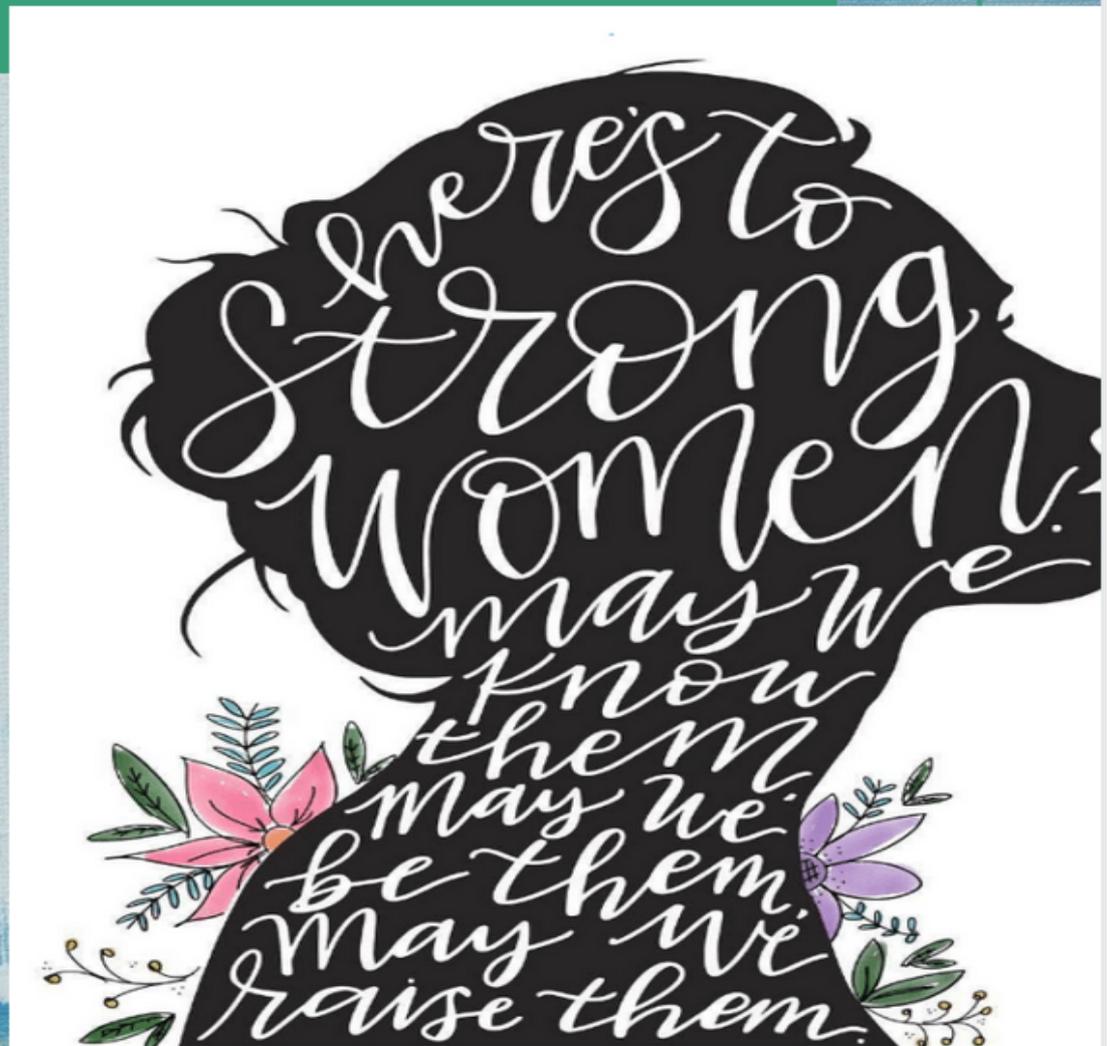


ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
LEBANON, 23-28 SEPTEMBER 2019



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EDITORIAL SUPERVISION: FEDERICA DEMICHELI



Erasmus+

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INTRODUCTION

What can be done to enhance female participation in politics and in entrepreneurship in Lebanon ? The seminar “[Engagement of Women in Politics and Entrepreneurship](#)” has sought to address this question involving and engaging 31 participants from 15 countries.

The undertaking was complemented and enhanced by the insights, experiences, testimonials and accounts provided by Lebanese prominent figures with proven track record and professional standing gained in sectors ranging from social entrepreneurship, academia, government and politics.

The exchange of insights and experiences between the seminar’s attendees and the experts has resulted in a better understanding of the Lebanese realities (local and national) with regard to women in politics and social entrepreneurship; in the awareness about the “participatory dimension”; in the overcoming of stereotyping about the role of women and in the discovery of good practices and tools about women in politics and social entrepreneurship led by women.

Workshops with experts, field visits and a panel discussion added unique perspectives, first-hand accounts and valuable insights that soundly resonated with the attendees’ scope of interest and achieved a level of engagement that, as emerged in the debates and groups’ discussions, turned out to be beyond expectations.

The seminar has been successful in bringing together youth workers and practitioners who share a specific interest in championing, at national and international level,, the empowerment of young women in politics and entrepreneurship as well as laying the foundations for new international projects.

Yet, the 4 -days seminar managed to add new perspectives to the contemporary narrative regarding the conditions of women in Arab countries, compare European experiences with those of the Mediterranean area, and involve youth organizations from those territories in the Erasmus + Programme.

It was organised by the Agenzia Nazionale per i Giovani (Italian Youth Agency) in collaboration with SALTO EuroMed Resource Centre, the Erasmus+ UK National Agency, GIZ Lebanon, LeaD and GIZ.

The present report has been commissioned by

WHY THIS SEMINAR ?

The original idea of this event was built on the inputs and recommendations emerged throughout a series of 3 "[Empowering women](#)" seminars.

In looking towards a more promising and inclusive future of the Mediterranean area, advancing the potentials and the rights of women remains, more than ever, one of the priorities of the EuroMed Youth Programme.

In Lebanon and in neighbouring countries, women represent an untapped potential for political and entrepreneurship engagement. Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as in business positions.

This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of positive and inclusive change. The main constraints to unleash this unexpressed talent lie in cultural circumstances, patriarchal mentality and stereotypical perceptions of the role of women who are politically and economically active, the lack of role models promoting ground-breaking perspectives and a media narrative that does not view women's plights as something headlines-worthy.

“Lebanon is a tiny country that brings together many challenges. There are many women who live in very poor and underdeveloped areas. There are several sects and religions and it seems that the idea of women retaining traditional roles with few rights while staying at home seems to be a common denominator even between these groups”

Christiane Gaehtgens, head of Lebanon programmes GIZ



As organizations committed to the advancement of women's aspirations worldwide, we cannot refrain ourselves from the opportunity to engage organizations and stakeholders by bringing Erasmus values and experiences to Lebanon and neighbouring countries acknowledging that meaningful changes start from the bottom through an inclusive participatory approach while dismissing the we know-it-all attitude.

As we travel, we embrace new perspectives, we get inspired, we connect with people with valuable insights. We also connect the dots of the lessons of the past that we might have under considered or ignored that would help us reconsider what social entrepreneurship means to us as professionals and as committed stakeholders.



“If you want to have better decision making, if you want to improve the quality of public policy, the best way to change it is to improve the diversity of the people who are making these decisions. So the participation of women usually brings a positive change in the quality of decision making. This is why we believe in women empowerment for the sake of all public policy”

Roberta di Lecce Counselor at the Italian Embassy in Lebanon

The Erasmus idea is indeed based on creating real connections among people. It enables everyone to consider studying and living in other places as part of their life experience. It is a way of gaining new perspectives, building self-awareness and affirming self-determination. It is very much needed to expand this narrative to other regions of the world, especially in Arab countries.



“The Italian National Agency has begun to invest concretely in young people and it is committed to encourage the participation and the inclusion of all, especially those who due to social, economic, geographical reasons do not feel to belong to this society and do not believe that there can be room for their dreams and their expectations”

Domenico De Maio, Director of the Italian National Agency.

As gender equality is a proven recipe for progress worldwide, it is therefore paramount to give Lebanese women more support in their efforts to take more participating and active roles. Paving the way for women to participate in political, business and civic arenas will result in gains for democracy worldwide, including greater responsiveness to citizens’ needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, help secure lasting peace and build inclusive societies.

WHY LEBANON ?

Despite the odds and the cultural and societal barriers that hinder women emancipation efforts and their involvement in politics and business, the country is at the cornerstone of looming new changes thanks to the determination of women and NGOs.

As this seminar took place, for the first time there are 4 female cabinet ministers; a woman runs the Ministry of Interior; a new institutional body, the Ministry for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth is tasked with boosting the economic environment for women and young people. Women organizations and social entrepreneurs are challenging social norms and fighting for the amendment of discriminatory laws. Nobody can deny that **women are pushing back against the pushbacks.**

More importantly, these women and organizations are not acting alone: they are beginning to form networks, associations, working groups, women-led movements; they are learning to work out differences, to mitigate disagreements, to reject victimhood mentality, to professionalize their undertakings.

