices.
- Encourage women to participate in committees on environmental protection projects, programmes and policies to address gender imbalances in decision-making.
- Ensure environmental education and women's access to land and other resources. Environmental education will produce changes in attitudes and increase the specific knowledge of every citizen, and educated women will contribute more significantly to bridging the gap between environment and development.
- Empower women to be farmers and inspire them to buy land and invest in sustainable agricultural and traditional practices on that land.
- Establish farmers markets for the goods and crafts produced by local women and create an online delivery system to sell and retail at a wider scale.
- Promote innovation and technology. Information and communications technology can increase women's inclusion in the economy, particularly in high-productivity service sectors. Greater access to information and technology can also stimulate changes in social norms and attitudes toward women's roles in society, potentially improving access to education.
- Recognize women's talents and invest in building women's aptitudes for the future.
- Implement measures to improve the status and working conditions of women. For example: help women access funding sources and schemes, provide scholarships and mentoring programmes to nurture women's creative talents, set up spaces where women can create and develop new skills, etc.

Recommendations for legislation

- Amend the Labour Law to be in line with international conventions and economic and social developments. Adopt social policies that ensure the elimination of discrimination against women and gender disparities.
- Adoption of a law banning sexual harassment at work.
- Adoption of a law for the protection of women's rights and their retirement.
- Adoption of a law for the protection of lands owned or inherited by women that allows women to freely invest in the land and perform agricultural work. Modify existing laws that limit women's economic independence. Reform inheritance and family law to lift prohibitions on daughters' legacies and to reduce husbands' power over wives' economic activity.
- Ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 44 of 1938 to provide compensations or allowances to unemployed women and to establish an unemployment fund.
- Adoption by economic institutions of an employment policy for women and the establishment of nurseries for children in large institutions.
- Conduct labour market assessments that include women workers, train women and develop their skills.
- Introduce a law implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 to integrate women at all levels in decision-making and in public life (war and peace resolutions, conflict and post-conflict issues).
- Enact equitable policies that bridge gaps between men and women. Legal authorities are highly advised to apply Law 293's limited legal text per the interpretation of civil society and feminist organizations.
- Enforce labour standards and equal pay and equal employment opportunity laws.
- Support employment and increased earnings for women.

Recommendations for civil society and trade unions

- Raise awareness about domestic violence and the use of Law 293.
- Establish a national fund to help the victims of domestic violence.
- Purchase local production facilities to enable women's economic work, which provides women with income to enhance their social status and self-sufficiency.
- Monitor discriminatory practices in institutions for fair remuneration in employment as well as for health and social benefits.
- Encourage women to join trade unions.
- Train women to effect individual and collective transformation towards gender equality by raising awareness and encouraging learning, knowledge-building and skills development.
- Train women on their rights to work and how to achieve justice, and encourage them to report abuses at work.
- Train men to help raise awareness on the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality. Trainings can be a transformative process that aims to provide knowledge, techniques and tools to develop skills and changes in attitudes and behaviours. They require commitment of men and women in order to create inclusive societies that recognize the need to promote gender equality.
- Reduce all forms of violence against women and girls. For example, offer legal and spiritual support to women and educate them around their legal rights.
- Avoid gender or cultural assumptions about the type of work that women can or should do. The above-mentioned awareness raising workshops will help change the mentality of some men who still restrict their wives.

Annex 1: Responses to the question “how do women contribute to environmental conservation in the Shouf region?”

- Participating in afforestation and clean-up campaigns
- Buying organic products and encouraging their cultivation
- Respecting the environment and keeping the garden clean around the house
- Constructing a compost unit in the garden and using the compost as a natural fertilizer in agriculture
- Replacing chemical pesticides and harmful drugs with organic, natural fertilizers and manure in agriculture
- Attending agricultural workshops to raise environmental awareness
- Raising poultry in agriculture lands
- Abiding by environmental laws and rules
- Using firewood for heating instead of diesel
- Using cloth bags instead of nylon
- Using environmentally friendly and recyclable utensils and buying glass instead of plastic
- Home gardening
- Working with the municipality to distribute sorting containers
- Beekeeping
- Cleaning after a picnic and using specialized waste bags
- Promoting sustainable tourism and agriculture
- Volunteering in environmental associations and organizations
- Maintaining clean roads
- Sorting garbage

End notes

¹ El Hajj, S. (2016). *Two years since the statement of the Domestic Violence Law: Is it really protecting women?* Al Joumhouriya.

² (2014). *Fourth and fifth official periodic reports on the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. Lebanese National Commission on Women's Affairs: Beirut.



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