As male dominated organizations and institutions are leveraging culture to halt women participation, Lebanese civil society players are in ferment: to move the needle forward for women causes, it is imperative to capitalize on this momentum working alongside with all the people who embody the values and ideals of EuroMed Youth Programme and embrace the notion that the progress of Lebanese women will result in a victory for all.



WHY THIS PUBLICATION ?

It sounds reassuring when a company operating in the private sector or in a public institution announces programs, initiatives and policies meant to further women participation committing itself to make structural and cultural changes that would create an even playing field based on merit regardless gender, age, sect or religious affiliation.

However, those pledges often remain on paper or do not translate into meaningful progress.

As it emerged during the seminar, despite the pushbacks, the progress measuring the participation of Lebanese women in entrepreneurship and in politics isn't just slow. It is stalling. In some areas of Lebanon their participation path is even going backwards.

Yet, some cracks in the ceiling are manifesting themselves. Throughout the seminar, the attendees met women and organizations that are taking this matter into their own hands. We are referring to committed individuals and organizations who are actively involved in advancing women rights and participation, equipping women with soft and technical skills that would allow them to make a difference in their professional and political quest.

Indeed, as this publication acknowledges how the Lebanese socio and identitarian complex realities hinder the advancement of women in politics and in entrepreneurship, it also exposes and attempts to valorize the works, the efforts, the commitments of various organizations, professionals, social entrepreneurs and activists who are effectively standing up for women causes in Lebanon.

This publication highlights their achievements and acknowledges how they can bring about more changes if they join forces / expertises with other partners and players.

Exposing and disseminating the seminar's works, lessons and human capital would be greatly beneficial for those Lebanese women who are still seeking the tools and the know-how to make inroads into politics and entrepreneurship as well as to those organizations that are counting only on their goodwills and own resources.

If the seminar's takeaways and the showcased human / professional capital can not directly reach the intended beneficiaries, the attendees' feedbacks made evident their desire and commitment to brokering new partnerships with other stakeholders and women-led organizations through their available means, channels and future initiatives.

This is why the seminar was not an end in itself. Indeed, the attendees have acknowledged and loudly echoed the need of a prolonged course of action; they embraced its objectives and pledged various post-seminar projects to capitalize on the lessons learnt.

Yet, they embraced a participatory methodology. An approach that acknowledges that social change begins at the grassroots level without imposing anything from the top. It addresses people current needs and takes into account people's background navigating into a complex environment with so many stakeholders that are not always on the same page.

As the needs and the rules of engagement vary according to the religious affiliation, their upbringing, their expectations, their time availability, it becomes evident that there are not standardized solutions that fit everyone's demands. The workshops' arguments made indisputable that training projects should be culturally and sometimes individually tailored.

In this framework, the seminar participants interacted with each other and with the experts as a group of equals through an experiences sharing process where everyone was both learning something and teaching something else without projecting their own beliefs and solutions on others.

SEMINAR CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Many Middle Eastern countries rank very low in terms of women’s political participation and their inclusion in decision-making. For instance, women holding CEO positions are often isolated from important decision-making circles and assigned to stereotypical areas related to social issues. Lebanon is not an exception. In the land of cedres, too few women mark their presence in local councils and similar bodies.

Yet, when and where women secures a seat in a local municipality, the lack of know-how binds them to minor responsibilities and stereotypical areas related to social issues instead of contributing at a professional level in relevant areas, for instance in setting up municipal budgets, making legislative proposals, proposing amendments, writing public calls.

According to the World Economic Forum’s “Global Gender Gap Report 2018,” Lebanon ranked 140th when it comes to the gender gap, 136th for the economic participation standards, 110th in education, 122 in health and quality of life, 147 and political involvement, all of which were ranked out of 149 countries. Note that in the political involvement ranking, Lebanon is directly followed by Saudi Arabia. In a nutshell: the participation of Lebanese women in political life is still very weak. As this publication is being written, there are currently only six female MPs out of 128 and 4 female ministers out of 30.

As it emerged from the seminar’s presentations and workshops, traditional gender roles prevent young women from gaining access to public office and relevant professional roles. In Lebanon women also face other challenges and discriminations:

- They need to provide more evidence of their competence than men do.
- They have their judgment questioned in their area of expertise.
- They are addressed in a less-than-professional way.
- Women had a tendency to be questioned more and need to be tougher.
- Qualified women are kept from rising to senior management positions.
- Women are perceived more junior even if they hold manager positions.
- They are less likely to be defended if their work is questioned.

Women participate in paid employment at lower rates and wages than men and they are less likely to be promoted. ***The implications are everyone’s business.***

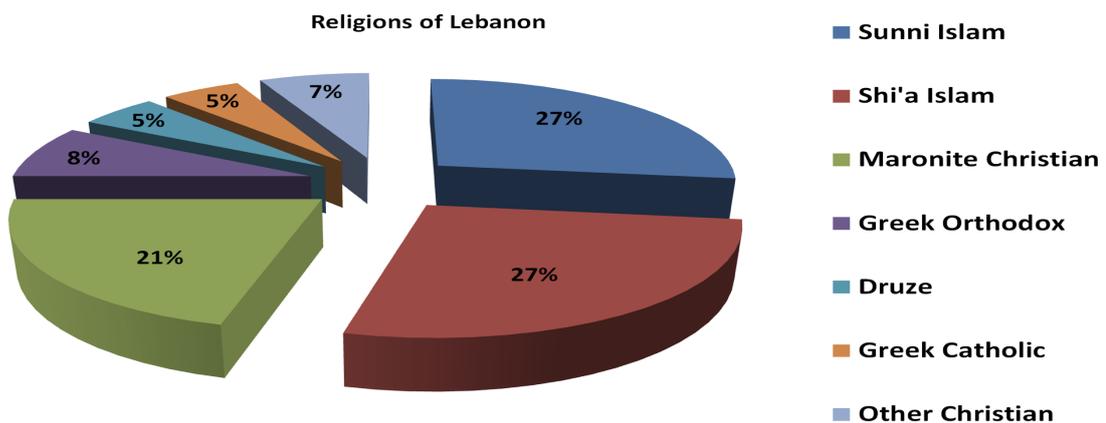
LEBANESE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Lebanon is a confessional state, religiously, culturally and politically diverse.

There are six different Muslim sects (Shi'a, Sunni, Druze, Isma'ili, Alawite or Nusayri), and twelve different Christian sects (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Copt, Protestant). These sects are largely geographically defined.

This mosaic of people and politics has led the Lebanese to historically seek a balance of power through a political arrangement known as confessionalism. It also resulted in an open-ended political coma that favours only the preservation of status quo dismissing women concerns and issues.

Lebanon Is characterized by its religious diversity that includes 18 religions



The Lebanese confessional system is characterised by the proportional distribution of political power among the different religious communities according to their demographic weight and geographic distribution.

Different groups' representation in the government is guaranteed along confessional lines. This is achieved by reserving a proportional number of high-level government offices, cabinet seats, legislative seats, and public employment to representatives of each religious community.

In this framework, **the risk is that women in politics are not considered political leaders but just elected officials who just hold on to a seat.** As it emerged in the seminar, the possibility of women in politics compromising their stances for the sake of confessionalism instead of putting women's concerns and demands front and centre on the national agenda challenging patriarchy, nepotism and sectarianism, can become a likely prospect.

Lebanese politicians have proven time and again that they do not prioritise women’s rights. Preventing women from gaining more rights placates religious elites who hold significant jurisdiction over women’s personal status and social mobility.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Modern Lebanon is a unitary multiparty republic with a parliamentary system of government. Its Constitution, promulgated in 1926 during the French mandate and modified by several subsequent amendments, provides for a unicameral Chamber of Deputies (renamed the National Assembly in 1979) elected for a term of four years by universal adult suffrage.

By an unwritten convention the president must be a Maronite Christian, the premier a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the National Assembly a Shiite.

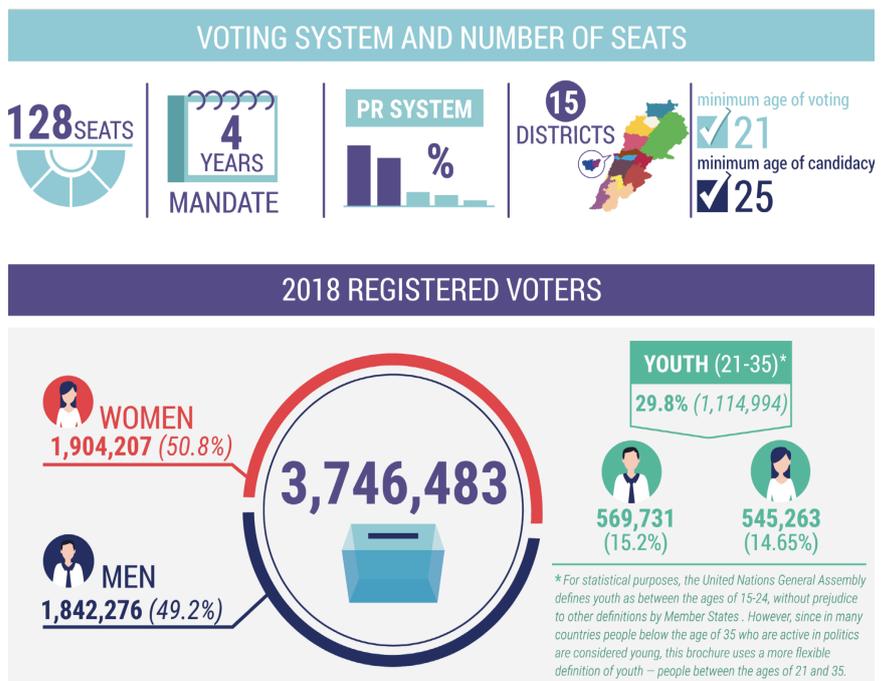
“The rules that govern marriage, property rights and inheritance are administered by religious courts. Women still face discrimination under 15 separate religion-based personal status laws, and both child marriage and marital rape remain legal in Lebanon. Women continue to face discrimination under the 15 distinct religion-based personal status laws. Discrimination includes inequality in access to divorce, child custody, and property rights. Unlike men, Lebanese women also cannot pass on their nationality to foreign husbands and children, and are subject to discriminatory inheritance laws”

ELECTORAL LAW . Quotas for sects - but not for women

The number of seats a list can win depends on the electoral quotient and the number of votes a list obtains. The total amount of votes won by a list is divided by the electoral quotient which will determine the specific number of seats a list will be awarded. Following this, candidates in a district will be chosen according to the most preferential votes received.

Once a confession’s seat(s) or the number of seats won by a list are exhausted, the remaining

candidates from that sect or list are ineligible. Thus, a candidate who receives a higher number of



preferential votes can lose to a candidate who accumulates less votes, simply due to the seat allocation per sect. [Hardly any aspect of this new law results in equitable competition among candidates.](#)

SEMANTIC CONTEXT

In western countries and mainstream political systems terms like center right, centre left, progressives, conservatives, populists, centrists, extreme right and left, sovereigins, secularism, laicism represent the norm of political discourse.

In Lebanon such choice of words is more an exception. In the Lebanese political vocabulary, terms like confessional party, confessionalism, sects, religious affiliation, sectorial quota and patriarchal narrative are the ones that resonate the most with the electorate. It all boils down to the fact that Lebanon has 18 different confessions and most political parties carry a religious colour. The head of the party does not answer directly to the men and women who cast their vote: the main interlocutor is the head of the religious sect the party represents the interests of.

REPRESENTATION AND OPPORTUNITIES IN POLITICS AND BUSINESS

The slow progress in women’s political participation stems from deep-rooted gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes. This notion was the leitmotif of Dr Halime Kaakour’s insights she has exposed throughout a panel discussion on the issue of women representation and opportunities in politics and business held on the first day of the seminar.



Dr Kaakour, who holds a Phd in international law and human rights and works as a teacher and consultant, uncovered the current challenges and obstacles women candidates face when running for office. She shared with the audience some of the findings of a yet to be published research she conducted featuring interviews with most of the women who ran for a parliamentary seat in the Lebanese general election held in May 2018.

Halime Kaakour

That election registered 976 candidates, of those, 111 (11.37% of the total number of candidates) were women. Only 86 had their name on the ballot.

Women elected? Just 6. Only 6 women sit in a 128-seat Parliament. Women are clearly under represented. According to Dr Kaakour, the candidates knew they had little chances to succeed but they ran anyway to send a message: **this is their right to run.**

They were placed in lists and districts where the chances of winning were slimmer than other areas, a situation that did attract the attention of the media. As a matter of fact, they did not enjoy the same media coverage than males did.

Dr Kaakour did not shy away from calling the outcome of the election a victory for the patriarchal society, one of the reasons that is holding Lebanon back. *“The confessional political system”* she said *“is sexist and biased against women; the political climate is sexist; the corrupt political system at large is sexist; the clientel system is sexist. Our fight for women rights is interrelated to the fight against corruption”*.

“I am offended everyday by people who say we have security problems, economical problems, environmental crisis, but we can not fix any of these problem without fixing the gender discrimination” Halime Kaakour

Her challenges overview also includes the lack of support from men and the parenthood status. Noting that most of the candidates were married, she claimed that it is inconceivable to run a successful campaign without the support of their male partners. The ones who ran were supported by the husband both on the personal level and financially. Then, for candidates who are mothers, society projects on them “a sense of guilt that burdens women candidates”. They are branded as women who care more about their political future at the expense of their motherhood duties.

WOMEN MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT 2018

WOMEN ELECTED

6 4.7%



PAULETTE SIRAKAN YACOUBIAN
Journalist - Independent



ROULA NIZAR EL TABESH
Lawyer - Future Movement



DIMA MOHAMAD RACHID EL JAMALI
*University Professor
Future Movement*



BAHIA BAHAA EL DIN EL HARIRI
*Member of Parliament
Former Minister of Education
Future Movement*



STRIDA ELIAS TAWK
*Member of Parliament
Lebanese Forces*



INAYA MOHAMAD EIZZIDINE
*Pathologist - Minister of State
for Administrative Reforms -
Amal Movement*

Money and media stood in the way as additional hardships. “Women are less psychologically prepared to ask for money. They are not familiar with the notion of asking money for themselves. They don’t know what to expect after they are given financial support, what compromises they are likely to face if they take money from one person or another”. Current female ministries

She exited the audience calling for the establishment of a new secular democratic party. *“Considering that the chief of the party is always a man, the chief of a clan is always a man; only women could bring a new approach to legal, social and economic issues”* she said concluding her remarks.

WHAT IF LEHMAN BROTHER HAD BEEN LEHMAN SISTERS ?

“When women are called to action in times of turbulence, it is often on account of their composure, sense of responsibility and great pragmatism in delicate situations”.

This is a famous line uttered by Christine Lagarde in response to a journalist who asked her about the strength of women in times of crisis. The former head of the International Monetary Fund and newly appointed president of the European Central Bank, replied that if Lehman Brothers, which went bankrupt in 2008 and caused the collapse of financial markets, had called itself Lehman Sisters, the world might well look a lot different today.

Audur Capital, an Icelandic private equity fund wholly managed by women, is the only such fund to have made it through the global financial crisis of 2007-08 caused by Lehman's bankruptcy filing, without a hitch. And in February 2009, Iceland's citizens chose a woman, Johanna Sigurdardottir, as prime minister in the midst of the country's financial crisis.



Madame Lagarde also stated that significant measures had been taken to fix the financial system, although more work was still required, particularly on gender diversity. Greater diversity always sharpens thinking, reducing the potential for groupthink. This very diversity also leads to more prudence, and less of reckless decision-making that provoked the crisis. While Madame Lagarde was referring to the financial system, her underlying messages would make sense in the Lebanese economic context too.

Christine Lagarde

An economy dominated by men influence and their rules of engagement that helped to create an environment in which women continue to be excluded from their community development at both social and economic level.

The promising news is that a governmental body, the newly established [Ministry for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth](#), is tasked with boosting the economic environment.

Lebanon real GDP in 2018 is estimated to have grown by only 0.2 percent, reflecting a deceleration in economic activity linked to policy-based tightening of liquidity.

In 2018, the unemployment rate in Lebanon was at approximately 6.17 percent. Youth unemployment rate was at 17.36 percent.

Female entrepreneurship in Lebanon is still relatively low and the majority of women-owned businesses in the country operate in the informal sector, making it more difficult for women to access formal finance from banks.

As explained during the panel by the second speaker Dr. Samar Boulos, the objective of the new Ministry is to support the sustainable development through the socio and economic empowerment of women and youth suffering from less and limited opportunities.

Dr Boulos, who is an advisor of the Ministry and General Manager of Safadi Foundation, spelled out the ministry strategic planning based on 4 main pillars:



Samar Boulos

1 Enabling environment: it ensures the social and economic rights of women and youth through a just legal framework of laws and regulations.

2 Skills for the market: it tackles the problems related to the lack of skills needed to compete in the job market. It develops programs and supportive mechanisms to enhance job creation opportunities and access to employment for women and youth in response to market needs. The skills are both technical and soft like self-confidence building, problem solving approach. According to Dr Boulos, many people lack soft skills that make the difference such as critical thinking, how to write a business plan, and are not risks prone, favoring security guaranteed by stable professional occupation over exploring new rewarding opportunities.

3) Expanding entrepreneurship: it enhances opportunities for women - led and youth led MSME (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises), MSE (Micro and Small Enterprises) and start-ups to sustain and grow.

4) Partnering for success: strengthening of civil society, public and public sector stakeholders through jobs creation initiatives, decent work, equal pay, reasonable accommodation, CSR, impact investing.

“There is plenty of data, economic trends, information about opportunities, training courses, tenders, public calls, but few people have access to them”. Samar Boulos

The post panel discussions contributed to make emerge other kind of challenges women face such as the **ability to travel and the role of reskilling**.

The issue regarding safety is paramount. In certain areas women do not feel safe in the commune between their home and their workplace. Women face disrespectful behaviour as they commute and endure physical abuse in the office.



Training and acquiring new skills is easier said than done. After the typical 9 to 5 working day, women return home to begin their second unpaid shift: taking care of family and house affairs. The 3rd shift is likely to be dedicated to reskilling, which is the time dedicated to acquiring and mastering new skills. The time required varies: It may take a full week, a month, it can be done in the evenings or during weekends.

When the reskilling meets a conflict of time with the second shift, many women tend to favor the home affairs. Such structure and cultural barriers are not easy to overcome. The reskilling solution can not be a solution at face value unless we make it work around the ways their life work. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural structures.

FROM RESKILLING TO MENTORING.

Takeaways from the mentoring LEAD Programme Lebanon



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

There are too few women involved in local councils and similar bodies. Those who are active often have insufficient knowledge or experience to contribute at a professional level in relevant areas, for instance in setting up municipal budgets, rather than just in the fields typically assigned to them, such as education and health care.

Within the **BMZ** (The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) Special Initiative for “Stability and Development in the Middle East and North Africa” , the **GIZ** (German development agency that provides services in the field of international development cooperation) regional programme “Strengthening Women in Decision Making in the Middle East (LEAD) aims to achieve a more balanced share of male and female citizens particularly in the area of political participation and decision making in selected communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

Within the framework of the LEAD programme, a regional “**Mentoring Project**” was launched in August 2018 in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. The project was developed and implemented according to the needs of the respective countries while **focusing on how mentoring can contribute to gender equality in political participation.**

Women in politics struggle with personal and structural challenges. Also, they often lack access to powerful networks. Therefore, the Mentoring Project did not only focus on empowerment, but also on structural changes and networking.

In the workshop **Mentorship in Political Context as model run by GIZ LEAD**, Lama Zeinoun Tabet (Project Advisor LEAD- GIZ) and Federica Demicheli (Trainer in *LEAD* programme) shared the lessons and the main takeaways from the **Regional Mentoring Project experience in Lebanon**.

Key factors

Mission: the Mentoring Project of the LEAD (Strengthening Women in Decision-Making in the Middle East LEAD) programme aimed at involving women elected in municipal councils and women active in different fields (politics, public administration, media, business, civil society, etc..) in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine in collective and individual training and guidance programmes to support the municipal council members in increasing the knowledge, competence and skills necessary to activate their role in their municipal councils and local communities.

Duration: August 2018 - March 2019

Target groups:

- Mentees: current female council members seeking support to be more visible, convincing and stronger in their political work.
- Mentors: experienced female politicians of leaders in politics.

Each mentee was matched with a mentor and agreed to work together in the mentoring journey over a period of nine months.

Lebanon Cooperation partners

- NCLW - The National Commission for Lebanese Women
- RDLF- The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering
- LOST- The Lebanese organization for Studies and Training

Why is mentoring?

The aim of mentoring is to empower and qualify female political elected in local municipalities by addressing council members as mentees and match them with mentors who are women experienced in different fields from politics, to public administration, media, business, and civil society. The experienced mentors support mentees in order to enhance their role in local politics and local communities.

Through mentoring, the mentees enhance their knowledge, self-confidence, influence and strategic positioning in communities. By being matched with a mentor, each mentee is supported by an experienced woman. In addition, mentees and mentors benefit from communicating and networking with other participants.

Mentoring is an informal and strategic learning methodology that both mentee and mentor go through and experience together. The special feature of mentoring is that each mentee can decide the kind of support she needs from her mentor and they work together based on that.

As the Lebanese experience of **Regional Mentoring Project** turned out to be a challenging experience marked by turns and twists for mentors, mentees and facilitators, it presents lessons that are worth sharing to better understand the Lebanese context and draw more insightful conclusions to put in perspective with regards to the implementation of future projects.

The relevant challenges of the programme concerned the initial supply of human capital. The shortage of experienced elected available female mentors proved soon to be a problem. In order to find enough mentors, it was then decided to put forward an open call that would broaden the mentors base and open up to business women, administrators, education and media figures.



Another problem that emerged was that the mentees were expecting more technical training in the field of public administration.

As participants grew frustrated and undisciplined, it was decided to rebuild the relationship and the process between mentors and mentees based on another model.

The new phase tackled the necessity to rebuild trust among the parties explaining what mentoring is about. Indeed, while mentoring is more about personal development, coaching is more focus on technicalities.

Lama Zeinoun Tabet

The issue regarding society status difference between the parties came up as well. Some mentors enjoyed a higher and more privileged social and economic status than the mentees. This did put some strains on the mentees along with the fact that it is already very hard to match women belonging to different political parties and sects.

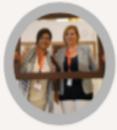
In the meantime, the recruiting efforts did not yield dividends. Five days after the call, 30 applications were received from mentors and 0 from the mentees.

The disparity prompted the launching of a new call, this time a joint call, where a mentee would apply along with a mentor of her choosing.

Mentors and mentees would fill in the application together and join the programme as a couple.

LEAD REGIONAL MENTORING PROJECT 2018-2019

Lebanon Group



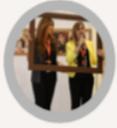
Mentor Chada Kassab
Mentee Samah Zaylaa



Mentor Layal Bou Moussa
Mentee Therese Farhat



Mentor Rebecca Abou Nader
Mentee Silvia Adem



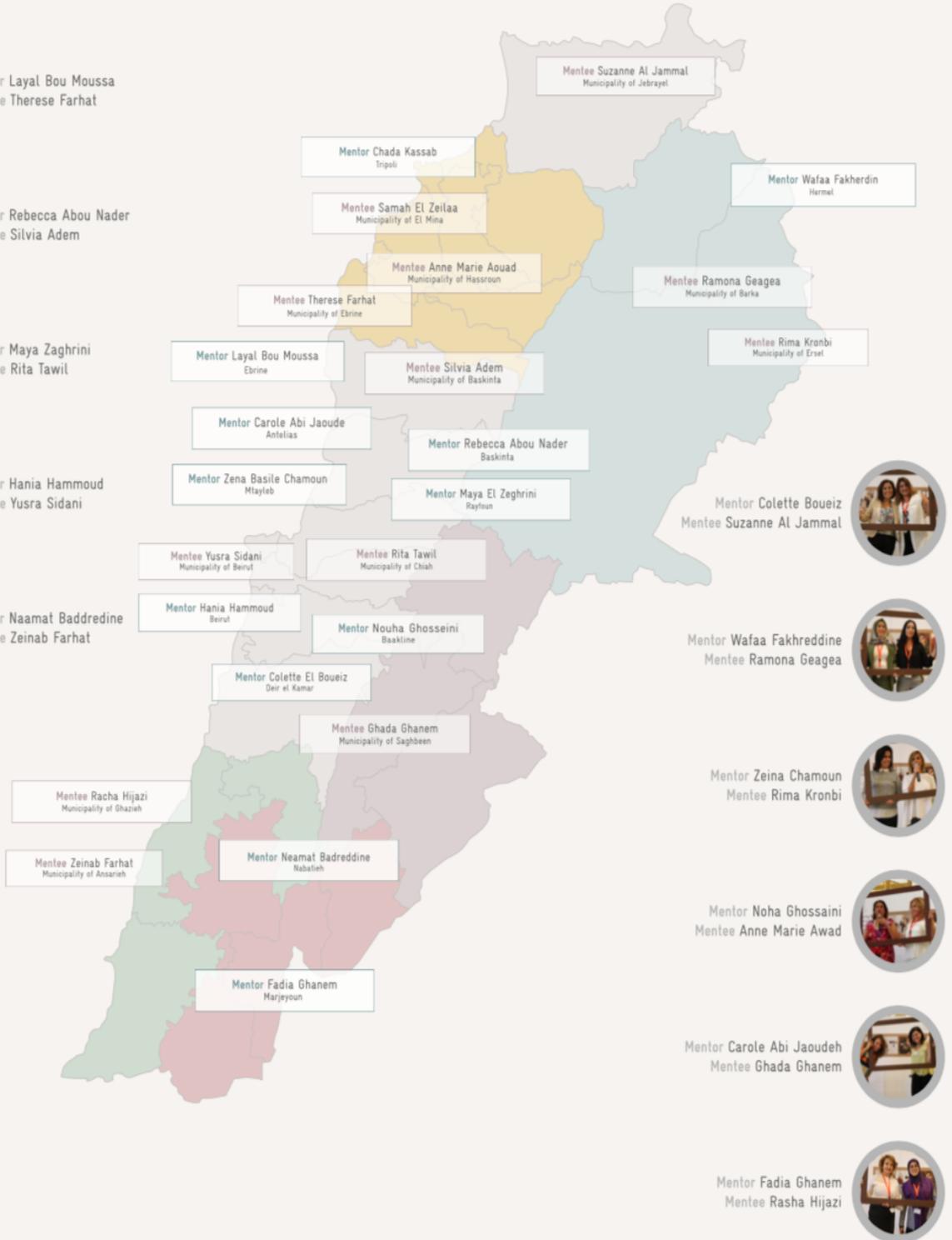
Mentor Maya Zaghrini
Mentee Rita Tawil



Mentor Hania Hammoud
Mentee Yusra Sidani



Mentor Naamat Baddredine
Mentee Zeinab Farhat



Learning process

The programme was designed expecting women to embrace what it means being responsible of their learning process and of their learning assessment. From an European perspective, it is hard to understand that, if you are a woman raised in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, no matter how educated a woman is, she is always under supervision and there is always someone who tells her how to manage her affairs. **Women are not in charge of their learning process.** therefore, it is not feasible to expect that women of 45 years -old would embrace right away a leading and personal attitude and approach toward learning.

If we challenge women about what learning means, they would not come up with a comprehensive answer.

It was also noticed how women who feel a strong and new responsibility on their shoulders, tend to go to an extra mile to prove they are capable and worthy of that task.

As it was acknowledged to the mentees, they don't have to walk the extra mile; they just need to ride the expected distance of the road such as fixing the public lighting rather than building an entire lighting factory.

Lessons learnt

According Lama and Federica, the programme revolved around the notion to learn valuable skills through interaction and activities rather than a more traditional academic method in which trainers explain while trainees take notes by default.

[Leading, guiding and learning by doing implies that mentors did not explicitly direct and instruct mentees to do things in a certain standardized way.](#) On the contrary, mentees were encouraged to choose a personalized approach that resulted in being more confident in asking the right and relevant questions, on how to share experiences in an inspiring fashion, on how solving problems with creativity and learning to prioritize the follow-up questions.

Being intellectually honest pays off. Mentees were explained from the very beginning that mentors don't hold any magic stick. Mentees were not expected to be trained quickly but were reassured that their training would bear fruits in the long run.

The mentors were not hard -skills instructors. They were more disposed to focus on the self- learning process, on building mentees' self- confidence and on encouraging mentees to experiment different tools, seek different sources of information and extra materials.



Federica Demicheli

Yet, as emphasized by the workshop lecturers, this model of learning by doing makes a lot of sense in a western environment but it may not resonate well in Lebanon.

In order to make the mentoring process more culturally tailored, it is important to be aware of the mentees' background, expectations and needs before designing a programme and setting the expectations on trainees behalf.

With this approach, the outcomes may overcome the desired expectations. As a matter of fact, most of the pairs are still in touch and they support each other endeavors. The mentees feel they can rely on the mentors help even outside the programme.

The level of trust and respect bonded them in such a way that they now know how to disagree with each other without fighting and refraining from asserting competence superiority.

Being part of a network of women who are committed and self-confident is crucial to bring about change.



The mentees' motivations do not stem from pursuing a political career. They were not politically oriented. For them it was less about politics per se and more about serving their communities. They want to be elected without being affiliated to a political party. Being a local council women is an experience they want to do once, taking on the inspiring task as role model, passing on their communities positive change as the domino chain effect moves on paving the way for other women making inroads into politics.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT WORK FIELD VISITS TAKEAWAYS

21 years ago, Ramy Lakkis left his native city of Baalbek for a brief trip to Beirut. Before taking off, he did not imagine that paying a visit to the country capital would lead to change his and other people's lives. *"In Beirut I saw a different country, a vibrant lifestyle, but especially a higher level of quality life"* said with the inspiring self-confidence of someone who walked the talk and saw firsthand the positive effects social entrepreneurship can sustain.

Indeed, the call for community service met his goodwills. He realized and embraced the notion he had to do something that would enhance people's lives. It took him 2 months to commit some friends to join in. They started to teach children how to strengthening local values. The rest is LOST, not a verb, but the acronym of the [Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training](#).

Established in 1998, LOST focuses on developing ultra-conservative and disadvantaged communities through versatile programs that build and enhance communal capacity, educate and train youth and women on matters of civic and intellectual nature, and engage them in civic affairs. The ultimate objective is creating a democratic and peaceful society where rule of law, justice, liberty and economic wellbeing are customary.

Mr Lakkis, founder and current general manager of the organization, acknowledged that women and youths are left out from the decision making process. He stressed how LOST deems important to improve the relationship with local institutions in a way that local governments are more clear about everyone's needs and are pushed to deliver better services.



Ramy Lakkis addressing the mission of LOST

Talking about women, LOST is not a gender organization. *“We have a citizen based approach”* Lakkis said. *“The key element for society change relies on the empowerment of women”*.

Another issue he shed the light on throughout his interaction with the seminar’s attendees was the **importance of the participatory and cooperative model**. *“We don’t pit women against men. We want them to cooperate. Women are more sensitive to the lack of good services”* he said. *“They have better capacity to build relationships and they are more prone to tolerance. The participation of women in the decision making process is a win- win deal that helps them and the community at large. We empower women without having a political agenda. The only the agenda is the personal development of women”*.

He also acknowledged that the divisions that afflict the Lebanese society is hindering cooperation. *“People tend to fix problems alone rather than in participatory way, turing solutions unsustainable in the long term”*.

He also exposed data that gives reasons to be optimistic. While 45% of the population (In the Baalbek governorate) is unemployed, LOST programme favored the creation of 550 jobs. Some of them were created at the Community Farm in the town of Baalbeck, 85 km northeast of Beirut. This venue marked the first of two field visits the seminar participants enjoyed during the second day of the seminar.

DATA BOX BAALBECK

90.000 people live under the poverty line.

12.000 lebanese returned to Lebanon from Sirya. They don’t have an identification.

107 public schools

60% of home don’t have access to potable water.

80% of gdp depends on agriculture

0.6 % Women representation in local institutions

Established one year ago, the community farm is a farmers’ incubation center that aims at increasing food security and livelihood of vulnerable families and small farmers, especially those led by women

and people with special needs. This support continues until small-scale agribusinesses reach a certain sustainability standards, then new vulnerable people and small farmers get enrolled.

The community farm



The community farm aims at supporting 100 vulnerable families annually in building and sustaining home-based agricultural businesses, helping 100 vulnerable small farmers in developing and maintaining their farms, and contributing to the reduction of desertification - a major threat to the agricultural sector in the region - through afforestation of about 100,000 trees annually in collaboration with local municipalities. It also aims at distributing 100 goats to vulnerable families, establishing warehouses and agricultural refrigerators to store farmers' products, and opening a market to encourage farmers promote and sell their products.

After the community farm, the group paid another visit to a sewing factory social enterprise ran under the guidance of LOST. Established 1 year ago, it teaches women how to sew.



The sewing factory in Baalbek

The factory also serves as a production and selling setting. 65 women take turns at sewing machines according to their schedule. Their pay is based on the number of days dedicated to the work.

Among the workers, the story of Rima stood out from the crowd. Rima comes from a very humble Syrian family of 7 members, and is currently residing in the city of Douris in a rented house which became their only refuge after their house was destroyed during the Syrian war.

Since her childhood, Rima was passionate about sewing and has always dreamt to learn this profession and craftsmanship. She wanted to become a fashion designer capable of designing and sewing clothes professionally. She was always looking for someone to teach her and pave the way for her to be able to design and practice sewing, so that she can rely on herself and obtain a secure income. The Syrian crisis affected her family's living situation, in which the parents were not able to generate enough income to sustain the entire family.

Therefore, Rima wanted to make a difference, in which she was counting on her competency and her ability to find a job to be able to help her parents who got their house destroyed by the war.



Rima faced many challenges at first, in which she tried very often to learn sewing with some of the local tailors, but a lot of her attempts failed, since she did not have sufficient experience.

Therefore, she had to work for no wage at first, to gain some experience. The labour market needed the experience and skills all together.

In addition, modern applied equipment along with lots of experience in the field were required by all the shops she applied at.

After learning about the sewing course being provided by LOST at the BINA center in Douris, Rima joined the course and started acquiring the needed skills. She learned many skills such as the art of sewing and design in theory and practice for three months.

Rima

By the end of the course, Rima gained both the experience and knowledge that enabled her to work with a designer in Baalbeck, and now she can rely on herself and help her family to overcome the crisis, in which she is now generating her own income. *“I never imagined I would be able to acquire enough skills to obtain a job, and I am so thankful to be able to take the first step in this profession, and to also assist my family with additional income”.*

Rima enrolled in the Competency Based Training (CBT) sewing course. This programme intended to provide vocational training in the following specialties; catering, sewing, hairdressing, make-up, tourism, agriculture, construction, tiling, painting, photography, gastronomy, sanitation, logistic services, robotics, health care, telephone repair and maintenance, electricity and electronics.

To date, 46 trainees benefitted from an internship opportunity, 47 trainees were capable of getting a job opportunity, and 12 trainees were able to start their own businesses.

WOMEN TAKING THE LEAD: namly and literally

During the visit at the farm, participants had also the chance to meet and hear some of the 320 women from the LOST network who formed an NGO called **Women Platform to Lead**. The organization aims at engaging women at the social, economic and political level. The first act the ladies undertook was to map the needs of the territory and present them along with some solutions to the administrators.

The network was formally established in January 2019 and it is currently in the process to structuring itself. *“We are a group of women who were able to cast aside our own selfishness and direct our energy and goodwills towards the community needs knowing that acting collectively gives us more strength”* said their spokesperson. She also recalled how at the beginning people in the municipality were laughing them, but after months of engagement and attempts to play a constructive role, they come to finally recognize them. *“They now come to us seeking our advices on matters related to the needs of the community”.*



Representatives of **Women Platform to Lead**

The tables are not turned yet, but the cracks in the ceiling begin to surface. The ladies of the network are now fully aware that only by engaging the counterparts their voices can be heard and their expectations can be met, especially for women who live in environments that do put women and youth issues in the far end of the political agenda.

What stood out from the ladies talks is that even if they are not elected in the next rounds of municipal elections, they stick out as motivated and self-aware women.

The awareness of being role models and a source of inspiration for other women makes them victorious even if they don't run. After all, participation means also that each person can be a multiplier of opportunities, of initiatives, of possibilities, of inspiration for other people. Their direct and indirect participation and engagement in the political process is likely to affect the next elections. Not only these women have sons and daughters who vote; they have relatives, friends, colleague who cast votes as well. **The Women Platform to Lead members are positioning themselves as the next elections' tie breakers.**

LESSON: Their trajectory is really meaningful and inspirational. It falls within the social change category. These women made it all *the way through*. They started off by attending workshops and training sessions, then they were able to do community projects, then they decided to established themselves as part of an officially recognized organization going through red tapes and regulations.

The lesson learnt is that engaging people throughout a participatory approach requires a lot of time especially coming from an environment where only the people very close to you are there to provide

support while their microcosm does not inquiry about your needs, necessities and does not value your expectations.

THE EXPERTS ' PERSPECTIVES

Behind a lunch bag there is a story of empowerment

She runs a social enterprise, she won awards, she employs women and she is only 25 years-old. Factoring in all the odds like a staggering economy, NGOs cutting budgets along with cultural barriers women face in underdeveloped areas of Lebanon, she has accomplished already a lot for her age.

For **Rodaina Bou Shaheen**, the best is yet to come; no way she will rest on her laurels. Self confidence and humble, charismatic and charming, she delivered an inspiring workshop presentation chronicling her social entrepreneurship trajectory as well as injecting stamina among the listeners.

QUOTE IN A BOX *“Social entrepreneurship is very challenging, full of uncertainties but it is a very rewarding path”*. **Rodaina Bou Shaheen**

She runs [REEF CATERING](#), a social enterprise that provides catering services for NGOs, organizations and individuals while empowering women in rural communities and other underprivileged communities.

“I started looking at my community, trying to understand its problems and what could be the solutions. One of the evident things I noticed is the unemployment status burdening women and girls. Many of them depend on their brothers or husbands, or are not allowed to go out and work. During my work in the NGOs sector, I also noticed that these organizations need supply of food for their workshops, conferences, trainings, meetings and so on”.



Rodaina Bou Shaheen

So, she came up with this simple idea: linking the NGOs food's demand with a food supply provided by women with the intermediation of REEF. This win-win scheme would allow NGOs to generate a social impact and women would make some money with on call job opportunities.

Currently she manages 25 employees on a turnover basis; 5 to 7 are regularly employed, the others are called up based on clients orders. In a nutshell: **NGOs can maximize their impacts by ordering their workshops and events meals from REEF and support women of rural communities.**



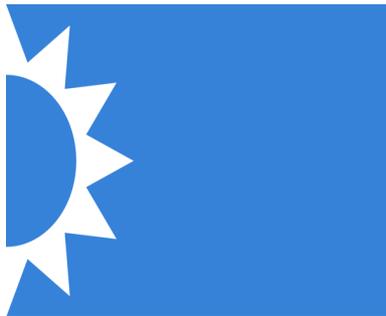
Gender and eco friendly. While empowering women of the rural communities, Reef Catering follows minimal waste and eco friendly strategies in packaging and presentation as an attempt to maximize impact and help customers maximize impact as well.

Rodaina's undertaking **proves what can happen when passion meets purpose** even in an environment in which the notion of a girl with professional aspirations is met with skepticism. **Does it sound like social enterprise? The answer is self-evident.**

Being a woman in a war zone is less dangerous than being a woman in politics

There are some women tasked with various responsibilities in the Future Movement party. They face various obstacles to get to the powerful positions but the women presence in the party is gaining traction.

Mirna Mneimneh introduced herself and her workshop *“Enabling structures on political parties that foster women participation”* with an optimistic realism.



Future Movement was founded by late PM Rafik Al Hariri in the mid-1990s. After Al Hariri's assassination in 2005, his son, Saad Al Hariri took over the leadership of the movement, which was officially registered in August 2007 and announced in April 2009 as a non- sectarian party that includes a sectarian diversity in its leadership but is more popular among Sunni. It won 21 out of 128 parliamentary seats in the last general elections.

As insider of the Future Movement party, she is indeed the party political bureau member and head of diplomatic affairs division of the party, she is best positioned to acknowledging the inner workings of the Future Movement in relation to the current presence and future role of women in it. She also addressed the main constraints that do not enable women to get ahead and fill the top positions within the Lebanese parties in general.

-
- **Lebanon granted women the right to run and vote in 1951, 20 years before Switzerland.**
- **The first Lebanon women to be elected was Myrna Emile Bustani in 1976.**

With regards to the Future Movement, the party has a women’s wing. The head of the wing is also the president of the executive office. In the executive committee there only 2 women. Mirna is one of them. She conceded that when there only 2 women over 66 people in the committee, their voices are not easily heard. The political bureau of her party counts 7 women.



Mirna Mneimneh

Women in the party though, are not appointed as party's representatives over territorial areas. The party assigns women certain "issues"; in other words, they handle files on behalf of the party on certain topics like sport, professions, education, media coordination.

"Western style training is not beneficial for Lebanese women. They are not culturally customised on the Lebanon's socio and political dimensions" **Mirna Mneimneh**

During the last elections, The Future Movement party won 3 pm out of 4 candidates. *"After the seats are won, the party should have pushed hard to have their female members of the Parliament in positions of political importance such as the head of some committees, spokesperson, or head of the coalition / block"* she said. According to Dr **Mneimneh** remaining just an MP throughout the legislature should not be an option anymore. She also said that the number of elected women as MP is irrelevant. *"The real change happens when women occupy powerful positions within the parties"*.

"54% of the students who completed higher education are women. Higher education should translate into higher changes and higher demands But this is not the case in Lebanon." **Mirna Mneimneh**

Regarding the main constraints that hinder women to climb the party ladder, she recognized the following ones.

- 1) **Lack of equal opportunities** to run due to the fact that not all parties have implemented internal quota.
- 2) **Strategies.** Parties don't prioritize women issues. Indeed, parties don't have a women wing in their organisation chart.
- 3) **Media.** Party don't champion women issues in the media and, parties don't hire women to be the organization's spokesperson.
- 4) **No supporting environment.** Public opinion is not engaged in political talks. People tend to consider talking about politics a waste of time.
- 5) **Changing the law in not enough.** Women will not flock to any party even if the rules of engagement will change. It is more a cultural issue.

Mirna finished her presentation recognizing and praising the role of NGO. *"Civil society is very active. Thanks to the NGOs resilience, political parties in Lebanon were obliged to include women candidates"*.

Gender due diligence

How organizations, especially local institutions, can become gender complaint ?

Rita Chemaly offered a comprehensive explanation in the “Participatory Gender Audit” workshop in which she chronicled the work and the underlying methodology employed by the [National Commission for Lebanese Women](#) (NCLW).

The NCLW is an official institution affiliated to the Presidency of the Council of Minister that aims at empowering women and ensuring gender equality in the social, political, economic and legal sphere. Established in 1998 , it is consulting the government, national councils and institutions on all gender-based issues and on the development of strategies related to gender equality.



Rita Chemaly

As put in context by Dr Chemaly, who is a political science author, analyst & activist in human rights & political fields, *“NCLW fights women discrimination. Men and women don’t enjoy the same rights. Children custody, divorce laws change according to the religious sects. Lebanon does not have a civic law that would guarantee an equality status and the same rights between men and women. We are trying to amend the laws and also instill change within institutions”*.

NCLW main objectives are to:

- Implement gender mainstreaming in public administrations through actions and mechanisms enforcing and institutionalizing Gender Focal Points' (GFPs) network in Lebanese public administrations and institutions;
- Oversee the implementation of the goals of international instruments and conventions Lebanon has ratified;
- Create a knowledge database that will enable various stakeholders to monitor the progress and challenges of advancing gender equality and women's human rights in Lebanon.
- Foster networking and cooperation on issues related to gender mainstreaming between Lebanese non-governmental institutions and public institutions.
- Encourage the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices related to women issues on different levels through NCLW's strong partnerships with International local and regional organizations and partners to promote women's and gender advancement;

In order to affect the change needed to further women advancement and participation in politics and business, the NCLW carries out participatory gender audits at municipality level. NCLW is auditing also NGOs to discover if they are gender aware. It is checking imbalances of gender in the board and within the staff. The scope of the audit touches the political parties as well.

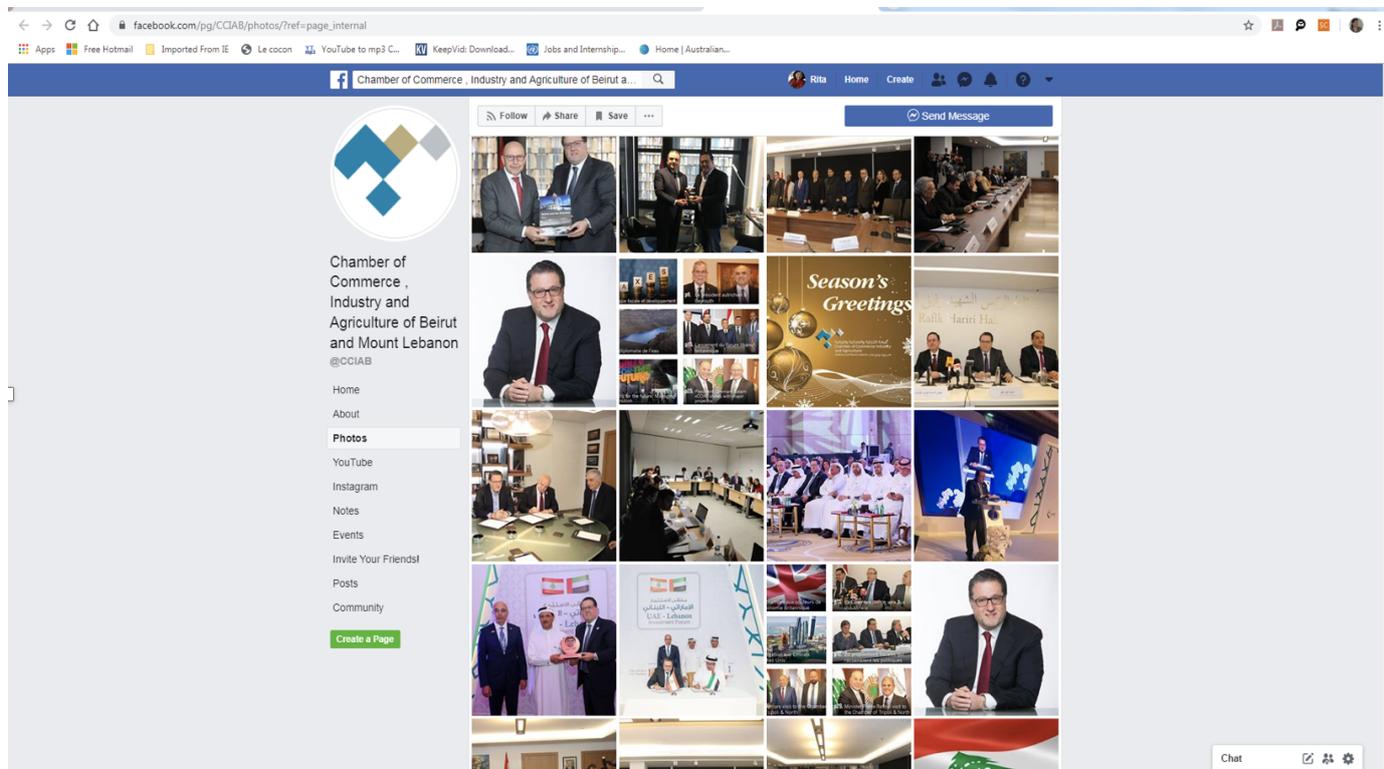
Here below the main takeaways of the workshops .

What is a PGA? It stands for **Participatory Gender Audit**. It is an auditing process that checks if the working environment is gender friendly and gender transformative. While gender friendly means that an organization accepts everyone regarding the gender, gender transformative refers to the capacity to push the boundaries to demand new rules of engagement for everyone.

What method does it adhere to ? PGA adopts a participatory process. It invites the people (employers, employees, partners on different scale) who work in an organization to participate in reflecting about gender mainstreaming issues. **PGA is carried out by a facilitation team that fosters dialogue inside an organisation** in order to come up with a report mapping the organization inner workings as well as highlighting recommendations. The report is produced and presented in partnership with the organization's employees.

What are the areas of disparity ? Equal pay, getting promotions, paid vacation and issues related to how the organization ideas respond to the needs and expectations of women and men; how and if the same incidents are addressed equally between men and women; attitudes and behaviours as if male bosses address women in a patronising way; to what extent are gender equality issues mainstreamed in the organization's internal and external communications and if there are enough people in the HR and if they are gender trained.

Does it look a gender inclusive organization?



What is audited?

- Job levels
- Organigram
- Temporary or permanent positions
- Part time or full-time positions by age
- Website, flyers, brochures, publications, social media
- Budget for activities
- Rules/regulations for holidays/leaves
- Pay gap
- Policy against harassment (do all staff know about it)
- Training sessions
- Promotion
- Programs details (beneficiaries, aim and objectives)
- Code of conduct
- Language used in official documents
- Kindergarten /nurseries

Where do the changes apply ?

- Attitudes, behavior (long- term change recommendations)
- Rules, regulations (short- term change recommendations)

Why it is call participatory ? As explained by Dr. Chemaly, the nature of the PGA team is not to persecute an organization's rule of engagement, its participation culture and policies.

First and foremost, the gender audit is carried out in partnership between a unit chosen by the organization and the NCLW team. **NCLW is not the effective agent of change. The changes are taking roots from and within the organization.**

NCLW helps organizations to explore their components and dimensions and to make emerge what are the regulations, attitudes, norms and behaviors that hinder women's rights.

The ultimate goal is to lay the foundations to further a cultural transformation of the organization from within. As NCLW teams act within clear boundaries and the don't patronize organizations on what to do next, the organizations themselves are ultimately responsible with drawing their own conclusions and elaborating their own solutions.

The 30% representation factor

A further account regarding the resistance Lebanese women meet when claiming their political rights, was the focus of **Mr Ramzi El Haji's** workshop **“Advocating for Women’s Political Participation”**. Trainer and consultant for [Loubnaniyoun](#), he identified various issues and dynamics women suffer from:

- The Lebanese political system is a patriarchal system, with no consideration or importance for the value of the role of women, especially at the political level.
- Women engagement in politics is almost absent.
- Political parties are governing the action course of politics with no collaboration between them to the greater good of local communities.
- Women enjoy little representation in the political process, and that poisons the democratic environment at large.
- According to academic studies, a country with a female representation percentages below 30% indicates that women cannot form a decisive or influential decision-making bloc. The representation for women in 2013 was estimated to be around 3%.
- TV stations refrain from giving women airtime to discuss political opinions or participate/lead political debate sessions.
- Throughout the years, women have had little to no engagement in politics, clearly evident by the numbers displayed during elections. For example, in 2004, women nominations to municipality elections constituted only 2% of total candidates, over a decade later, in 2016, the number increased to a rough 5.6%.

Loubnaniyoun info

Its goal is to make Lebanon a better place to live in by supporting the establishment of a free, responsible and knowledgeable society. Its projects tackle humanitarian and social aspects ranging from economic, educational, environmental, women’s and children’s rights, elderly, people with special needs, community welfare, health care services, urgent social problems and sustainable development.



Participants engaged in a discussion in which they voiced their perplexities about the meaning of the word “empowerment” arguing that some women are satisfied with being a member of a community, but don’t need to be empowered any further. Another perplexity that has emerged is connected to what effect Loubnaniyoun likely involvement would have on women if the support provided is not sustained by a follow -up strategy. A prevailing concern also acknowledges that calling and fighting for women rights may result in an useless act if the system in place is not structured to uphold those rights.

Ramzi El Haji

A more sustainable and rational approach would be to organize trainings sessions in which men would be exposed to data and experiences proving how empowering women would result in an economical advantage for the entire household.

EXPERIENCES FROM THE SEMINARS' ATTENDEES

As the end of seminar drew near, some of the attendees engaged the participants in a best practices sharing session.

Nahla El Shall, a business trainer at [IECD Egypt](#), a French NGO developing vocational training for youth and basic management training for micro & small businesses, recalled the challenge she had faced during a class she was teaching and how she managed to find a gender friendly win-win solution.

Some women who signed up for her class showed up with their babies; their presence turned out to be a burden for the trainees and the trainer. The latter had no choice but to exclude the presence of the babies even if it meant to forbid women from accessing the venue in case they did not comply with the rule. The following class experienced a big decline among the participants. To rectify the situation, Dr El Shall came up with a proposal: she asked the participants to chip in with little money to be spent on a baby-sitter who would take care of the participants' children. This scheme would facilitate the mothers to attend the class and keep everyone's focus and participation high.



Nahla El Shal

As explained by Dr. El SHall, there are 3 levels of gender integration.

1)**Gender neutral**, which implies to look at men and women with the same lents, avoiding to distinguish roles and policies according to people's sex or gender.

2)**Gender sensitive**, when we take in consideration gender differences. This implies the modification of behavior by raising awareness of gender equality concerns.

3 **Gender transformative**. It about changing behavior. It aims for an alternative vision for women and girls by tackling the underlying causes of gender inequality - social norms, attitudes, beliefs and patriarchal value systems – that create structural power imbalances between the sexes.

The gender sensitive model Dr. El SHall chose, turned out to be the most appropriate approach in that situation.

Yvonne Filed steered the audience of her workshop “Mali enterprising leaders programme, supporting black and minority ethnic community” back to Europe.

Managing Director and founder of The Ubele Initiative, she spoke about the mission of the Ubele Story, the Mali Enterprising Leaders Pilot and the Wolves Horticultural Pilot.

She recalled how in 2010 she was worried about the sustainability of black communities in Great Britain. Community leaders were getting old and elderly chose to remain in Britain. Young people, on the other hand, needed some kind of new interventions that the old leadership was not able to provide. So, something new had to be done. The priorities included a new generation of leadership and community spaces that could be sustainable through community entrepreneurship.

Yvonne Filed



Yet, to achieve such goals, the support of the [The Ubele Initiative](#) was paramount. Founded in 2014, the Ubele Initiative is a social enterprise with a mission to contribute to the sustainability of the African Diaspora community. Through social leadership development, community enterprise and social action, it incubates projects across the UK.

Ubele in Swahili means ‘The Future’. The organization stands out for being inter-generational. Its community building initiative aims to increase community capacity

to lead, and create innovative and entrepreneurial **Yvonne Filed** social responses.

Its strategic objectives are:

1. Building community resilience and sustainability

2. Knowledge generation and learning
3. Strategic partnerships which influence policy and practice
4. Global diaspora connections

Among the projects Ubele runs, Dr Young singled out the **Mali Enterprising Leader (MEL)** and **The Wolves Lane Horticultural Centre** .

MEL is the first community business pilot project which seeks to create community business opportunities intergenerationally within BAME (black, asian, and minority ethnic) community organisations in the UK.

The project targeted five Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community organizations with spaces or clear aspirations to secure a space, offering them organizational capacity assessments, tailor made support and advice as well as local, national and international networking opportunities.

The project pilot spanned from February 2017 to July 2018.



Ubele was also the lead organisation in a successful grant application of £14,898 to Power to Change's Bright Ideas fund to support the development of Wolves Lane as a community business. [The Wolves Lane Horticultural Centre](#), located in Haringey (North London) is a hub of sustainable food enterprises and educators set on a 3.5 acre site. It grows organic produce, runs a local veg box scheme, teaches food growing skills, incubates start-ups and provides space for events. In Haringey, almost two-thirds of the population are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and over 100 languages are spoken in the borough. Wolves Lane's public survey in 2017 demonstrated that the hub needed to do more to engage with the ethnically diverse groups in their surrounding

community.

Wolves Lane Horticultural Centre

In response, Wolves Lane is aiming to create a food growing hub and market that engages with this diverse population. Already, the hub has attracted volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds and has ambitions to deliver education projects on horticulture and healthy eating.

Through its urban growing projects, education and training and sustainable energy practices, Wolves Lane is educating and developing a stronger public awareness of how communities can reduce their impact on the natural environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The enthusiastic level of engagement and participation displayed by the seminar’s attendees and the post-seminar spontaneous discussions about new projects and potential partnerships, spoke volumes of the great deal of interest about the topic and the genuine desire to turn words into deeds.

Empowered by best practices, equipped with pragmatic optimism and motivated by what is at stake in Lebanon and in neighbouring countries, the attendees voiced their eagerness to play a bigger role in support of Lebanese women causes by expanding the scope of their actions and initiatives in other fields such as the unions, media, academia and diplomacy.

The seminar has laid the foundations upon which it will be possible to design and implement new programmes or scaling up existing projects through the expertise and human capital of the seminar participants.



The inspiring workshop run by Rodaina Bou Shaheen left a mark and made the attendees wonder how much more positive effective changes she could achieve if she had counted on the support of social entrepreneurship stakeholders and organizations alike.

Yet, the most noteworthy factor of the seminar was witnessing first-hand the groundbreaking work individuals like Rodaina Bou Shaheen and organizations like LOST and NCLW are carrying through in such complicated environments against so many odds and in some cases by counting only on their own capabilities, resources and good will.

Their achievements and course of actions are not just remarkable but also revealing: they prove that the narrative that paints the Lebanese reality as complex and deterring for the strides of Lebanese women, shadows how **the scope of grassroots organizations' achievements can exceed the imagination and convert defeatists into activists.**

The seminar revealed and showcased successful training programs, groundbreaking initiatives, a suitable methodology and inspiring experiences that are making a difference at local level.

That difference could be expanded and enhanced through new creative initiatives and by the human capital displayed by the seminar attendees.

SEMINAR TAKEAWAYS: OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED AND MASTERED

1. Acknowledgments and understanding about the social, economic, sectarian, cultural factors that prevent Lebanese women to make inroads into politics and entrepreneurship.
2. Data and insights about the political context in Lebanon with a focus on women presence in the institutions and in the parties and how the notion of political representation resonates in the Lebanese electorate.
3. Understanding about the “participatory dimension” and how it can result in social change. Change will not come about by being involved in politics or by joining a political party. Real change arises from groups of people coming together challenging norms and established behaviours.
4. The strive for social change is not a linear process but is something that involves contractions, defeats, resistance and setbacks along the way.
5. Lebanese women led movements are in forment. They don't just work to increase the opportunities and even the playing field in economy and politics. They are tackling underlying mindsets and challenging conventional norms.
6. The main constraints that hinder women to climb political parties ladders.
7. Training and reskilling should be culturally and individually tailored.
8. Lebanese women led movements do not enjoy access in the media. NGOs should leverage their influence and connections to lobby women issues in the media and to train women to deal with the media in a professional and compelling way.
9. Lebanese women are not a homogeneous group. Depending on whether women are young or older, educated or uneducated, live in rural or urban areas, they have very different life experiences that lead to different priorities and needs. Therefore, a comprehensive mapping and understanding of the various contexts women live in is needed before pitching and designing projects.
10. Lebanese social entrepreneurs could accomplish more if had more support and resources.
11. Identity is not a self contained unit. It is a relationship between people and history, people and community, people and institutions. We do not understand the outcomes without understanding how they came about.
12. Participating is not enough. Having a job in the private sector or securing a seat in the local municipality represents one side of the coin. The other side refers to how a woman feels in that environment: does she feel her contributions are valued? Do her colleagues make her feel she belongs to the team? Is she in a position where she feels she can bring the best of herself?
13. Mentoring strategies and methodology fitting the Lebanese intercultural learning and social contexts.
14. How professionally executed gender audit initiatives can lead to gender equality within organizations.

15. First-hand overview of the groundbreaking projects ran by LOST in favour of women participation in entrepreneurship and how they manage to enhance young Lebanese and Syrian women emancipation through education and skilling.



Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport. The Erasmus+ UK National Agency is a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK.

In cooperation with:



