



Al Murunah+ Evaluation: Baseline Report

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The evaluation team

Alix Clark	Team Leader, Social Development Direct
Erin Stern	GBV Evaluation Expert, Social Development Direct
Hana Asfour	Evaluation Expert, Social Dynamics Research Group
Nilanjana Bhattacharjee	Evaluation Specialist, Social Development Direct
Valeria Miglio	Evaluation Specialist, Social Development Direct
Inez Ksiazek	Safeguarding Expert, Social Development Direct
Sari Kassis	National Researcher (Palestine), Social Dynamics Research Group
Sabreen AbdulRahman	National Researcher (Palestine and Jordan), Social Dynamics Research Group
Hatem Al Hmoud	National Researcher (Jordan), Social Dynamics Research Group
Rita Jarrous	National Researcher (Lebanon), Social Dynamics Research Group
Hassan Osmani	National Researcher (Lebanon), Social Dynamics Research Group
Erika Fraser	Quality Assurer, Social Development Direct
Gemma Ferguson	Quality Assurer, Social Development Direct
Jacob Pigg	Programme Manager, Social Development Direct
Ella Wong	Copy Editor, Social Development Direct

Acronyms

EA\$E	Economic and Social Empowerment
EQ	Evaluation Question
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
RNBWS	Resilient Nature-Based Water Solutions
SDDirect	Social Development Direct
SDR	Social Dynamics Research Group
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
WHO	World Health Organisation
WRO	Women's Rights Organisation

Glossary

Agricultural Water Management	Use of water in a way that provides crops and livestock the amount of water they need, enhances productivity, and conserves natural resources for the benefit of downstream users and ecosystem services. ¹
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (e.g. gender) differences between men and women. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private. ²
Household resilience	For the purpose of the AI Murunah+ project and this evaluation, we define 'household resilience' as a household's capacity to withstand, adapt to and recover from climate shocks (particularly water scarcity) that have the potential to lead to financial crises.
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)	Intimate partner violence refers to behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or emotional harm. It includes acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. ³
Nature-Based Solutions for Water	Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human wellbeing and biodiversity benefits, focusing specifically on addressing water resource challenges. ⁴
Resilient Nature-Based Water Solutions (RNBWS)	RNBWS are spatially integrated combinations of nature-based solutions for water and agricultural water management. They encompass innovative agro-ecological and ecological water management techniques, coupled with social and market mechanisms that support long-term sustainability. ⁵
Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and	An umbrella term for several different types of behaviours. SEAH is rooted in power imbalances and often linked to inequality, notably gender equality. The individual terms within SEAH are commonly defined as:

Harassment
(SEAH)

- **Sexual exploitation** – any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
- **Sexual abuse** – the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions (including sexual assault, rape, molestation, and other forms of non-consensual sexual activity).
- **Sexual harassment** – a range of unacceptable and unwelcome behaviours and practices of a sexual nature that may include, but are not limited to, sexual suggestions or demands, requests for 'sexual favours', sexual, verbal or physical conduct, or gestures that are or might reasonably be perceived as offensive or humiliating.⁶

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Executive summary

Project context

This is a baseline evaluation for Al Murunah+ project, which consists of four gender transformative pilots in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. The project was commissioned by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and implemented in partnership with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The project is designed to address how gender inequality and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)—particularly emotional and economic violence—limit women’s participation in agri-business and household resilience. By integrating gender transformative and economic empowerment approaches into climate resilience activities, Al Murunah+ aims to shift harmful norms, improve the distribution of household and community decision-making power, and enable women to adopt climate-smart agricultural solutions that strengthen household resilience to climate shocks.

To achieve this, Al Murunah+ combines two streams of gender transformative work with economic interventions. Couples participate in the Economic and Social Empowerment (EA\$E) curriculum, which aims to enhance women’s economic empowerment and promote more gender equitable relationships within households. Opinion leaders also receive tailored training to foster gender-responsive management of water systems, agricultural cooperatives and local markets. These activities are complemented by targeted economic support for women, such as business skills training, technical assistance in climate-smart agriculture, improved access to resources and toolkits, and procurement of productive assets, to increase access to sustainable climate-smart income opportunities. Together, these layered interventions aim to reduce IPV, expand women’s economic agency, and contribute to longer-term resilience of households. There are two successive cohorts of couples that participate in EA\$E and the economic intervention, completing the EA\$E curriculum prior to receiving the economic intervention.

Purpose, objectives and scope

The purpose of this evaluation is to establish the baseline conditions of households enrolled in the Al Murunah+ project. The findings will serve as a reference point for the endline evaluation to track progress against the project’s intended outcomes. The baseline also aims to inform implementation of the project across later cohorts of participating households. This baseline evaluation took place between June 2025 and January 2026. It will be followed by an endline

evaluation, expected to take place between May and October 2026. The objectives of this baseline evaluation are:

- To establish an understanding of the current gender attitudes, norms and behaviours (including IPV) at an individual, household and leadership level (referring specifically to governance structures within agri-business, market chains and water associations).
- To assess current levels of women's participation in financial decision-making in the home, and access to sustainable livelihoods within farming systems or value chains.
- To explore the interlinkages between household resilience and gender inequitable attitudes and norms (within households and amongst community leaders), IPV and women's ability to work and manage their resources.

The scope of the evaluation covers three of the four countries in the project; Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. The evaluation did not take place in Egypt as the project's security clearance did not allow for data collection by foreign agencies. To ensure timely implementation of the evaluation it was decided that the team should proceed rather than explore security clearance options. The evaluation covers both the gender transformative and economic components of the project and their full implementation timeline.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation aims to answer four main evaluation questions (EQs):

- EQ1. To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to positive changes in gender norms, roles and practices within households?
- EQ2. To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to creating more gender equitable leadership and decision-making structures?
- EQ3. To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project strengthened women's economic empowerment and climate-smart agriculture skills, and how has this contributed to household resilience?
- EQ4. What are the internal and external factors that have enabled and hindered progress towards the project's intended outcomes across the four pilot countries? Is there evidence to suggest that these results are sustainable?

Methodology and limitations

The baseline evaluation used a participatory qualitative methodology across three phases:

1. **Desk review** covered 87 project documents and external literature.

2. **Primary data collection** by country teams of national researchers in Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon who conducted same-sex interviews or workshops with couples, opinion leaders and key stakeholders. In total, the evaluation included 210 individual interviews with 105 couples, 6 workshops with 34 opinion leaders, 12 workshops with 97 women and 47 men participating in EA\$E and economic activities, and 13 stakeholder interviews.
3. **Synthesis:** All interviews were transcribed, translated and analysed thematically in Dedoose. The analysis entailed triangulation of data, participatory synthesis workshops, and validation meetings with stakeholders.

The baseline evaluation faced several limitations related to sampling, data availability and contextual constraints. Registration lists for couples sampled contained limited demographic information, making it difficult to ensure a diverse sample. Sensitivities around privacy and family honour also limited participants' willingness to discuss IPV or relationship dynamics, particularly among men, creating discrepancies between partners' accounts. The design of the opinion leaders and economic interventions were still under development at the time of the baseline, leaving little documentation to inform contextualisation or tools. Regional instability, border closures and active conflict (especially in Palestine) disrupted timelines and restricted sample expansion, while widespread poverty, insecurity and violence made it difficult for participants to focus on topics such as household resilience and climate-smart practices.

Key findings

The findings summarised below describe the state of gender norms and household practices, women's participation in leadership structures, and household resilience prior to the implementation of the project.

Gender norms, role and practices (EQ 1)

Summary:

- Household roles were unequally distributed, with women generally responsible for domestic and caregiving spheres, including when engaged in paid work.
- Poor conflict resolution mechanisms, emotional and economic IPV were prevalent across pilot countries.
- Help-seeking was limited by norms of marital privacy and family honour.

What are the attitudes, roles and practices related to gender equality among couples engaged in the EA\$E curriculum? (EQ 1.1)

Baseline findings indicate that women bear near-total responsibility for the domestic and caregiving spheres while men exercise final authority as providers. While women's economic

contributions are increasingly recognised as essential due to regional financial hardships, this has not resulted in a redistribution of domestic labour; instead, men's domestic participation remains limited to "helping" or performing physically demanding tasks to avoid social stigma. Despite emerging dissatisfaction among women regarding unequal care burdens and bounded decision-making power, these traditional hierarchies are largely socialised as natural or divinely ordained. This normalisation is actively reproduced intergenerationally, as parents continue to socialise sons as future providers and daughters as future caregivers.

What is the existing nature of communication, conflict resolution practices and experiences of economic and emotional IPV among couples to be engaged in the EA\$E curriculum? (EQ 1.2)

While couples value "respectful communication," these interactions are heavily mediated by expectations for women to de-escalate male anger and "self-silence" to preserve stability.

Conflict is predominantly driven by economic insecurity and financial pressure, as well as stresses related to childcare, family interferences, and gendered expectations regarding authority and mobility. Emotional and economic IPV—including the appropriation of assets and restrictions on women's mobility or employment—are frequently normalised as legitimate expressions of male protection and authority. While physical IPV is broadly condemned in principle, it remains a persistent reality, often rationalised as men's response to external stress or female "disobedience."

Help-seeking for conflict and IPV is severely restricted by deep-seated norms of marital privacy and family honour, as well as wider barriers including women's economic dependency and fear of losing custody of their children. Consequently, family mediation remains the most common form of support accessed. Formal support systems are rarely engaged and are occasionally used as leverage within relationships rather than as pathways to protection.

Leadership and decision-making structures (EQ 2)

Summary:

- Although opinion leaders generally support gender equality, women's rights in practice are often limited by discriminatory practices and existing power hierarchies. Women face several barriers to participating in leadership and decision-making structures.
- Decision-making structures and workplaces within farming systems and value chains are characterised by inequitable leadership norms, weak labour protections, and unfair wages.

Amongst opinion leaders, what are the current levels of gender equitable knowledge, attitudes and practices? (EQ 2.1)

Although opinion leaders generally support gender equality, there is a consistent gap between equality 'on paper' and women's lived realities. While formal rules rarely prohibited

women's participation, leadership structures, informal nomination networks and land ownership requirements continued to privilege men over women. Male opinion leaders also frequently framed equality as 'fairness' based on differentiated roles, often justifying men's authority through references to physical capacity, experience or responsibility. In contrast, female opinion leaders were more likely to adopt gender transformative perspectives and to translate their views into concrete actions. On the other hand, male opinion leaders tended to demonstrate conditional or passive forms of engagement that preserved existing power hierarchies, particularly in formal leadership spaces.

How equitable are leadership structures and business environments for women within targeted farming systems and value chains? (EQ 2.2)

Leadership structures and workplaces within farming systems and value chains remained only partially inclusive of women., even as women's economic participation in agriculture and community structures has increased, largely due to economic pressures. A consistent pattern across the countries was the distinction between women's presence and their power.

Workplaces within farming systems and value chains were widely described as weakly regulated, unevenly inclusive and often unfair to women. Occupational safety mechanisms were largely absent, and women faced both physical and reputational risks in male dominated spaces. Wage disparities and unequal employment conditions were also reported across the pilot countries. Expanding women's economic participation without addressing these structural inequities risks intensifying women's workload and exposure to exploitation rather than advancing meaningful empowerment. Overall, the findings underscore that without deliberate shifts in power relations, leadership norms and labour protections, increased participation alone is insufficient to achieve gender-equitable systems.

Women's economic empowerment, agency and climate smart agriculture skills (EQ 3)

Summary:

- Women's work in farming systems and value chains is largely confined to informal 'assistance' roles, constrained by intersecting attitudinal, organisational, and environmental barriers.
- Men hold more power than their wives in household decision-making around expenditure, sale of assets, investment and income generation.
- Severe economic and food insecurity are affecting household resilience. Gender inequitable norms further undermine household resilience by limiting women's ability to contribute to income generation and financial decision-making.

To what degree do women have access to sustainable and resilient income streams (in farming systems and value chains)? (EQ 3.1)

The majority of the female participants across Palestine and Lebanon were not in regular, paid work at the time of the baseline or for the six months prior. In Jordan, a higher proportion of women were working across a range of sectors. Jordan, a higher proportion of women were working across a range of sectors. Farming systems and value chains are dominated by men, with women's work largely confined to informal 'assistance' roles that are undervalued, unpaid or treated as an extension of domestic support rather than as economically productive labour.

There are intersecting barriers to women's work in farming systems and value chains that operate at multiple levels, ranging from individual, household, community, workspace and institutional/societal.

Table 1. Top barriers to women's work across countries (see annex for full list)

Level	Top barriers for women
Individual	Low literacy/ qualifications; no start-up capital
Household	Entrenched gender roles; care burden family interference
Community	Gossip and stigma; certain jobs seen as 'shameful'
Workplace / market	Unsafe work environments; long hours; far work sites; unequal pay
Societal ⁷	Climate stress; water scarcity; poor finance access; weak inclusion enforcement; conflict; low or unreliable wages

To what degree do women have agency and participation in financial decision-making and resource management within the household?⁸ (EQ 3.2)

Baseline findings demonstrate that women's agency in financial decision-making at a household level is constrained. Husbands or male household heads hold more power in household decision-making than their wives or female household members. Men tend to retain authority over major financial decisions, such as larger purchases (e.g. furniture, cars, livestock), sale of assets (e.g. gold, leasing land), investing and income generation activities. On the other hand, women are more likely to have agency in decisions about day-to-day spending and/or be responsible for managing a budget to meet basic household needs throughout the month. This inequality in agency over financial decisions is rooted in inequitable gender norms, whereby financial decisions are considered the purview of men. It was common across all countries to hear stories of men controlling the mobility of their wives, which further constrains women's ability to earn an income, have agency over that income or participate in the economy.

What is the evidence of and pathways through which a) addressing gender inequitable norms and attitudes (including those that contribute to IPV) and b) increasing women's agency and economic participation could contribute to household resilience longer term? (EQ 3.3)

The baseline found that households in the sample are facing economic and food insecurity.

Across each country, households face unique contextual factors that impact household resilience including climate, conflict and economic shocks. Climate-related shocks are reducing households' ability to generate income or be self-sufficient through farming or value chains. Stakeholders, participants and opinion leaders reported that water scarcity and rising temperatures are reducing the yield and viability of crop and livestock-based agriculture.

Most households were able to withstand minor shocks but lack the capacity to build resilience to protracted insecurity. Many described a strong mindset of endurance that helped them manage immediate impacts, but few had the resources or capacity needed to adapt to or recover from shocks. Most households were focused on meeting their basic needs, with limited income to plan ahead. Coping mechanisms varied, but negative coping mechanisms were more common, mainly due to a lack of resources to prepare for shocks.

Household resilience was broadly viewed as a shared responsibility, but shaped by traditional gender roles. Men were expected to provide income and protect the family during crises, while women were responsible for managing the household budget and daily needs. The baseline found evidence that gender inequitable norms undermine household resilience by limiting women's ability to contribute to income generation and financial decision-making. Single-income households are more at risk of severe impacts of shocks, and restricting women's work increases this exposure. At the same time, women are widely recognised as skilled budget managers, yet constraints on their financial decision-making reduce households' ability to manage resources efficiently in times of crisis.

Enabling and hindering factors (EQ 4)

Summary:

- Funding uncertainty has caused delays in the design and implementation of interventions and data collection activities.
- Economic shocks and regional conflict are having a significant impact on the households participating in the project and the projects implementation.
- Insecurity and economic hardship are pushing more women into paid work, but patriarchal norms still constrain economic opportunities, mobility, and help-seeking

Across the pilot countries, progress towards the project's intended outcomes is shaped by a mix of enabling and hindering factors; programmatic, institutional and contextual.

At programmatic level, the project has faced funding uncertainty and management challenges, which have caused delays in design and implementation. At the time of the baseline, the project implementing partners had limited clarity on planned opinion leader or economic interventions, and how they reflect market characteristics and existing opportunities for women. This in turn impacted participants and opinion leaders recruited into the project, resulting in female participants not engaged or interested in agriculture and opinion leaders with limited agricultural background.

At the institutional level, policy commitments to women's rights and GBV prevention have expanded in the past decade across the pilot countries, and most governments have articulated formal commitments to gender equality through national development strategies, women's empowerment plans and sectoral policies. However, inclusion policies in cooperatives and farmer groups are weakly enforced, land ownership remains male-dominated, and social networks often ease men's paths into leadership far more than women's. Transport and childcare gaps, combined with limited institutional capacity and discriminatory personal status laws, contribute to persistent implementation gaps.

At the contextual level, broader crises and shocks both constrain and create openings for women's participation. Insecurity and economic hardship, from conflict and financial crisis, are pushing more women into paid work. Despite some openings, strong patriarchal norms still confine women to domestic or home-based roles and restrict mobility and help-seeking. Climate change is lowering agricultural yields and water access, while instability in Lebanon and Palestine has sharply reduced safe, stable employment.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Men hold more power and authority within households, and across decision-making and leadership structures. Whilst women participate in household decision-making and within the agricultural workforce, their agency within leadership structures and decision-making at household or institutional level is bounded and men hold final authority.

Conclusion 2: Emotional and economic forms of IPV are prevalent but rarely recognised as violence and are largely normalised. Unlike physical violence, which is widely condemned, emotional and economic IPV are more normalised as "protection" or attributed to men's natural authority.

Conclusion 3: Restrictions to women's autonomy and mobility is a prevalent and intersecting form of emotional and economic IPV, which is used to maintain the status quo. The requirement for "permission" to move, work or socialise functions as a powerful mechanism of control that keeps women dependent on their male partners.

Conclusion 4: Structural and attitudinal barriers hamper women's access to and participation in decision-making and leadership spaces, hindering gender equitable shifts within workplaces, cooperatives and associations. The baseline evaluation found that decision-making and leadership structures are gender inequitable, with women facing significant barriers to equal participation and voice within these structures.

Conclusion 5: Women face significant barriers to accessing work at individual, household, community and structural levels, many of which are not targeted in the project design. While the project addresses some of these individual and household barriers, significant gaps persist at community, workplace and societal levels. These include restrictive social attitudes and stigma towards women working, exclusionary workplace policies and practices, and unsafe and inaccessible transport infrastructure.

Conclusion 6: There is evidence of interlinkages between women's economic empowerment and agency, and household resilience. When women's economic participation is paired with increased decision-making power and mobility, households are better equipped to navigate crises. However, unless the project successfully achieves changes in attitudes and practices across male participants, the impact of women's economic empowerment on household resilience remains precarious.

Conclusion 7: Despite the incredible strength amongst households to endure crisis, resilience at household level is low and exacerbated by multiple economic, conflict and climate shocks. Households showed remarkable emotional endurance in the face of crisis and withstand the shock. However, they are less able to adapt to or recover from shocks. Across the sample, the majority of households rely on insecure, fluctuating salaries and struggle to meet their basic household needs, leaving little ability to build adaptive capacity through saving or investing, and pushing many toward negative coping mechanisms during crises that further erode household resilience.

Conclusion 8: Climate change is not the most urgent shock affecting household resilience, but it compounds the impact. Although climate shocks are not the most immediately urgent crisis in all contexts, climate change further exacerbates urgent economic and conflict shocks. Across Palestine and Lebanon, there are major conflict-related and economic crises which are significantly impacting household resilience, relationship quality, health and psychosocial well-being. The project's current focus on climate stressors, without fully addressing wider challenges, limits its ability to respond to the complex realities that households face.

Conclusion 9: There are several significant hindering factors at programmatic, institutional and contextual level that, unless addressed, could hamper the progress of the project towards its intended outcomes. There is recognition that this is a complex social norms project with ambitious outcomes, operating in a complex and volatile environment and to a short and uncertain timeline. Whilst some programmatic hindering

factors can be addressed there are significant hindering factors in the external environment that are beyond the projects control. These include the regional conflict and the impact of ongoing uncertainty across FCDO about project level funding. This has delayed implementation, confused project design and forced rushed decision making.

Recommendations

Ensure the projects theories of change (ToCs) accounts for complex contextual factors (Conclusion 5, 8 and 9). The evaluation recommends a review of the ToC for AI Murunah+ to ensure that it adequately acknowledges contextual factors that impact implementation and households, through clear assumptions and risks.

Review the project implementation design and plans against the projects ToC (Conclusion 5, 8 and 9). Evidence from the baseline suggests that the project design is diverging from the design outlined in the ToC, particularly in relation to the economic and opinion leader pathways. We recommend reviewing project design and implementation documents against the ToC and evaluation findings to inform adaptation.

Engage extended family and community members (Conclusion 2 and 4). The attitudes amongst extended family and community members drive conflict and reinforce inequitable gender norms within households. The project could consider introducing a new module into EA\$E with couples on how to manage the influence of extended family and community attitudes, inviting extended family members to selected EA\$E sessions or introducing norms diffusion approaches, specifically targeting the wider community.

Strengthen coordination and communication channels within the project (Conclusion 9). The project experienced challenges with their coordination across IWMI, implementing partners and WROs throughout inception and early implementation. For the remainder of the implementation IWMI should review the existing programme management, communication and coordination mechanisms between IWMI and the implementing partners specifically. This would support risk management, quality adaptive design and timelines.

Strengthen the safeguarding system for project staff and participants (Conclusion 2). The evaluation received several disclosures of violence and a handful of safeguarding incidents raised by project participants. The evaluation team has fed back to IWMI the need to strengthen safeguarding protocols, processes and resources to prevent harm to project participants, community or staff.

FCDO should continue funding for the AI Murunah+ project to allow for appropriate time to address recommendations and affect change (Conclusion 9). We recommend that FCDO continue funding the AI Murunah+ project into financial year 2026/2027 to avoid causing harm to

participants due to abrupt closure. Given the complex and ambitious nature of the project, it would be recommended that efforts are made to secure longer-term funding and that FCDO draw on adaptive MEL principles for AI Murunah +.

Introduce a series of specific adjustments to future iterations of the EA\$E sessions under AI-Murunah+ (Conclusion 1, 2, 3 and 6). These include adjustments to expenditure exercises to acknowledge the severity of economic insecurity, that the curricula should not be rolled out without the economic intervention, and introducing content on managing the influence of extended family.

Introduce a series of specific adjustments to the opinion leader pathway (Conclusion 1, 4 and 5). These include a review of the registration criteria to ensure the project engages the most appropriate opinion leaders in the community and a review of the opinion leader intervention to ensure it is designed to address entrenched unequitable gender norms in male leaders.

Reassess the economic intervention to ensure it does no harm, meets women's needs, and responds to market analysis and contextual shifts (Conclusion 4, 5 and 6). These include conditional approaches to grants or prioritising funding to support women's access to cooperatives, focusing on home-based or local work, conducting a review of the inclusion criteria for women, provision of training to accompany grants and ensuring the economic activities are resilient to a range of shocks (e.g. climate, economic and conflict).

1. Introduction

This baseline evaluation of the AI Murunah+ project was commissioned by FCDO and carried out by Social Development Direct (SDDirect) as lead in partnership with Social Dynamics Research (SDR). The evaluation team worked closely with the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) at FCDO and the lead implementing organisation, IWMI.

Overview of AI Murunah+

The AI Murunah+ project was commissioned by FCDO and is led by IWMI and implemented in partnership with IUCN in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine to address how gender inequality and IPV—particularly emotional and economic violence—limit women’s participation in agri-business and household resilience. By integrating gender transformative and economic empowerment approaches into climate-resilience activities, AI Murunah+ aims to shift harmful norms, improve the distribution of household and community decision-making power, and enable women to adopt climate-smart agricultural solutions that strengthen household resilience to climate shocks. The project is outlined in more detail in Section 2.2.

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the baseline state across the households enrolled in the AI Murunah+ project. The report presents findings across Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. The evaluation did not take place in Egypt as the project's security clearance did not allow for data collection by foreign agencies. This baseline report can then be used at the project endline evaluation to measure the impact of the project against its project outcomes. This evaluation aims to inform the implementation of the project across later cohorts of households to be engaged. The evaluation report provides evidence of the interlinkages between gender inequitable norms and household resilience to climate shocks, and the endline will go on to explore the causality of these pathways and the impact of the project.

The intended audience of this baseline evaluation includes IWMI, FCDO, national implementing partners, and other stakeholders, including gender-based violence (GBV) and climate practitioners, donors and national governments that are interested in programming at the intersection between GBV prevention and climate change interventions. The final ownership and copyright of all reports developed by this evaluation rests with FCDO.

The report is structured in seven sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides the project overview and context. Section 3 presents the evaluation’s objectives, purpose and scope, and Section 4 sets out the methodology, limitations and ethical considerations. Section 5 presents findings for each evaluation question and Section 6 summarises the conclusions. Section 7 outlines the project recommendations. The report is supplemented by nine annexes provided in a separate document.

2. Project background

Summary:

The Al Murunah+ project is implemented in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt, and aims to address three interlinked constraints on household resilience:

- Climate change (specifically water scarcity) is undermining household resilience and agricultural productivity across all countries. Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine face severe water stress, due to reduced rainfall, rising temperatures, weak water infrastructure, and unsustainable land management practices. These pressures intersect with gender inequalities to heighten household-level economic precarity, which in turn increases risks of violence against women and girls.
- IPV remains widespread and underreported in the region. Weak enforcement, limited institutional capacity, and discriminatory personal status laws hinder the implementation of legal frameworks and policies that support violence prevention and response. Economic and emotional violence intersect, reducing women's autonomy and access to formal and informal labour markets.
- Women's economic exclusion as a result of inequitable gender norms at household, community and structural levels. Women's work remains concentrated in a narrow range of sectors, particularly agriculture, food processing, and low-value service activities, typically in informal or low-paid work.

The Al Murunah+ project seeks to address these interlinkages, ultimately contributing to household resilience to climate shocks and gender equality, by integrating gender transformative and economic empowerment interventions into climate resilience activities. More detail on the implementing context and project can be found in Section 2.1 and 2.2 respectively.

2.1 Overview of implementing context

The Al-Murunah+ project is implemented in four countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region; Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. Within each country, the project works in between one and four sites. These sites vary in their specific characteristics but are predominantly rural or peri-rural locations, with livelihoods largely dependent on agriculture and associated value chains. This section provides a consolidated overview of the context across all four countries, with selected country data included throughout. It is informed by a desk review of relevant external resources, as outlined in Section 4.3. A more detailed analysis of each country context is presented in Annex 8.

Data from all four countries illustrate shared structural challenges, including severe water stress, high levels of IPV, and persistent gender inequality, although the scale of these issues varies between Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine (see Table 2 for some headline statistics).

Table 2. Overview of structural challenges⁹

		Jordan	Lebanon
Water stress¹⁰	Score (5 = extremely high) Rank out of 164 countries	4.62 (Rank = 15)	5 (Rank = 6)
IPV	% of women and girls aged 15-49 who have experienced IPV in the past 12 months ¹¹	13%	35%
Global Gender Gap Index (2024)	Score (1= parity) Rank out of 146 countries	0.652 (Rank = 123)	0.632 (Rank = 133)

All four countries face persistent, intersecting pressures that both exacerbate and are exacerbated by climate change and GBV. Regional stressors include ongoing conflict, economic and financial pressures, high population growth and refugee influxes, and governance challenges. For example, in Palestine, the ongoing Israeli occupation and associated violence is placing great strain on households who face physical violence, forced displacement and economic and food insecurity as a result. In Lebanon, a severe financial crisis that began in 2019 caused hyperinflation, resulting in ongoing food and economic insecurity. Meanwhile, Jordan has high levels of population growth, refugee influxes and economic constraints, all of which intensify vulnerability to climate change, increase pressure on limited natural resources, and drive conflict and ongoing fragility.

Across all countries of implementation, water scarcity is a pressing challenge.¹²

Lebanon and Jordan are ranked among the 15 most water stressed countries in the world.¹³ In Palestine, weak water infrastructure and inadequate supply—exacerbated by ongoing conflict—are well documented.¹⁴ Additional drivers of water scarcity and land degradation include unsustainable land management practices (e.g. overgrazing, monoculture farming), poor governance of water and agriculture, and inadequate legislation enforcement.¹⁵ The region also faces rising temperatures, more extreme weather, and increasingly erratic rainfall,¹⁶ reducing the viability of small-scale farming and food processing activities, and heightening income insecurity.¹⁷ Climate change-related stressors intersect with existing gender inequalities to heighten economic precarity and household stress, which in turn increase risks of violence for women and girls.^{18,19,20,21}

Gender considerations are only partially integrated in current climate and environmental policies across the countries of implementation. Although some progress has been made, there is limited recognition of how climate impacts intersect with existing gender inequalities, care burdens and exposure to GBV. Whilst Palestine and Jordan have mainstreamed gender into their National Adaptation Plans,²² broader laws and policy

Figure 1. Women, Business and the Law Index (2026)

relating to women's economic opportunities also vary between countries, with the World Bank's Women, Business and Law Index (2026)²³ (see Figure 1) showing a more positive enabling environment around entrepreneurship (scores of 75-100) than around marriage (scores of 20-60), which includes laws and policies protecting women from violence.

Women's labour market participation in the MENA region is the lowest globally, ranging from 17-25% across the four countries, despite substantial improvements in women's education, health and human capital.²⁴ Inequitable gender norms and attitudes place a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women and restrict their mobility, access to work and leadership roles. These norms differ between the four countries, as shown in the Arab Barometer survey results in *Figure 2*. Labour markets often lack supportive policies such as affordable childcare, flexible work arrangements, effective anti-discrimination protections, and adequate access to finance and productive assets.²⁵ Limited access to finance, assets and professional networks further curtails women's participation in higher-value segments of the private sector and agri-food value chains.²⁶ Women's work tends to concentrate in a limited range of sectors, particularly agriculture, food processing, and low-value service activities²⁷, largely informal, seasonal, or vulnerable employment.²⁸ In rural and peri-urban contexts in particular, women's participation in agricultural and food-related value chains is often characterised by unpaid family labour, low returns, and limited control over productive assets, land and income.²⁹

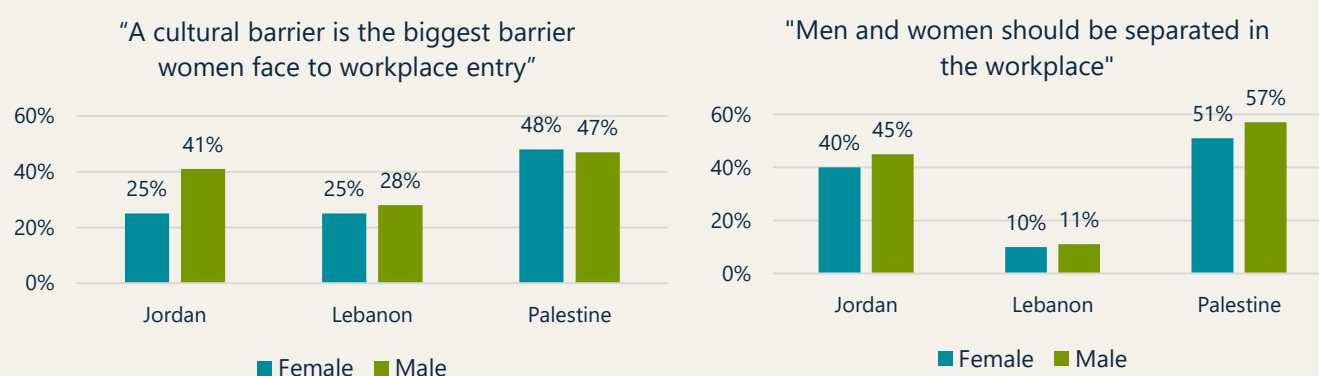


Figure 2. Attitudes towards women's labour market participation³⁰

GBV remains widespread and underreported. Citizens from nearly every MENA country perceive that GBV has increased in the past year (see Table 3).³¹ In the MENA region, an estimated 30% of women aged 15-49 experience physical and/or sexual IPV in their lifetime.³² According to data from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 35% of women and girls have experienced IPV in Lebanon and 13% in Jordan.³³ Increases in GBV have been driven by overlapping pressures, including the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, economic crisis, and displacement. Although each country's context varies, weak enforcement mechanisms, limited institutional capacity, and the continued primacy of discriminatory personal status laws contribute to persistent implementation gaps. Arab

Barometer survey data show considerable variations in gender norms across Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, but in every country a substantial share of respondents continue to express attitudes that limit women’s equal roles in the household (see Table 3).

Table 3. Attitudes toward household decision-making and prevalence of GBV³⁴

	% saying they strongly agree or agree		
	Jordan	Lebanon	Palestine
“A man should have final say in all decisions concerning the family”	53%	34%	42%
“In the past year, has abuse of or violence against women in the community increased, stayed the same or decreased?” (% who said increased)	51%	44%	54%

For a more in-depth contextual analysis, please see Annex 8.

2.2 Overview of the project

Al Murunah is a five-year programme (2021-2026) implemented under PHENOMENAL, FCDO’s flagship regional climate change programme in the MENA region. The objectives of Al Murunah are to demonstrate the effectiveness of Resilient Nature-Based Water Solutions (RNBWS) and to strengthen national capacities for the implementation and uptake of RNBWS. The underlying premise of the project is that the adoption of RNBWS can enhance water and food security in agricultural areas of MENA, and in doing so increase the resilience of rural households and communities, and their ability to adapt to the effects of climate change.³⁵

To complement the work of Al Murunah, four gender transformative pilots in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine were designed (Al Murunah+). The project was commissioned by FCDO and is led by IWMI in partnership with IUCN. The Al Murunah+ project addresses the adverse effects of IPV, and the inequitable gender norms, practices and attitudes that drive it, on women’s participation in agri-business and RNBWS. The project design phase ran from January 2025 – July 2025, implementation of activities is taking place between August 2025 – July 2026 and closeout activities will take place July 2026 – September 2026.

The project layers economic and GBV prevention interventions onto the core interventions of Al Murunah to assess whether this leads to any changes in IPV (specifically economic and emotional), promotes more equitable gender norms at the household and community levels, and better supports women and men to develop and implement climate-smart

solutions in farming systems and value chains, ultimately contributing to strengthened household resilience. Key outcomes for AI Murunah+ will focus on promoting more equitable distribution of roles, responsibilities and decision-making within households and in community leadership structures, reducing instances of targeted forms of IPV (economic and emotional), and improving the sustainability of income sources through the expansion of climate smart practices amongst women.

AI Murunah+ is implemented through a combination of gender transformative and economic interventions targeting women, couples, families, cooperatives and community leaders. A summary of these interventions is included below. Additional details on the planned activities and their intended outcomes are illustrated in the AI Murunah+ ToC (see Annex 4).

Gender transformative interventions are delivered through two workstreams:

- **Gender transformative workshops for couples guided by the EA\$E curriculum**, an IRC-developed framework that aims to enhance women's economic empowerment and promote more gender equitable relationships within households. An adaptation of the EA\$E model, available in Arabic and tested in Syria, was reviewed and further adapted to the operating context by implementing partners. The pilots retained the discussion groups series from the original EA\$E package in all four countries, and in Egypt an EA\$E-aligned business skills training was also offered as part of the economic package.³⁶ The couples component includes eight sessions, covering themes such as household economy and cash flow, setting financial goals, communication, negotiation and conflict resolution, gender roles and norms, dealing with financial stress, and budgeting and planning. The sessions are delivered by trained in-country facilitators working with local women's rights organisations (WRO). All four countries delivered the curriculum to couples in mixed-sex groups, although Jordan also had a small cohort of couples who received some sessions in sex-segregated groups. *Total couples enrolled in the EA\$E sessions: 688.*³⁷
- **Training of community-level opinion leaders** to promote more gender-responsive management of water systems, agricultural cooperatives, gender equitable markets and climate change projects. Training involved 12 sessions with opinion leaders in Lebanon, 8 in Egypt, 6 in Palestine and 4 in Jordan. Each country developed their own content tailored for the needs in that specific context. In Lebanon this involved adapting a previously tested curriculum (Indashyikirwa); however, the other three countries created new content. The types of stakeholders involved in these activities vary by country, but broadly includes municipality officials, civil society representatives, and members of relevant agriculture, water and resource

management cooperatives, associations and councils. *Total number of opinion leaders enrolled in the sessions: 135.*

Economic interventions are delivered through the economic empowerment pathway, which aims to translate the social gains achieved through the EA\$E curriculum into sustainable, income-generating opportunities for women. The economic interventions are designed to strengthen women's participation in climate-smart agri-businesses and local value chains, while contributing to household resilience, food security and RNBWS. Each country provides context-specific financial and skill-based interventions, covering a wide-ranging number of activities as laid out below. *Total number of women provided economic incentives: 688.*

- Business skills training (EA\$E-aligned) focused on costing, pricing, risk management, and record keeping.
- Capacity support and technical assistance for women on topics such as climate-smart agricultural practices, business and leadership skills, and financial management.
- Improving women's access to skills, resource and climate-smart income generating activities through training, followed by provision of 'toolkits' (e.g. garden, dairy, beekeeping toolkits), and supported by funds, saving and lending schemes, and partnerships with microfinance institutions and agricultural cooperatives.

Procurement of approved assets for couples (including livestock and machinery)

The project is implemented with one cohort of opinion leaders and two successive cohorts of couples. The couples in each cohort complete the EA\$E curriculum prior to receiving the economic intervention (Figure 3).

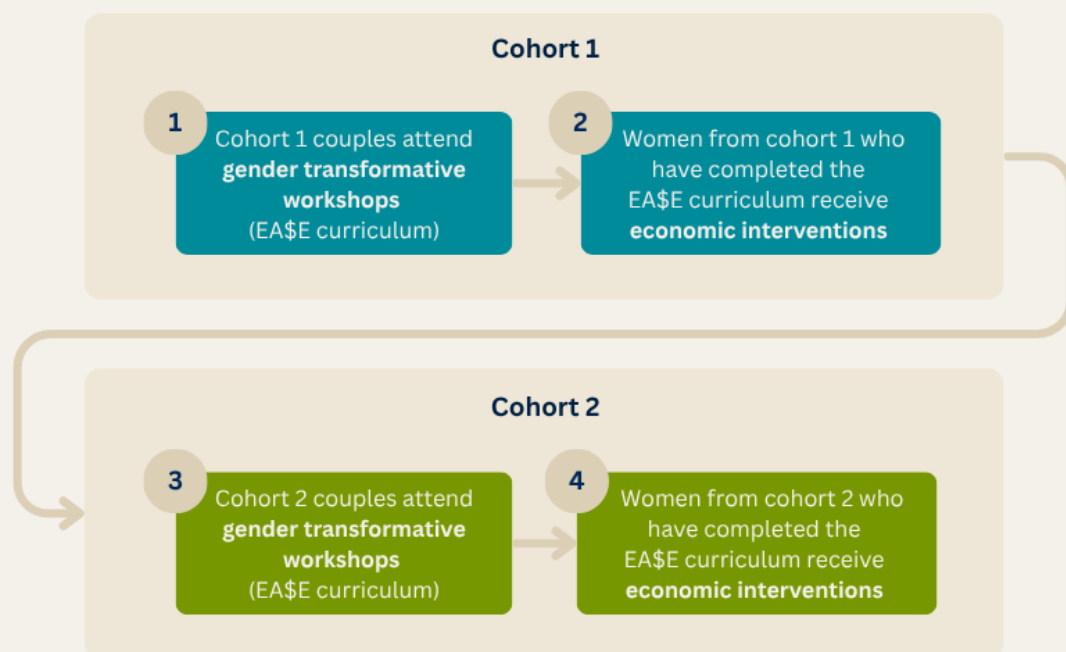


Figure 3. Overview of the two-cohort implementation approach

3. Purpose, scope and objectives

3.1 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The AI Murunah+ baseline evaluation is intended to establish the pre-intervention state against which the project impact can be assessed at endline, in addition to providing insights that can inform project delivery. This includes exploring the current state of harmful gender attitudes and norms within couples and families, understanding household dynamics, including gender roles and levels of IPV, identifying barriers to women's participation in farming systems or market chains, and assessing resilience of households to climate shocks. The objectives of this baseline evaluation are:

- To establish an understanding of the current gender attitudes, norms and behaviours (including IPV) at an individual, household and leadership level (referring specifically to governance structures within agri-business, market chains and water associations).
- To assess current levels of women's participation in financial decision making in the home, and access to sustainable livelihoods within farming systems or value chains.
- To explore the interlinkages between household resilience and gender inequitable attitudes and norms (within households and amongst community leaders), IPV and women's ability to work and manage their resources.

3.2 Scope of the evaluation

The baseline evaluation covers the gender transformative and economic interventions of the AI Murunah+ project, as outlined in Section 2.1. While all components are included, the evaluation primarily examines how shifts in gender norms, IPV and women's economic empowerment might contribute to increased resilience to climate shocks amongst women and their households. The evaluation draws on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria to provide an additional analytical lens to assess the effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability of the AI Murunah+ pilots. These are mapped against the evaluation framework below. The evaluation does not include the broader AI Murunah programme focused on RNBWS.³⁸

The evaluation covers three of the four countries of implementation: Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. Data was collected in Wadi Seer in Jordan, in Ras Al-Far'a and in Wadi Al-Far'a in Palestine, and in Arsal, Fakiha, Qaa and Ras Baalbek in Lebanon. The evaluation did not take place in Egypt as the project's security clearance did not allow for data collection by foreign agencies. Due to the longitudinal nature of the evaluation, this will also mean that primary data collection does not take place in Egypt at Endline either. FCDO, IWMI and

SDDirect have agreed that it would be better to increase data collection across Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine instead.

The baseline establishes the current state of gender norms and household practices, women's participation in leadership structures, and household resilience. Findings will be used by IWMI, FCDO and implementing partners to inform adaptive programming and assess change against the EQs set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the endline. The sample is drawn from cohort one of the project participants, with potential to extrapolate findings to cohort two. **The scope of each EQ is outlined in the evaluation framework in Annex 3, with details of intended use in Annex 2.**

The sequencing of evaluation outputs and processes in Section 4.3 was planned to maximise the use of the baseline findings and recommendations, ensuring that they inform adaptive programming. Timelines were implemented flexibly in alignment with project needs and progress: inception ran from December 2024 – June 2025 and the baseline evaluation took place between July 2025 – January 2026, with data collection taking place in September 2025, following the registration of project participants. To maximise the utility of the evaluation, preliminary findings from the baseline with direct relevance to the implementation of project were shared with implementing partners in real-time to ensure they could directly inform these activities. Finalised findings from this baseline evaluation will be available to inform the delivery of interventions to its second cohort of couples. The endline evaluation is expected to take place between May and October 2026.

The evaluation design is informed by an understanding of the local, national and regional contexts in which the pilots are being implemented, including cultural sensitivities around the topics being explored. National researchers have been recruited to develop and review data collection tools, protocols and operational plans in consultation with implementing partners to ensure they are culturally, socially and politically appropriate to each setting. Robust ethical and safeguarding measures tailored to the sensitive topics covered by this evaluation and the varying security contexts across pilot locations have guided the design and implementation of this baseline (see Section 4.6). The evaluation team also encountered a number of context-specific challenges which were adaptively managed as they occurred, as further described in Section 4.7. Although findings are aggregated at project level, the evaluation uses a comparative approach to draw out similarities and differences across pilot countries.

Recognising the fragile and rapidly changing conditions of some sites, we have regularly assessed feasibility and ethical considerations in consultation with FCDO and national stakeholders, and adjusted baseline plans as needed to ensure activities remain safe, inclusive and appropriate. Please see more in Section 4.6 and Annex 7.

4. Methodology

4.1 Evaluation principles and approach

This evaluation follows a theory-based approach,³⁹ complemented by contribution analysis.⁴⁰ A project-level ToC, developed by the evaluation team with IWMI and FCDO during inception (see Annex 4), outlines the causal pathways that link AI Murunah+ activities to desired results and outcomes at the individual, household and system levels. It provides the analytical framework to test causal assumptions and, using contribution analysis, assess the project's contribution to observed change. This baseline examines existing norms, attitudes and practices along pathways, before implementation, the ToC and draft contribution narratives will be revisited and strengthened at endline.

An endline evaluation is expected to take place between May and October 2026.

Between the baseline and endline, the evaluation tracks a longitudinal sample of couples in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, supplemented by data collection with other project stakeholders (see Section 4.3).

The evaluation adopts a qualitative design to answer the EQs, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the current context, including norms, attitudes, and perceptions at the baseline stage, as well as the nuances of how and why changes happened at the endline stage. The choice of a qualitative design also aligns with the resources available to conduct the assignment. Through its design and implementation, **the evaluation is grounded in feminist research principles**, applied through a focus on participatory approaches, and critical reflection on the power dynamics that shape how data is produced and whose perspectives are elevated. To support this approach, the following key principles are integrated across all phases:

- **Utilisation, co-creation and co-ownership.** Weekly meetings with IWMI and FCDO have informed the timeline and design of the evaluation to ensure continuous co-creation and adaptation. We have shared real-time, actionable insights for IWMI and FCDO, leading to project adaptations. The final report aims to deliver actionable findings for IWMI, FCDO and other relevant implementers, and contribute to wider evidence on gender norms, household practices, women's leadership, and household resilience.
- **Meaningful participation and inclusion.** We aim to reach a wide range of project stakeholders, including through participatory approaches and accessible locations and timings. To ensure representation of diverse voices, primary data was disaggregated (with informed consent) by key socio-demographic characteristics, such as sex, age, disability, educational level and household composition.

- **Localisation and contextual insights.** Our team includes researchers based in Europe, Canada and the MENA region, bringing diverse expertise across gender equality, safeguarding and evaluation. Primary data collection was led by national researchers, whose contextual knowledge shaped methods, data collection tools, analysis and development of findings.

4.2 Evaluation questions

High level EQs and sub-questions were refined during the inception phase, and aligned with the evaluation purpose, scope and objectives.⁴¹ The full framework outlining EQs, indicators and main data collection methods and analysis is outlined in Annex 3.

EQ1. To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to positive changes in gender norms, roles and practices within households?	1.1 How effective has the Al Murunah+ project been in influencing more gender equitable attitudes, roles and practices among couples engaged in the EA\$E curriculum?
	1.2 To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to more respectful communication, better conflict resolution practices and reduced economic and emotional IPV among couples engaged in the EA\$E curriculum?
EQ2. To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to creating more gender equitable leadership and decision-making structures?	2.1 To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to more gender equitable knowledge, attitudes and practices among enrolled opinion leaders?
	2.2 To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project contributed to more equitable leadership structures and business environment for women within targeted farming systems and value chains?
EQ3. To what extent has the Al-Murunah+ project strengthened women's economic empowerment and climate smart agriculture skills, and how has this contributed to household resilience?	3.1 How effective has the Al Murunah+ project been in supporting women's access to more sustainable and resilient income streams in farming systems and value chains?
	3.2 How effective has the Al Murunah+ project been in increasing women's agency and participation in financial decision making and resource management within the household?
	3.3 What is the evidence of and pathways through which a) addressing gender inequitable norms and attitudes (including those that contribute to IPV) and b) increasing women's agency and economic participation could contribute to household resilience longer term?

EQ4. What are the internal and external factors that have enabled and hindered progress towards the project's intended outcomes across the four pilot countries? Is there evidence to suggest that these results are sustainable?	4.1 What are the programmatic, institutional or contextual enabling or hindering factors?
	4.2 What evidence is there to suggest that the project has resulted in sustainable change for women and their households?

4.3 Methodology

The baseline evaluation applied a participatory, qualitative methodology. To support triangulation, the methodology was designed to capture a plurality of perspectives through semi-structured interviews with couples and participatory workshops with opinion leaders and project participants, complemented by semi-structured interviews with additional relevant stakeholders and secondary data analysis where programme documentation was available. The methodology comprised of three sequenced phases (see Figure 4), which resulted in several deliverables including an inception report, data collection tools, preliminary findings presentation and baseline evaluation report. The approach and evidence base guiding these key phases is described in more detail in the following sub-sections.



Figure 4. Overview of baseline evaluation phases

Phase 1: Desk Review

During the inception phase of the evaluation, the evaluation team reviewed 39 key Al Murunah+ project documents, proposals, curricula, presentations, and external literature relevant to the GBV, climate and women's economic empowerment nexus. Additional pilot-level documentation was requested and, where available, used to inform the contextualisation of data collection approaches. A total of 48 additional documents were reviewed to inform a more in-depth understanding of the operating context for the project (see Annex 6).

Phase 2: Primary data collection

In each country, the data collection was conducted by two national researchers and two notetakers and supported remotely by two global evaluation team members. Researchers and notetakers were recruited by the evaluation national research partner, SDR group, in consultation with SDDirect. The recruitment and vetting process was designed to ensure the selection of qualified and ethically committed researchers, with specific experience in qualitative methods and GBV-sensitive research in their respective country contexts. National researchers and notetakers received training on the evaluation design and methodology, ethics and safeguarding, informed consent and data protection processes, and the purpose and application of the different data collection tools. Prior to the data collection taking place, the data collection tools were translated into Arabic and then adapted by national researchers to ensure they reflected contextual, linguistic and programmatic nuances at country level. The different sources of primary data for this baseline evaluation are outlined below.

Couples interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a longitudinal sample of both partners of couples enrolled in the EA\$E curriculum and the economic intervention. These interviews, conducted separately for husbands and wives, explored household roles and expectations, relationship dynamics and communication, conflict resolution, household income and decision-making, and household resilience. In Jordan, where the EA\$E curriculum session on child marriage has been retained, interviews also touched on attitudes and experiences of child marriage. Across the three countries, **a total of 210 individual participants / 105 couples were consulted.**

Opinion leader workshops. A total of **6 sex-disaggregated participatory workshops were held with 34 opinion leaders** (20 women and 14 men) selected for the project's opinion leader intervention. The roles and occupations of the stakeholders who took part in workshops varied by country, and included community activists, representatives of community-based organisations, agricultural workers, and teachers (see Section 5.2 for additional details). Through participatory exercises, these workshops explored women's

access to leadership and decision-making structures in farming systems and value chains, and opinion leaders' knowledge, attitudes and practice related to gender equality.

Project participant workshops. Across countries, **12 sex-disaggregated participatory workshops were held with 50 women and 47 men** enrolled in the EA\$E curriculum and economic interventions. These workshops covered attitudes, practices and norms related to women's work and household responsibilities, financial decision-making, and household resilience to shocks.

Stakeholder interviews. A total of **13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with additional relevant stakeholders** (10 women and 3 men) in the community to explore the current state of IPV, women's access to work, gender attitudes, knowledge and practice in farming systems and value chains, and household and climate resilience. Stakeholders interviewed included representatives of local government, community-based organisations, and agricultural cooperatives.

Phase 3: Synthesis and report writing

Following data collection, **all interviews and workshops were transcribed and cleaned by notetakers and translated into English** by an SDR partner organisation. Notetakers produced detailed transcripts for couples and notes summarising key discussions for workshops.

Transcripts and notes were analysed thematically on Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, using a coding framework aligned with the EQs and data collection tools.⁴² Additional thematic codes were added as trends were identified. The demographic data collected from participants was linked to anonymous transcripts to allow for sub-group analysis. Following thematic analysis, the couples interview data was also reviewed through a **dyadic analysis** lens to identify overlaps and contrasts between individual experiences and perspectives within relationships. This approach allowed for identification of discrepant accounts regarding IPV and relationship quality, which were interpreted not as contradictions, but as evidence of gendered asymmetries in power and differing thresholds for defining violence. For example, discrepancies where men reported 'fair' mobility restrictions while partners expressed dissatisfaction can triangulate how power and control are subjectively experienced and justified within the same dyad. Secondary data was also analysed thematically using a coding matrix capturing key project and contextual features.

To ensure inter-coder reliability the team worked closely to design the coding framework, agreeing a definition for each code. The coding framework was then tested by the lead coders to identify gaps or divergence in interpretation. When coding began, the lead coders worked together to cross check the coherence of their coding across the first ten transcripts. As the remaining team members began coding, the lead coders checked a sample of each

of their coding. To further support inter-coder reliability mini coding teams were selected to work on the different data sources, minimises the number of team members working across data sources.

An internal analysis workshop was convened with the evaluation team and national researchers to triangulate, synthesis and validate findings from across the various data sources and facilitate comparative analysis across countries. To support adaptive learning and co-creation, emerging findings from the baseline evaluation were presented to implementing partners after the data collection, and a validation workshop with FCDO and implementing partners was organised to collectively discuss conclusions and recommendations.

4.4 Sampling

The baseline evaluation used a mix of purposive, random and cluster sampling approaches, tailored to different stakeholder groups. The sample is drawn from registers of participants enrolled in the project and complemented by a short list of external stakeholders associated to the project.

Couples for interviews were selected through cluster and purposive sampling, using an initial participant register for cohort one that was clustered based on geographic location, and from which participants were selected based on criteria such as age and disability, where this information was available (see Section 0). Efforts were made to ensure a balance of genders and age groups, but the sample cannot be considered statistically representative of the demographic groups reached by the project.

Stakeholders and opinion leaders were identified through purposive sampling, based on long lists shared by implementing partners and using criteria such as gender, thematic expertise, leadership type, and level of engagement with the project. Finally, **project participants** were selected for the workshops through random and cluster sampling approaches, removing participants already selected for interviews and clustering the lists by gender, and then drawing random samples. Where individuals did not respond or declined requests to participate in interviews or workshops, additional people were selected using the same sampling approaches described above.

The final sample represents a diverse range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Through data collection, this baseline evaluation reached a total of 354 participants/stakeholders (48% male and 52% female). A total of 13% of participants/stakeholder consulted reported having a disability. The majority of the sample (83%) had two or more children and lived in a household with four or more members (75%).

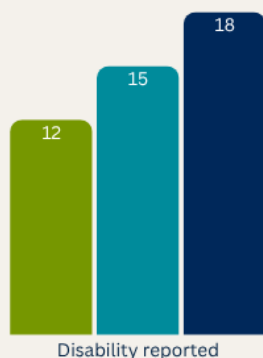
Education levels varied: 29% had completed primary education, 41% secondary, and 24% tertiary. Economic circumstances also differed, with 50% of participants reporting that their income rarely or never meets their basic needs, 30% saying it sometimes does, and only 16% reporting that it is sufficient always or most of the time. Characteristics such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and refugee status were not captured due to sensitivities in the region. Table 4 provides an overview of the sample, and Figure 5 summarises key demographic data categories. A more in-depth breakdown of demographic data is included in Annex 5.

Table 4. Overview of sample (number of individuals consulted)

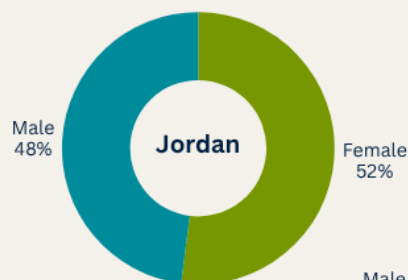
Consultation method	Country	Sex		Total number of individuals in the sample
		Women	Men	
Couples interviews	Lebanon	35	35	70
	Palestine	35	35	70
	Jordan	35	35	70
Project participant workshops	Lebanon	16	13	29
	Palestine	19	19	38
	Jordan	15	15	30
Opinion leader workshops	Lebanon	7	3	10
	Palestine	5	4	9
	Jordan	8	7	15
Stakeholder interviews	Lebanon	5	3	8
	Palestine	1	0	1
	Jordan	4	0	4
TOTAL				354

Disability (number of individuals)

● Jordan ● Lebanon
● Palestine



Sex (percentage)



Age (number of individuals)

● Jordan ● Lebanon ● Palestine

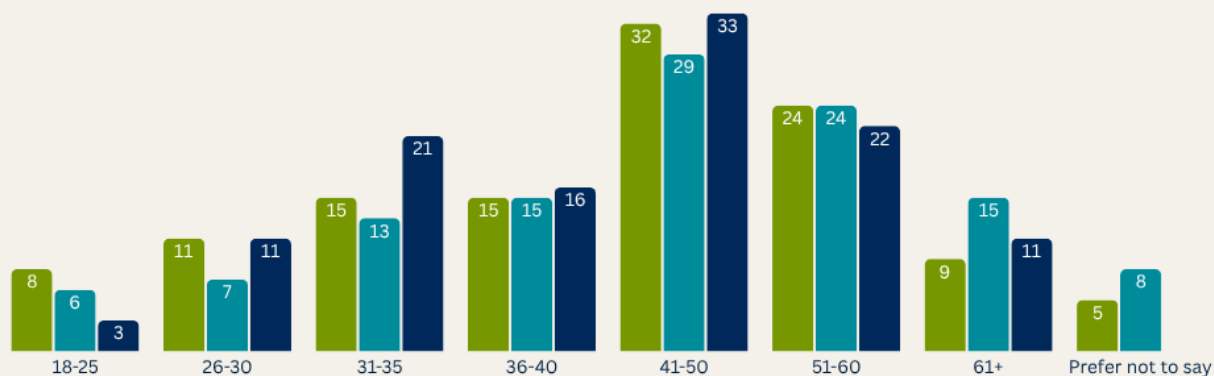


Figure 5. Overview of demographic data of individuals consulted

4.5 Limitations

Table 5. Overview of limitations

Sampling	The sample for the couples interviews and project participant workshops was drawn from the first cohort of couples only . This was a result of 1) delays from the project in generating the full register and 2) uncertainty around project funding delaying registration of a second cohort.
	The registration lists for couples only included limited demographic data , which made it challenging to select a sample that purposively captured diverse identity and socio-economic characteristics.
	Some implementing partners were still identifying and enrolling opinion leaders at the time of data collection, meaning that some opinion leaders who participated in workshops had limited knowledge of the project and its planned activities. Fewer opinion leaders were sampled than planned, as the number engaged by pilots was

	lower than originally anticipated. At the endline evaluation stage, the evaluation team will aim to increase the number of opinion leaders consulted. Similarly, identifying stakeholders for interviews was challenging due to limited clarity on their expected roles and involvement in the project.
	At the time of data collection, the gender transformative and economic interventions across pilot countries were under development or undergoing revisions, and there was limited documentation (e.g. adapted EA\$E curricula, implementation guides related to opinion leader interventions, feasibility studies) available for review by the evaluation team. This posed some challenges in contextualising data collection tools to the country-level nuances of planned economic and gender transformative interventions.
Data availability	The evaluation did not take place in Egypt as the project's security clearance did not allow for data collection by foreign agencies.
	Notions of privacy and family honour at times deterred couples from opening up about sensitive topics such as experiences of IPV and conflict within relationships. Male participants were generally more reserved, and especially hesitant to discuss private details. There were some discrepancies between couples' accounts of relationship quality, communication and experiences of violence. These differences were identified through dyadic analysis and are highlighted throughout this report (see for instance EQ 1.2 in Section 5.1.2).
	Despite some challenges in some contexts with reaching proposed sample numbers, the evaluation team observed that data saturation had been reached once approximately two thirds of transcripts had been analysed. This suggests that the amount of primary data collected for this baseline was adequate to capture key insights and trends.
Context	Instability in the region and consequent border closures impacted data collection timelines and plans. In Palestine, the evolving conflict limited the data-collection window and prevented expansion of the sample of stakeholder and opinion leaders.
	The immediate and pressing circumstances of poverty, insecurity and violence faced by participants across pilot locations made it more challenging to discuss relationship quality, household resilience and climate-smart practices.
Social Desirability	The identity and positioning of the research team may have influenced disclosure patterns. To mitigate this and ensure survivor safety, all partners of couples were interviewed by national researchers of the same sex. While this facilitated a degree of rapport and comfort—particularly for women discussing sensitive experiences of IPV—it is possible that participants' perceptions of the researchers as "outsiders" still generated social desirability bias. The gender of the interviewers may have inadvertently reinforced certain gendered narratives, for instance some male participants may have sought to align their responses with perceived shared traditional values held by male researchers.

The evaluation design **mitigates the risk of social desirability** bias by using a longitudinal cohort approach. It is anticipated that the endline study with the same interviewees will yield more open discussion, as the intervening period allows for continued rapport-building and participation in the EA\$E curriculum. Furthermore, as discussed further in the findings, men often find it easier to report on 'historical' incidents; the endline will provide the necessary temporal distance for participants to reflect and report more openly on past behaviours and shifts in household dynamics.

4.6 Ethics and safeguarding

This section provides high-level overview of the approach to ethics, safeguarding and data protection. Further details can be found in Annex 7.

To minimise the risk of harm caused during the evaluation, a set of ethical principles was introduced to guide all activities⁴³. These were aligned with the international best practice and guiding standards of ethical conduct in evaluation, including ethical standards set by the United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) ethical research guidance on research on violence against women⁴⁴ and FCDO's ethical guidelines, principles and standards for research and evaluation. The ethical principles were applied to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, data protection, reduction of direct and indirect risks to interviewees and safe participation.

Safeguarding technical assistance was built into the contract and a dedicated safeguarding expert was supporting the research team to ensure that relevant safeguarding systems were in place and that support was available throughout the evaluation. Given the nature of the work, including data collection on sensitive topics such as gender equality and IPV, and the varying security and humanitarian contexts, a robust **duty of care approach** was embedded throughout the evaluation. Ahead of data collection, referral pathways were mapped and a clear protocol to outline the reporting, response and referral process for any safeguarding incidents or disclosures of violence was developed.

All activities were guided by the 'do no harm' principle, focusing on proactively addressing risks to participants and minimising the impact of power dynamics, with prevention of harm embedded as an underlying principle into the safeguarding measures developed for the evaluation. Given the sensitive nature of the evaluation and the vulnerability of the participants, the evaluation team did remunerate costs of travel for participants engaged in the evaluation. The amount and process for remuneration were decided in collaboration with the national WRO implementing partners. When making this decision we considered 1) actual cost of travel, 2) appropriate or safe amount for remuneration and 3) risk of harm to participants in receipt of funds. In all cases, it was

clearly communicated that the remuneration was only to cover transport and not an incentive.

The evaluation put in place specific data protection measures to ensure confidentiality and privacy at all stages of data collection. During data collection, no personally identifying data was recorded alongside qualitative data and all data was stored anonymously using unique identifiers. This data is stored securely on SharePoint by SDDirect who are registered with the Information Commissioner in the UK as a 'data controller' in accordance with the provisions of the European General Data Protection Regulation (2018) and the Data Protection Act (1998). The datasets collected through this evaluation will be retained by SDDirect for use in the endline evaluation, but will be anonymised and shared with FCDO, who will have final ownership.

Ethical clearance for the evaluation was obtained at a regional level through the International Water Management Institutional Review Board.

4.7 Risks and challenges

Due to the thematic focus of the evaluation and context-specific challenges related to conducting activities in conflict-affected settings, the evaluation team encountered the following risks and challenges, which were actively managed through mitigation strategies:

- **High numbers of GBV disclosures:** during the evaluation, the researchers received multiple disclosures of instances of GBV. While a certain number of disclosures was expected due to the focus of the evaluation, and relevant ethical and safeguarding measures had been put in place, the actual level of incidents shared with the team was relatively high. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the cases, these were often referred to the Team Lead, the Safeguarding Focal Point and the Safeguarding Lead for advice. All cases were addressed in line with the case management procedure, with support provided to evaluation participants. To mitigate the emotional impact on the evaluation team, regular well-being check-ins and optional 1:1 calls were introduced. Annex 7 provides more information on safeguarding and duty of care.
- **Context-specific challenges:** due to the evaluation taking place in a conflict-affected setting, the evaluation team had to manage additional challenges while managing personal safety and security risks. This required flexibility in the data collection window, timeline and approach, particularly in Palestine, where the threat of violence necessitated additional precautions, such as additional risk assessments, weekly risk meetings, flexible communication mechanisms, regular debriefs with the team and real-time adaptations to plans.

- **Safeguarding and ethical concerns:** some ethical and safeguarding concerns were raised during the evaluation. Those were resolved using the measures established for the evaluation, with the Safeguarding Focal Point and Safeguarding Lead risk-assessing all decisions on a case-by-case basis to prevent further harm and decide on the best way forward. The use of measures such as case management procedure and referral pathways was informed by the understanding of the context, with further support requested from relevant experts in complex cases involving ethical research or GBV-related considerations.

All concerns and risks were addressed in line with the internal processes and procedures established for the evaluation, and escalated to partner organisations and FCDO as appropriate, with further information shared on a 'need-to-know' basis. Mitigation measures ensured that data collection remained safe, ethical and responsive to the evolving context.

5. Findings

5.1 Gender norms, role and practices (EQ 1)

5.1.1 What are the attitudes, roles and practices related to gender equality among couples engaged in the EA\$E curriculum? (EQ 1.1)

In summary

Baseline findings across Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan indicate that household stability rests on "complementary but unequal" roles, where women bear near-total responsibility for the domestic and caregiving spheres while men exercise final authority as providers. While women's economic contributions are increasingly recognised as essential due to regional financial hardships, this has not resulted in a redistribution of domestic labour; instead, women face a significant "double burden," as men's domestic participation remains limited to "helping" or performing physically demanding tasks to avoid social stigma.

These traditional hierarchies are largely socialised as natural or divinely ordained, despite emerging dissatisfaction among women regarding unequal care burdens and bounded decision-making power. This normalisation is actively reproduced intergenerationally, as parents continue to socialise sons as future providers and daughters as future caregivers, ensuring the continuation of existing gendered hierarchies.

Across couples interviewed, attitudes, roles and practices related to gender equality were shaped by deeply embedded gender norms perceived as natural and appropriate. Gender equality was rarely framed as shared responsibility or equal authority; instead, couples described complementary but unequal roles. Wives were expected to manage the 'domestic sphere'—including childcare, household labour and emotional care—while husbands were expected to provide financially and exercise final authority. These understandings reflect entrenched attitudes and social norms regarding masculinity, femininity, and decision-making within intimate partnerships.

These norms were most visible in daily household practices. Across all three countries, women bore primary responsibility for childcare, cooking and cleaning. Some women described their households as unable to function in their absence, as one woman in Jordan explained: *"Once I left him and visited my family's house—they stayed without food... 'don't leave the house or it falls apart'."* Women's caregiving responsibilities often extended beyond the nuclear family to caring for elderly parents, ill relatives and in-laws. This labour was rarely recognised as work or a negotiated responsibility; instead, it was framed as a

moral obligation embedded in women's roles as wives and daughters-in-law. While women often exercised significant day-to-day authority in managing households, day-to-day spending and raising children, this agency was clearly bounded. Final decision-making—particularly regarding larger financial purchases, women's mobility and employment—typically rested with men. This is explored in more depth under evaluation sub-question 3.2.

Across contexts, men's primary role was defined as financial provider and household authority. Both female and male participants commonly stated that men should earn income, have final authority on financial decisions, and engage with the external world. As one woman in Lebanon stated: *"I like a man to be a real man, someone who works and provides for his home."* Men were also frequently described as more rational and emotionally reserved than women, a belief used to justify greater authority within the household. Indeed, men were widely perceived as primary authority figures, including to discipline children. As one man in Jordan asserted: *"If I say no, it means no. There is no discussion."*

Men's domestic contributions were more commonly associated with physically demanding tasks, such as repairs or heavy lifting, considered appropriate masculine roles. Men's involvement in other forms of domestic labour was limited and typically framed as "helping" rather than shared responsibility. Assistance was described as occasional and conditional, often occurring only when women were unwell. Among younger couples, modest shifts were reported, but these were largely framed as mutual assistance rather than a redefinition of roles, as noted by a man in Jordan: *"Wives helping their husbands with income and husbands helping their wives with housework."*

Strong social stigma regarding men's visible engagement in domestic tasks considered feminine, such as cooking, cleaning or hanging laundry, persisted across contexts, but was expressed more frequently in Lebanon and Palestine compared to Jordan. As one woman in Lebanon noted: *"If they see a man holding a broom and sweeping, they start teasing him."* This stigma was noted in multiple interviews by women who expressed concern that their husbands' involvement in domestic labour could reflect negatively on their own performance as wives. As a woman in Palestine shared, *"I would not let him do that. Not to that extent. I do not like men hanging clothes in front of the neighbours. He carries the basket, I do the hanging."*

Departures for women from traditional gendered roles were similarly largely situational. Women's paid work typically occurred when husbands were ill, unemployed, elderly, or otherwise constrained. In these situations, women's paid work was often framed as necessary rather than desirable and restricted to socially acceptable forms, including agricultural or home-based activities. As one man in Palestine explained, *"I have never stopped my wife from working, but that does not mean I would agree to any kind*

of job... I have to think about our customs and traditions." Women's economic contributions to the household could also provoke defensive reactions from men, for challenging their traditional authority and roles.

Despite these constraints, women's economic contributions were widely recognised as important, particularly as a survival strategy and amid regional economic hardship.

Indeed, many women across the contexts contributed to the household income, though their work was primarily informal, seasonal and home-based. However, the perception of this work—by both men and women—varied significantly by setting. In Jordan, women's labour on household plots was frequently characterized by both spouses as an extension of domestic responsibilities rather than productive labour, reinforcing its "invisible" nature. In contrast, reports from Palestine showed a more explicit mutual recognition of women as essential breadwinners when conflict-related restrictions barred men from traditional employment; as one woman in Palestine noted, *"When a wife's hand brings income, the home breathes."*

Across settings, women's paid work rarely resulted in redistribution of domestic labour. Even when men were retired or unemployed, household responsibilities typically remained unchanged, as noted by one man in Jordan, *"After I retired and started staying at home, nothing major changed... She still manages the house in the same system we were used to."* When women engaged in paid work, childcare and household management were typically addressed through extended family support, particularly grandparents and older daughters. See more on this under EQ 3.1.

Although many parents reported treating their sons and daughters equally, everyday practices reflected clear differences. Daughters faced greater mobility restrictions, particularly in Palestine and Lebanon, where concerns of safety and honour were emphasised. As one woman in Palestine lamented, *"My daughter walks to kindergarten and I am afraid."* Across contexts, girls were more frequently involved in domestic work, while boys more likely assisted tasks outside the home or income-related tasks. Parents commonly described sons as future providers and daughters as future caregivers, as stated by a man in Palestine, *"Sons will grow up to lead their own homes... daughters will grow up to do as their mothers did."* Overall, despite stated aspirations towards gender equality for their children, parental socialisation largely reinforced the same gender norms, attitudes and behaviours observed among adult couples at baseline.

Regarding attitudes towards gender roles and equality, adherence to rigid gender roles was widely viewed as the foundation of a stable and functioning household. Gendered divisions of labour and authority were commonly described as natural and culturally appropriate. In Palestine, religious narratives were frequently invoked to legitimise

these arrangements; as one man in Palestine stated, *"Men are the protectors and providers... that is something God decided."* Most participants described existing household arrangements as aligned with social customs, stressing that harmony was achieved through fulfilling interdependent roles. As noted by a woman in Palestine, *"Each of us has our role... both are important and they complete each other."*

Yet there were gendered differences in perceptions: men were more consistently satisfied with these arrangements than women and were more likely to describe them as equitable and functional. In contrast, many women—particularly in Lebanon and Jordan—expressed dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Women described feeling overburdened and undervalued, especially when their unpaid labour was minimised. As one woman in Lebanon noted, *"I tell him I am tired, he looks at me and says: 'from what?'... Does that mean I do not have the right to get tired?"* Several women also described unmet expectations at the start of marriage, expressing disappointment that responsibilities were not more evenly shared.

Some women explicitly challenged prevailing norms around male authority and decision-making. One woman in Lebanon stated, *"You need to forget the 'man's authority' mentality—it only creates conflict."* Interviews also revealed emerging positive attitudes towards gender equality among women and younger couples, including support for women controlling their income, valuing joint decision-making, and education for both sons and daughters. These shifts were described with higher frequency in Jordan compared to Palestine and Lebanon. However, many women conveyed a sense of resignation about the likelihood of changing deeply entrenched norms, particularly among older generations of men. While there are signs of openness to more equitable gender relations, these evolving attitudes were not consistently reflected in everyday practices.

Consultations in Jordan regarding attitudes towards child marriage, where the EA\$E curriculum includes specific child marriage content, revealed a broad opposition to the practice. Most participants emphasised that girls under 18 lack the emotional maturity for marital responsibilities, with one man stating, *"A minor is a minor... She carries responsibility before her time."* Education was identified as the primary protective factor, with participants stressing the importance of girls completing secondary school or university before marrying to enhance their independence and resilience, including in the event of divorce. While many observed that child marriage is becoming less common, significant social pressure persists for women to marry by their late twenties, indicating that while the minimum age is rising, expectations around marriage timing for women remain strong.

Despite this shift, a minority of participants still advocate for early marriage, often drawing on "protection narratives" to shield girls from perceived social risks or "bad behaviours." As one man explained, *"In the current situation, yes it protects them... because*

the environment is worrying, and girls might make bad friends, leading to bad things. Early marriage keeps her from developing bad ideas or behaviours." Financial hardship remains a critical driver, with economic pressures pushing families toward early marriage as a survival strategy. Notably, the evaluation found a strong intergenerational link: parents who married early were more likely to marry their daughters before 18, often to relatives perceived as "suitable". However, most women who had personal experience with early marriage expressed deep regret and negative views, citing the severe challenges and relationship instability that followed.

The findings suggest attitudes that are more or less resistant to change, which can inform the EA\$E curriculum adaptation. Attitudes most resistant to change are those rooted in "natural" or "divine" orders of household authority and the strict gendered division of domestic labour, which remain heavily policed by social stigma and the "protection" of family honor. These are often reinforced by intergenerational cycles and the "helping" versus "sharing" dichotomy. Conversely, attitudes most amenable to change appear to be those linked to economic survival and future resilience. There is a clear opening for the curriculum to build on the existing "aspirational equality" parents hold for their children—specifically regarding secondary education and delaying marriage—and the pragmatic recognition of women's economic contributions as essential to household stability and resilience in the face of regional economic hardship.

5.1.2 What is the existing nature of communication, conflict resolution practices and experiences of economic and emotional IPV among couples to be engaged in the EA\$E curriculum? (EQ 1.2)

While couples value "respectful communication," these interactions are heavily mediated by expectations for women to de-escalate male anger and "self-silence" to preserve stability. Baseline findings across the three contexts reveal that while temporary withdrawal is a common resolution strategy, it often leads to avoidance rather than constructive resolution.

Household conflict is predominantly driven by economic insecurity and financial pressure, as well as stresses related to childcare, family interferences, and gendered expectations regarding authority and mobility.

Emotional and economic IPV, including the appropriation of assets and restrictions on women's mobility or employment, was prevalent across all countries. This was frequently normalised as legitimate expressions of male protection

and authority. While physical IPV is broadly condemned in principle, it remains a persistent reality, often rationalised as men's response to external stress or female "disobedience." Help-seeking for conflict and IPV is severely restricted by deep-seated norms around marital privacy and family honour, as well as wider barriers including women's economic dependency and fear of losing custody of their children. Consequently, family mediation remains the most common form of support accessed.

Couples across contexts defined a "good relationship" as one characterised by mutual understanding, respect, trust and honesty. However, understanding was typically framed as agreement on gendered roles rather than negotiated decision-making. As one man in Jordan stated, *"The most important thing is she understands you and your needs. When you come home from work, she doesn't start asking for things; she has already prepared your food, my role is to keep work problems at work and to ensure the household has income."*

Relationship quality varied across the sample; while some couples described supportive partnerships grounded in trust and emotional connection, others reported a lack of appreciation, or significant power asymmetries. Even where participants articulated ideals of respect and harmony, these often coexisted with entrenched norms that constrained equitable communication and shaped how couples navigated dialogue and conflict.

Building on these perceptions of good relationships, couples consistently valued communication characterised by honesty, respect and calm discussion. Open dialogue was presented as a marker of a healthy relationship, with couples seeking private moments – often late at night after children were asleep – to discuss household matters and relationship concerns.

However, these ideals often operated within broader gender norms that normalise male authority and female acquiescence. A recurring theme was the normalisation of men's temper, often attributed to external stressors like economic pressure or exhaustion. As one man in Palestine reflected, *"I admit that sometimes I react with anger or impatience. It is not because I do not respect her opinion, but because of pressure and exhaustion. When a person is tired, worried about work or expenses, he can lose his temper."* Consequently, women were primarily responsible for de-escalating conflict, often adjusting their timing, tone, or approach to avoid raising sensitive issues when their husbands were tired or stressed. As one woman in Lebanon described, *"When he comes home, he's often angry and stressed, but he tells me everything. I tell him that he needs to calm down... so I basically start comforting him... and by the next day, he goes back to work as if nothing happened."* In Lebanon and Jordan in particular, several women reported being dismissed or accused of "nagging" when raising issues, which led some to withdraw from open communication.

While most couples across the countries described conflict as inevitable, there was a significant disconnect between the desire for constructive resolution and the strategies employed. The most common approach—particularly among men—was temporary withdrawal. As one man in Palestine explained *“The best method when things heat up is leaving the house for a bit... then we get back and it is as if nothing happened.”* While this prevented immediate escalation, it often resulted in avoidance rather than resolution. Periods of silence ranging from hours to weeks were common. As one woman in Lebanon described, *“We spent two months not talking to one another. He used to eat alone; he used to sleep in a different room. He spoke with me only when he wanted something... yet he never apologises.”* Although both men and women reported using silence and withdrawal, women were more likely to describe these experiences as emotionally distressing and unresolved, noting that while the silence eventually ended, the underlying issue was rarely addressed. Some couples reported conflicts escalating to shouting before more constructive strategies, including withdrawal or constructive communication were applied.

Ultimately, conflict resolution strategies tended to reinforce unequal power dynamics. While men were often described as reluctant to apologise – viewing it as a threat to their authority – women were frequently expected to restore harmony through patience or ‘self-silencing’. As one woman in Lebanon explained, *“I apologise a lot to my husband, even when I am right... because I don’t want conflicts. My husband is a tough person, there is no way that he apologises, even if he is wrong.”* In several cases, when disagreements could not be resolved through discussion, couples reported how the final decision rested with the husband. Some women explicitly linked this to long-standing socialisation to defer to male authority. As one woman in Palestine reflected *“He always has the last word... whatever your husband says, say yes... it stayed with me... he can be wrong and I still say yes.”*

Across contexts, financial pressure emerged as the most consistently reported driver of conflict among couples. Unemployment, irregular work, rising costs of living, medical expenses, and debt were described as placing sustained stress on households and reducing tolerance during disagreements. As a man in Jordan noted, *“The disagreements and tension rise when money is not available. When there is money, everyone is happy and relaxed... When there is no money, discussions happen... Most disagreements happen over this.”* In Palestine, participants frequently described how the conflict has reduced employment and intensified financial insecurity. As one woman in Palestine explained, *“Most of what makes it hard is not between us... it is the situation around us... the money worries that keep knocking on the door.”* In Lebanon, several participants identified hyperinflation and very high food prices as affecting their ability to secure work. Both male and female participants described losing their jobs as a result of small businesses being forced to close due to unsustainable rent and operating costs.

Environmental stressors, specifically prolonged drought and extreme heat, exacerbate financial pressures by decimating agricultural livelihoods and driving up household costs. Interviews with couples revealed that as water sources dry up and temperatures rise, resulting crop failures undermine or lead to a total loss of income, while expenses for irrigation and cooling increase (see more detail about climate shocks in Section 0) This climate-induced financial strain directly erodes domestic stability; participants noted that when there is no money for basic necessities like water or medicine, arguments become frequent. As one man in Jordan noted: *"Everything is related to water. When there is no money to cover needs, problems will happen. There is no calm or stability or tranquillity in the family."* For many, the persistent psychological exhaustion of managing these environmental shocks transforms manageable disagreements into deeper marital conflict and instability. As a woman in Lebanon asserted: *"Our olive trees have given us nothing for two years because of the drought... this puts us in a constant state of tension."*

Across all three contexts, disagreements related to children and their upbringing were prominent. Couples described tensions around spending, schooling decisions, differing parenting approaches, and perceived neglect of or unequal involvement in childcare. These tensions were often intertwined with and exacerbated by financial stress. In some cases, jealousy or perceived competition for attention within the family contributed to conflict, as illustrated by one woman in Lebanon, *"Things are getting more difficult as he is aging, his anger management issues are increasing, as well as his jealousy, he loses it when he sees me taking care of my children more than him."*

Interference from extended family members, particularly in-laws, was another recurring driver of conflict across settings. Participants described tensions arising from external opinions on household decision-making, childrearing and marital roles, which were particularly common from mothers-in-law. Interference from the extended family could be a form of social surveillance that rewards male dominance and frames female autonomy as a threat to family stability. Disagreements related to women's mobility and social interactions were also commonly reported.

While many participants described disagreements and conflict as "normal" aspects of married life, specific triggers, particularly those related to financial disputes and restrictions on women's mobility, could escalate into IPV. For example, in Jordan, one woman described an experience highlighting how male control over money and mobility may intersect and rapidly escalate into physical violence.

"I asked him for money and he refused. And when I went out with my friends, I took money without telling him. He got angry that I took money. The argument escalated and he hit me with an iron rod." (Female participant, Jordan)

While conflict across settings is triggered by external economic and environmental shocks, communication and conflict resolution styles are shaped by distinct national pressures. Couples in Jordan prioritize household privacy and domestic peace, often using small rituals—such as sharing a cup of coffee or preparing food after a disagreement—to signal reconciliation and prevent external community surveillance. In Lebanon, the psychological exhaustion of hyperinflation and shifting social statuses often leads to resigned silence, where women perform the emotional labour of comforting husbands to restore stability. Meanwhile, in Palestine, the lack of agency under occupation reinforces rigid internal hierarchies, where women employ tactical "self-silencing" and men use physical withdrawal to maintain a sense of order. Ultimately, across all settings, these resolutions often prioritize the absence of conflict over the equitable negotiation of power, frequently leaving underlying grievances unaddressed.

The majority of participants stated that IPV is never justified, primarily conceptualising violence as physical assault. This form of violence was widely framed as morally wrong and destructive to family stability, with participants frequently highlighting the potential for intergenerational harm. Many couples expressed concern that children witnessing violence would "inherit" these behaviours, leading to a cycle where sons might become future perpetrators and daughters might accept violence as a norm in their own lives. As one man in Lebanon noted: *"Some men treat their wives badly because they were raised that way. But that's wrong. It destroys respect, causes divorce and harms the children. When kids see their father mistreat their mother, they start to resent him and may develop psychological problems."* Religious values were cited as a primary deterrent, reinforcing the expectation that husbands should protect rather than harm their wives; as one man in Lebanon noted, *"A man who hits his wife is not a man... God built the world... and told us to take care of our loved ones."* However, these explicit rejections of violence coexisted with more conditional attitudes shaped by gender norms. While violence was condemned in principle, it was occasionally rationalised as a result of men's inclination to anger or as a response to perceived female "disobedience" or disrespect. As one woman in Jordan noted, *"If the man hits, it's normal – he's a human who got angry and enraged."*

Across all sites, participants reported similar forms of emotional IPV, including verbal abuse, controlling behaviours, humiliation, and intimidation during conflict. These were notably more frequent in Lebanon and Palestine than in Jordan. Compared to physical IPV, emotional abuse appeared more normalised and was less consistently recognised as a form of IPV. In Palestine specifically, forms of emotional IPV and controlling behaviours often mirror the daily external stressors of humiliation, surveillance, checkpoints and unpredictability. For some men, emotional domination serves as a harmful compensatory mechanism for men seeking to reclaim the control denied to them in the public sphere.

Women across the sample described the profound psychological impact of emotional IPV, including feelings of worthlessness, withdrawal, self-silencing, and emotional exhaustion. As one woman in Lebanon explained, *"When he addresses me with these words... I feel worthless, with no dignity, as if I do not have any family and he picked me off the streets."* Another woman in Jordan described how emotional abuse could be more harmful than physical violence with broader household impacts: *"Sometimes verbal violence affects more than hitting. Like my husband, his tongue is harsh. He leaves the house and leaves me, and I take out my anger on the children for two or three days."* Emotional abuse frequently overlapped with other forms of violence, particularly in Lebanon where emotional and physical IPV commonly co-occurred, suggesting that different forms of violence are interconnected rather than occurring in isolation.

Controlling behaviours, particularly restrictions on women's mobility, social interactions, and contact with family members, were prominent across settings.

Several women described needing permission to visit friends or relatives, with decisions sometimes presented as non-negotiable. As one man in Jordan explained, *"If I say no, the matter is finished... if there is an event at her parents' house and I say she does not go, then she does not go. And if I say go, she goes."* Some women also described unpredictable or arbitrary restrictions, including limitations on who they could visit or when they could leave the house. While reports of digital violence were extremely rare, one instance from Jordan illustrated how technology can be leveraged for economic control; in this case, a husband performed a factory reset on his wife's phone to dismantle her independent online business and reassert authority over her digital and financial presence. Men often framed these restrictions as expressions of authority or protection, especially in unsafe and crisis-affected environments of Palestine and Lebanon. Yet many women experienced them as deeply constraining and emotionally distressing, limiting their ability to maintain external support networks.

Intimidation during household conflict, including breaking household items, throwing objects, or leaving the home for extended periods, was reported across contexts, primarily perpetrated by men. Although these behaviours did not always involve direct physical assault, they functioned as demonstrations of power that created environments of fear and insecurity. Ultimately, these various forms of emotional IPV and controlling behaviours are enabled by a broader normative context—often reinforced by religious interpretations—that emphasises male authority and guardianship and restricts women's mobility. Such beliefs provide a framework where controlling behaviours are not only normalised but are framed as a fulfilment of protective male roles.

Across contexts, experiences of economic IPV were a common and pervasive tool of control, primarily manifesting through restrictions on women's paid employment,

control over household finances, and appropriation of women's personal assets. These recurring practices were often justified by men in terms of protection, moral concerns, jealousy, or financial management, but had the effect of limiting women's economic autonomy. In several cases, most prominently in Lebanon, economic IPV co-occurred with emotional or physical abuse, suggesting that financial control formed part of a broader pattern of coercive control within relationships.

In several cases, husbands discouraged or prevented wives from working outside the home, framing employment restrictions as necessary to protect women's health, family honour, or appropriate gender roles. In Jordan, fewer instances of economic IPV were reported compared to Lebanon and Palestine, although similar patterns of restricting women's work and mobility were still evident. One woman in Jordan described her resentment toward her husband's framing of employment as shameful.

"I feel that just as we give men everything, they must give us everything and allow us to go out and work. For him, everything is shameful. Going out is shameful, your voice should not be raised even in the home. He tells me you are a woman, your place is in the house." (Female participant, Jordan)

Some women described repeated efforts to seek employment being refused by their husbands. As one woman in Palestine explained, *"I told my husband I want to work there... he said no, do not work... even in the past he refused."* In other cases, men's support of women's employment was limited, whereby they distinguished between acceptable home-based work and employment outside the home; one woman in Palestine noted, *"He does not want me to work outside... he says it is because he does not want me to tire myself... Home-based small things are acceptable to him... but going out to work is not."* Some women across the three settings also described leaving employment due to husbands' jealousy or disapproval of interactions with male colleagues or customers.

Men's control over household finances was another recurrent pattern, which was closely linked to broader norms of male authority and responsibility for financial decision-making. Although often framed as protective or appropriate within prevailing gender norms, these practices restricted women's access to income, assets and independent decision-making. In Lebanon in particular, several women described husbands maintaining exclusive control over financial resources, even when women identified essential household needs. As one woman in Lebanon explained, *"He keeps the money with him and buys the things that I ask him to buy... Sometimes I used to tell him leave at least USD 50 at home... but he does not listen."* Appropriation of women's personal assets, including gold received at marriage, was also reported in Lebanon and Palestine. While financial hardship was frequently cited as justification, these decisions were not always mutually agreed and reflected underlying power imbalances. As external shocks, including climate stress and

crises, repeatedly undermine their economic roles, many men appear to retreat into the household as the final domain where they can still exert influence and maintain a sense of authority.

Across Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, reports of physical and sexual IPV varied in frequency and pattern, often revealing the complex friction between personal experiences and societal ideals.

In Palestine and Jordan, disclosures were relatively limited and primarily framed as isolated, historical incidents from earlier in the marriage. These events were frequently linked to specific stressors such as financial strain, jealousy, restrictions on women's mobility, or tensions with in-laws, with their cessation attributed to increased maturity, improved communication, or family intervention. As one woman in Palestine reflected *"Years ago, during a fight linked to his family, he struck me once. I fainted. My family came, scolded him, and warned him never to touch me again... Since then, he has not laid a hand on me."* These narratives may signal shifts toward less violent conflict management, but may also reflect temporal distancing—a way of downplaying current risks or navigating social desirability bias. In contrast, reports of physical IPV were more frequent in Lebanon and more likely to involve repeated episodes. Notably, some men across settings acknowledged their own past perpetration while simultaneously condemning violence in principle, highlighting a significant gap between stated attitudes and actual behaviour. This divergence suggests that while verbal rejection of IPV may be increasing, underlying norms related to male authority, emotional volatility, and women's expected compliance remain influential in legitimising violence.

A small number of sexual IPV instances were also reported, primarily involving pressure for sex despite a wife's reluctance. Sexual IPV was more frequently described as an ongoing pressure or unresolved tensions, rooted in traditional norms of marital "duty". It is important to note, however, that sexual IPV was not included in the project ToC or EA\$E curriculum and therefore was not explicitly probed for in the interviews. Furthermore, the persistent stigma and extreme sensitivity surrounding this form of violence likely contributed to underreporting.

Regardless of the reported frequency, the consequences of physical IPV for the family unit were profound.

Across settings, women described the psychological and relational consequences of physical IPV, including fear, emotional withdrawal, and impacts on children. As a woman in Palestine noted, *"It affects the relationship and the children... the woman withdraws."* While physical and sexual IPV were not explicitly probed in all interviews, disclosures indicate that these forms of violence remain present and intersect with other forms of IPV and broader patterns of gendered authority and control.

Across all contexts help-seeking for conflict or IPV was strongly constrained by norms related to privacy, family honour and marital preservation. Marital disputes were widely

viewed as private matters, and involving others was often perceived as inappropriate or likely to worsen the situation. As one man in Palestine explained, *"The moment a problem between a husband and wife is spoken about to others, it can only lead to disaster."* Many women expressed a preference for non-disclosure, framing this as necessary to preserve family stability and avoid escalation.

Despite strong norms discouraging disclosure, some women reported seeking informal support, particularly from family members or trusted friends, in more serious situations. However, such disclosures were often perceived by both women and men as risky, including for the potential to generate stigma or escalation of conflict. As one man in Jordan explained, *"If the husband listens to his family, or the wife listens to her aunts, this can destroy a home. Advice can be negative, especially from a jealous person pretending to give helpful advice... With escalation, resentment and bitterness grow."*

In several cases, women sought help from male relatives perceived to hold greater authority and influence over their husbands. As one woman in Palestine noted, *"If I can't convince him, I go to his father. He respects his father and wouldn't say no to him... his father is the one who can change his mind."* Some men also described involving male relatives, particularly fathers-in-law, to reinforce discipline and marital hierarchy. As one man in Jordan explained, *"If she is not accepting my discussion, I take her to her father. I tell him, here is your daughter, honoured and respected."* This specific phrasing frames the husband's inability to control his wife not as a failure, but as a formal handover that preserves the woman's—and by extension, the family's—public reputation. These accounts suggest that informal help-seeking often occurred within existing gendered authority structures and did not necessarily prioritise women's autonomy or safety.

Formal help-seeking was rare across contexts, appearing almost exclusively in reports from Lebanon. There, one woman described seeking support from a WRO, which provided some mediation. Another woman in Lebanon described documenting physical abuse and threatening to involve the police, although she did not ultimately pursue legal action, *"I used to document everything... the marks... and threaten him with the photos... telling him I can use them against you."* In contrast, women in Palestine often prioritized keeping experiences of violence within the family as a form of collective resilience, where involving external authorities was perceived as a threat to family security amid political instability. Women in Jordan predominantly relied on male relatives to mediate disputes, viewing police or non-governmental organisation (NGO) involvement as a final, socially damaging resort.

Barriers to leaving an abusive relationship were pronounced across settings. Economic dependency was a major constraint, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, where women linked their inability to leave abusive relationships to lack of independent income. As a

woman in Lebanon shared, *"If I had a job, I would rent my own place and preserve my dignity."* In Palestine, leaving was further hindered by movement restrictions and the absence of safety nets outside the family; in a context of ongoing conflict, leaving a relationship risks losing one's only source of social and physical security. As one woman in Palestine explained: *"If the family breaks, we all fall. The men are under pressure from the outside [the occupation/economy], and we are under pressure from the inside. If I leave, I destroy the only thing we have left that is ours."* Concerns about children were another deterrent across contexts. Several women described remaining in abusive relationships due to fears of family separation, uncertainty about custody arrangements, or inability to financially support their children. Limited access to alternative housing or support networks further constrained options. As one woman in Lebanon explained, *"If I get in conflict with him, I don't have a house to go to, I don't have a father or a brother or anyone I can rely on."*

Dyadic analysis of the baseline data revealed discrepancies between couples'

accounts. Women were more likely to report experiences of IPV, while men in the same relationships often reported no perpetration or framed incidents as isolated or historical. Differences were also evident in assessments of relationship quality. Men more frequently characterised relationships as positive, communicative and respectful, whereas women described limitations, mistrust, or emotionally harmful interactions. Men were also more likely to characterise gendered divisions of roles and restrictions on women's mobility as fair and appropriate, while women were more likely to express dissatisfaction with these arrangements.

These discrepancies may reflect differing interpretations of shared experiences, gendered thresholds for defining violence or respect, and social desirability bias in reporting perpetration. Such discordance also highlights asymmetries in power and interpretation within relationships, and that concepts such as "respectful communication" and "non-violence" may be understood and experienced differently by each partner.

5.2 Leadership and decision-making structures (EQ 2)

5.2.1 Overview of opinion leaders across the countries

Opinion leaders identified in each country varied, but in general, participants included figures such as influential individuals, school principals, and government and municipal council figures. In Jordan, opinion leaders comprised individuals with significant professional backgrounds and a strong presence in local associations. In Lebanon, they included retired professionals and figures with respectable standing in their communities. In Palestine, opinion leaders were closely linked to municipal councils, refugee camp

committees, and community governance structures. More information on the professional backgrounds of opinion leaders is available in the table below.

Table 6. Opinion leaders in the three countries

Jordan	Lebanon	Palestine
Female opinion leaders included professionals and social activists (e.g. school principal, civil engineer), while male leaders were mostly farmers and retired cooperative members active in environmental and heritage associations.	Female opinion leaders were mostly retired teachers and former heads of schools. Others included soap-makers, and directors of women-led organisations. Some were engaged in additional work due to economic pressure, mainly producing traditional preserved foods. Male opinion leaders included retired soldiers who transitioned into private agricultural or food preservation work, and a priest active in youth and scout movements who assisted in church agricultural work.	Female opinion leaders included professionals such as sociologists, social workers, a speech therapist, and a retired school headteacher. Male opinion leaders were mainly village and community council leaders, (e.g. a deputy village council leader, an NGO founder, members of development and refugee camp committees). Many had experience in livestock farming, small-scale agriculture, and community water management.

5.2.2 Amongst opinion leaders, what are the current levels of gender equitable knowledge, attitudes and practices? (EQ 2.1)

In summary	Gender equality was generally understood as equal rights and opportunities in principle , however, gaps between formal rights and women's experiences were highlighted among female opinion leaders across the pilot countries.
	There was a clear gender divide in attitudes toward roles and authority between female and male opinion leaders , with the former demonstrating more gender transformative attitudes, questioning structural inequalities and traditional norms.
	Female opinion leaders were more likely to show their stated support for gender equality by taking concrete actions to promote women's participation and challenge exclusionary norms, whereas male opinion leaders tended to demonstrate conditional or passive forms of engagement that preserved existing power hierarchies, particularly in formal leadership spaces.

The Al Murunah+ pilot comprises interventions targeting opinion leaders in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine. It should be noted that at the time of the baseline, specific interventions targeting opinion leaders in each pilot country were not clearly identified. A broader level understanding was that the interventions aim to address inequitable gender

attitudes amongst opinion leaders to contribute to an enabling environment for changes within couples, particularly with regard to women's work and women's access to leadership.

Across opinion leaders there was a common understanding of gender equality, however, female opinion leaders highlighted the gap between rights 'on paper' and women's lived experiences of it. Both female and male opinion leaders generally understood gender equality as the idea that women and men should, in principle, have equal rights and opportunities in employment, leadership and access to resources. However, this understanding was frequently accompanied by a recognition—particularly among female opinion leaders—of a persistent gap between gender equality as a formal principle and women's lived experiences. Elaborating on the privileged access to power and networks that men have, a female opinion leader in Jordan explained, *"opportunities exist, but access is not equal. Men reach the leaders first."* More concrete examples shared include the requirement of some cooperatives in Palestine to have female representation, however, these regulations not being consistently applied. In Lebanon and Jordan, there was mention that while there are quotas for women's inclusion in some leadership structures, they do not guarantee women's authority.

This pattern was the same across countries but played out in slightly different ways. In Jordan, opinion leaders acknowledged that opportunities for women exist in agriculture, cooperatives and market chains, including access to NGO support and grants. However, female opinion leaders emphasised that male-dominated leadership structures and informal decision-making processes continue to restrict meaningful access. In Palestine, female and male opinion leaders strongly framed gender equality as a rights-based concept, especially in relation to leadership and employment. While participants broadly agreed that women should have equal rights to leadership positions, female opinion leaders pointed to the existence of structural barriers, such as land ownership requirements, male-dominated networks, and informal processes for nominations to leadership positions that systematically exclude women in practice. This reinforced the perception that equality exists largely 'on paper', rather than in lived experience. As one female opinion leader explained, *"Women face an unfair system that favours men in promotion and decision-making."*

Across all three contexts, male opinion leaders more often framed gender equality as 'fairness' rather than sameness. This framing emphasised differences between women and men in physical capacity, experience or social responsibilities, and often served to justify differentiated roles rather than equal authority. For example, in Jordan, male opinion leaders repeatedly described equality as assigning roles according to physical capacity and suitability, rather than equitable participation. During discussions on agricultural work, ploughing, fertilisation and infrastructure, one male participant said, *"Even some men can't carry a fertiliser sack. How could women manage?"*

Opinion leaders' attitudes to gender equality varied significantly by gender and by sphere of life,⁴⁵ particularly between household roles and public or leadership roles. Female opinion leaders across settings consistently articulated more gender transformative attitudes, questioning traditional gender roles and norms, critiquing men's dominance in leadership and decision-making structures, and openly naming informal exclusion, tokenism, power differentials and social penalties as key drivers of gender inequality. For example, on the issue of informal exclusion and power differentials, a female opinion leader in Lebanon said, *"Women are included [in leadership structures] just to fill a position, not to influence decisions."* Male opinion leaders, while often expressing rhetorical support for gender equality, more frequently held attitudes that legitimised men's authority through references to men's greater experience, productivity, or physical capacity. While women's competence was often acknowledged, their authority to lead or make final decisions was more frequently questioned or framed as conditional. Highlighting differentiated levels of authority between women and men, a male opinion leader in Jordan explained, *"Of course we consult [women], but the final responsibility is ours."* Attitudes of opinion leaders towards gendered roles in the household mirrored those of couples, where domestic tasks were viewed primarily as women's responsibilities.

Country-specific attitudinal patterns further shaped these dynamics. In Jordan, female opinion leaders expressed strong awareness of the unequal burden of unpaid care work, even when women engage in income-generating activities. Highlighting this, a female opinion leader in Jordan explained, *"Childcare is primarily a woman's responsibility... the husband rarely participates."* In Palestine, attitudes towards leadership were heavily shaped by social expectations that favoured men's leadership, with women's leadership often perceived as socially uncomfortable or challenging to prevailing norms of masculinity and authority. In Lebanon, overt rejection of women's leadership was rare, but implicit discriminatory beliefs persisted, linking leadership legitimacy to men's experience and physical capacity.

In practice, a clear gendered divide emerged in how support for gender equality was enacted. Female opinion leaders were more likely to translate their verbal commitment to gender equality into concrete actions, encouraging women's participation in work, leadership, household and community decision-making, and supporting other women through mentoring, encouragement and collective action. Many female opinion leaders described navigating restrictive norms through negotiation, persistence and gradual change, even within highly constrained social and institutional environments.

"There are traditions that still persist [in our society]... even with progress and development. Some women challenge these traditions. I am one of them. I try to change the mindset in my family... Even

if society has evolved, it will take time for some habits and perceptions to change.” (Female opinion Leader, Lebanon)

Male opinion leaders, despite often expressing support for gender equality, tended to demonstrate more conditional or passive engagement. Their behaviours frequently maintained existing power relations by retaining control over leadership positions, resources and final decisions, while allowing women’s participation in limited or supportive roles. Women’s involvement was often framed as situational, by being acceptable when driven by economic necessity, donor requirements, or the absence of men, rather than as a sustained shift in power or authority.

The table below provides a summary of country specific differences in how female opinion leaders support gender equality.

Table 7. Summary of opinion leaders’ views on gender equality

Jordan	Lebanon	Palestine
Jordan shows strong NGO influence and visible female participation, but entrenched male gatekeeping in cooperatives and household authority remains central.	Lebanon reflects more open debate and strategic female engagement, but informal power networks and productivity narratives still preserve male dominance.	Palestine shows the strongest structural critique from women and the clearest evidence of institutionalised exclusion through land, nomination and network systems.

5.2.3 How equitable are leadership structures and business environments for women within targeted farming systems and value chains? (EQ 2.2)

In summary

Women’s participation in decision making structures such as agricultural cooperatives and water user associations has increased across the pilot countries, but authority and decision-making remain male-dominated.

Structural and informal barriers limited women’s inclusion in leadership structures and in ‘real-power sharing’.

Workplaces are weakly regulated and unsafe, with disproportionate implications on women because of gender norms.

Economic participation does not equate to fairness or empowerment as women are likely to be concentrated in lower-valued work or receiving lower pay for similar work compared to men.

Leadership and decision-making structures within cooperatives, water associations, market chains and community governance bodies were not fully inclusive of women’s voices. While women’s participation in agricultural production and home-based value chain activities was reported to have expanded (primarily because of economic pressures in all three countries), this did not translate into ‘genuine’ representation or authority within formal leadership structures. A consistent cross-country finding was the distinction between women’s presence and their power. Women may be members, contributors or even visible participants in cooperatives and markets, however, the final authority over strategic, financial and market-facing decisions continued to rest predominantly with men.

Male and female opinion leaders expressed different views on the extent to which leadership and decision-making structures were inclusive for women. Opinion leaders—particularly female opinion leaders—highlighted that men were still seen as the default leaders. Elaborating on this, a female opinion leader in Jordan explained, *“When the association is women-only, women lead it; but if the association is mixed, it is impossible for a woman to take the lead.”* In general, male opinion leaders were more likely to emphasise that formal rules do not prohibit women from applying for membership or leadership positions, framing opportunities as available in principle. Meanwhile, female opinion leaders—particularly those in Jordan—provided a more critical assessment of how inequitable decision-making and leadership structures remain. While acknowledging gradual shifts and examples of women’s leadership, they stressed that real decision-making power was more commonly available to men because of patriarchal norms and structural barriers. Female opinion leaders consistently highlighted the gap between formal opportunity and practical influence, noting that women’s roles are often symbolic, advisory or donor-driven rather than authoritative and locally owned. A female opinion leader in Jordan summarised the dynamics within a cooperative saying, *“The body of the cooperative is feminine, while its head is masculine.”* The table below summarises the perceptions on equitable access to leadership structures and decision-making structures specific to each country.

Table 8. Perceptions on equitable access to leadership and decision-making structures

Jordan	Lebanon	Palestine
Male opinion leaders emphasised that women have capacities and opportunities to lead. However, female opinion leaders highlight several structural barriers to equitable access to and participation in leadership structures.	Leadership and decision-making structures in agricultural value chains were described as predominantly male-dominated. Women’s involvement was concentrated in socially acceptable segments of the	Leadership and decision-making structures were consistently described by male and female opinion leaders as limited in inclusivity, and that male opinion leaders retain final authority.

Opinion leaders mentioned that cooperatives are often controlled by 'established networks' and difficult for both to access.	value chain, and less so in leadership structures.	
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There have been some efforts to promote more equal representation within leadership and decision-making structures, however these are not addressing the root causes. A common intervention noted by opinion leaders across all contexts was the use of quotas to drive equitable representation. Male opinion leaders commonly viewed quota mechanisms as externally imposed or ineffective, particularly in Jordan and Lebanon. Female opinion leaders shared that quotas appoint women into leadership roles symbolically, without giving them real influence as representation does not translate into substantive decision-making power. In Palestine specifically, female opinion leaders felt that when women enter leadership through quotas rather than competition, this can undermine perceptions of merit, leading others to question their competence, and reinforcing the narrative that women need special treatment. A female opinion leader from Palestine shared, *"Quotas are more against women than for them."*

Female opinion leaders shared a range of structural barriers they face to participation in leadership, such as land ownership requirements, informal male nomination networks, women's unpaid care responsibilities, and persistent social stigma around women's public leadership and mixed gender interaction. Highlighting how land ownership requirements restrict women's access to agricultural opportunities, a female opinion leader in Lebanon said, *"the criteria for this application required owning land, which I don't, so I could not submit an application even though I wanted to."* Harmful gender norms or attitudes also pose a barrier. Male opinion leaders demonstrated gender inequitable attitudes, for example in Lebanon and Palestine, male opinion leaders acknowledged and respected women's contributions within the agricultural sector and value chain but felt that final responsibility for major sales or investment decisions should be made by men. A male opinion leader in Palestine explained, *"Of course, we consult, but the final responsibility is ours."*

While women's contributions to work was regarded as visible and often essential; they usually focused on lower-value, home-based or socially acceptable roles.

Moreover, across the countries, there were patterns of gendered occupational segmentation within agricultural systems and value chains. While not always formally defined, certain roles were socially regarded as 'women's work' and others as 'men's work', shaping access, income and authority. For example, activities like food processing, packaging and small-scale sales, were roles frequently framed as extensions of domestic responsibilities and seen as acceptable for women to engage in. Meanwhile, men dominated higher value roles such as transport, wholesale trade, negotiation and higher-profit market segments.

Workplaces within farming systems and value chains were described as weakly regulated, unevenly inclusive and usually unfair to women, especially in relation to wages, safety and social legitimacy.⁴⁶ Across all three countries, female and male opinion leaders also reported an absence of structured occupational health and safety measures within agricultural settings (such as formal occupational health standards, monitoring or enforcement of safe working conditions, protective equipment, and response mechanisms for accidents or injuries). Safety concerns included not only physical risks but also reputational and social risks on women (such as harassment, social exclusion and reduced marriage prospects). One female opinion leader in Lebanon described experiencing such scrutiny by her community questioning *“where is your man? Are you a widow which is why you are coming here by yourself?”* Concerns regarding physical violence were also reported, specifically in Lebanon and Palestine. In Lebanon, for example, lack of transportation and poor regulation in agricultural spaces exposed women to potential physical harm. Mobility and safety constraints were particularly pronounced in Palestine, compounded by the broader context of occupation, insecurity and fragmented governance. These environmental pressures reinforced male dominance in public decision-making spaces and limited women’s ability to attend meetings, travel to markets, or build the social capital necessary for leadership.

Views on value chain fairness consistently pointed to wage disparities and unequal employment conditions. For example, female participants in Palestine reported that women often received lower wages than men for similar work, especially in agriculture and factories. In Jordan, a female stakeholder reported that 91% of agricultural labour is performed by women, yet men are typically landowners and women work as labourers. Moreover, in Palestine, women were reported to accept very low daily wages (between 20-30 Shekels), meanwhile, men were likely to refuse such work. Lebanese female participants also mentioned being paid less than men for identical tasks. Stakeholders in all three countries expressed concerns that expanding women’s economic participation without structural reform risked reinforcing exploitation rather than empowerment.

“If we push women into more agricultural work but their wages stay low, or the profits are taken by others, or they are exposed to unsafe conditions, then this is not empowerment, it is just adding more pressure on their shoulders.” (Stakeholder, Palestine)

5.3 Women's economic empowerment and climate-smart agriculture skills (EQ 3)

5.3.1 To what degree do women have access to sustainable and resilient income streams (in farming systems and value chains)? (EQ 3.1)

In summary

Women's access to sustainable and resilient income sources are largely absent, coming mainly from home-based, small-scale activities that are irregular and unreliable. **Gendered cultural perceptions strongly shape labour roles**, with women concentrated in 'lighter' or 'supportive' agricultural tasks and men in higher status and better paid positions. **The barriers faced by women intersect across levels**, from household norms about respect and honour to community discomfort about mixed-sex spaces, reinforcing women's exclusion from decision-making and decent work. **Farming systems and value chains are designed around men**, with policies and safety protocols that do not prioritise women's needs, and unequal pay. **Where change is emerging**, it is often driven by economic need, urbanisation and education, which together are enabling more women and girls to enter paid work.

Most women across the pilot countries either do not work or rely on home-based, low risk activities that are seen as socially acceptable and treated as "extra" income rather than a stable livelihood. While a minority of women described more established "projects" that provide relatively stable earnings, most reported small, low-paid activities that help cover daily needs and are vulnerable to interruption or dismissal. As a female participant in Jordan expressed, *"Since I am a substitute teacher they could tell me at any moment, thank you and goodbye."* Women's work is typically organised around domestic responsibilities and proximity to home, and even when women worked or imagined working outside the home, they did not expect household roles to shift. Workshop participants across settings agreed that women could take on non-traditional roles only if workplaces were safe, nearby and perceived as "appropriate" to their skills. Low levels of formal education further constrain women's options, with many women explaining that having left school early limits the types of jobs they can access.

Farming systems and value chains are dominated by men, with women's work largely confined to informal 'assistance' roles that are undervalued, unpaid or treated as an extension of domestic support rather than as economically productive labour. In Jordan and Lebanon, men's wage-based agricultural work is widely favoured, while women's

contributions are framed as helping husbands “reduce costs” rather than as paid work. Project participants and opinion leaders largely described women working “with their men” in harvesting, livestock or processing, but rarely being recognised as farmers or paid workers. Deeply gendered norms position men as naturally suited to physically demanding tasks and external market roles, and women as better suited to nurturing or home-based work. For example, in Far’a Camp (Palestine), women are more visible in education or family-oriented committees than in agricultural leadership, which is seen as “men’s work.” In Jordan, opinion leaders agreed that selling to companies and large markets is typically a male domain, while women may sell small quantities locally to neighbours.

“In reality, no, women do not have equal opportunities to men in agri-business and farming, whether we are talking about Far'a or similar rural and camp settings. Women are present everywhere along the chain, but often in the most invisible and least protected roles. In many families, women work on the land as ‘helping hands’ rather than as recognised workers or farmers. She may spend long hours planting, harvesting, sorting or feeding animals, but her work is seen as part of her duty as a wife or daughter, not as a job that deserves a salary, a contract or rights.” (Female stakeholder, Palestine)

There are intersecting barriers to women’s work in farming systems and value chains that operate at multiple levels, ranging from individual, household, community, workspace and societal levels (see Annex 9 for summary table).

- **Individual barriers include health, skills, confidence, and structural disadvantages** that limit their ability to seek and sustain employment. Across the sample, many interviewed women live with chronic illness or disability, have low literacy or no formal qualifications, and lack start-up capital or networks. Emotional exhaustion from unpaid care, advanced age, and low self-confidence further reduce their willingness or ability to work outside the home.
- **Household barriers include entrenched gender roles, heavy care burdens and a husband’s approval**, leaving women little time or autonomy to pursue paid work. Across all three countries, women were expected to prioritise housework and childcare with additional household constraints including in-law interference, limited transport money, and pressure to avoid roles seen as socially inappropriate. Even when women contributed substantial unpaid labour to family farms or businesses, this was framed as “helping” rather than legitimate income. Norms around respectability and honour meant men often decided which jobs were acceptable, and women’s movement was implicitly authorised by husbands. These expectations, combined with the emotional and physical strain of care work and male control over finances, left many women with limited bandwidth and power to take on or sustain income-generating opportunities.

"If she worked part-time, that would be fine as long as she's home when the children come back. Otherwise, it could create problems in the household." (Male participant, Lebanon)

Across all three countries, household views of women's work and mobility are tightly bound to ideas of respectability and cultural appropriateness, with men often deciding which jobs are "right" for women. In Lebanon, men commonly said women's work was acceptable so long as it aligned with their societal values of 'decency', rejecting roles seen as inappropriate *"like being a dancer"* and idealising motherhood as women's primary focus. Some interviewed men expressed a preference for women running their own small businesses rather than working as employees for others. Interviewed women commonly consult their husbands before working or going out, framing this as mutual respect rather than permission, yet men still implicitly authorise their movement and work (see more on this in Section 5.3.2). In Jordan, socially conservative norms and concerns about sexes mixing shape which sectors are seen as suitable, with teaching or nursing preferred and jobs involving close contact with men discouraged. Opinion leaders also reinforced divisions between men's external sales roles and women's small-scale or home-based marketing. Across all contexts, women's work is permitted within narrow, male-defined boundaries of decency and honour.

"When a woman is a mother and is taking care of children, I view it as a holy work and so she should focus on that." (Male participant, Lebanon)

Across all countries, and especially in Palestine, women's skills and economic potential are heavily constrained by the sheer weight of household and care work, leaving them with limited bandwidth to pursue income-generating opportunities. In OPT, women produce high-quality dairy, herbs and preserves with clear market potential, but struggle to scale because they shoulder almost all domestic responsibilities alongside their work. In Akkar (Lebanon), female project participants described profound emotional and physical burdens for women, *"carrying pain in silence"* to keep families stable, often at the cost of their own wellbeing.

- **Community barriers include powerful norms and stigma** that police where and whether women can work, particularly in agriculture and factory work. In Lebanon, the prevailing belief that *"a woman belongs to her house"* continues to shape expectations and reputations. In Palestine, especially in Al-Far'a, tight social restrictions and fear of stigma heavily constrain women's mobility and access to work outside the home. In Jordan, similar attitudes extend into leadership: a quarter of the opinion leaders felt certain leadership roles are unsuitable for women or might make them *"lose their femininity"*.

- **Workplace barriers relate to safety, access and discrimination**, though the specific constraints vary across the three countries. Women reported unsafe or inflexible work environments, distant worksites, and discrimination or unequal pay. In Jordan, long hours, unreliable transport, and family objections to mixed-sex workplaces were especially common. In Lebanon, women frequently cited GBV and harassment risks, and a narrow set of acceptable jobs (e.g. teaching, retail, mouneh). In Palestine, inaccessible workplaces for women with disabilities and norms against working closely with men further restrict opportunities. Further, women's access to markets, training, services and finance is markedly weaker than men's, limiting their ability to move beyond small, local, often informal work. A Palestinian stakeholder highlighted how trainings, extension services and loans are typically directed to heads of household and landowners, usually men, excluding women from advancing in value chains, starting agri-businesses or being recognised as farmers and entrepreneurs in their own right. She noted that, *"Women's contribution is essential, but it is often unpaid, unrecognised, and limited to certain stages of the chain."*

"I personally choose unmarried female employees because married women take leave or leave work due to family conditions and childcare." (Female participant, Jordan)

- **Societal barriers to women's work includes climate stress, fragile infrastructure, and broader political-economic instability that limit both opportunities and safe access to work.** In Jordan, rising temperatures, dry periods and aridity reduce farm production and demand for women's labour in agriculture, while rain and poor transport infrastructure further disrupt mobility. Women consistently reported structural barriers such as difficulties accessing finance, particularly in rural areas where they cannot offer collateral such as land titles or formal salaries, and noted weak enforcement of inclusion policies in cooperatives and farmer groups. Across all contexts, female stakeholders and project participants consistently described long distances, unsafe or irregular transport, and high travel costs as major barriers to women reaching workplaces or markets, especially in rural areas. Many women hold formal qualifications but find their degrees *"in a drawer"* because local and/or crisis-affected markets prioritise basic needs, require mobility they do not have, or offer no relevant jobs. In Lebanon and Palestine, women weighed low wages against childcare, transport and food costs, and often found outside work unfeasible, opting for home-based activities instead. In Jordan, non-Jordanians (especially Syrians) face legal work restrictions along with social discrimination. In Lebanon and Palestine, political instability, checkpoints, economic decline and service disruptions undermine the stability and safety of available work.

Climate-driven shocks negatively impact women's work in and income from farming and value chains. Despite this, few women described using climate-smart practices, often because they lack capital, equipment and market access, or because water scarcity—particularly in Lebanon—makes such practices unfeasible. Previous NGO initiatives provided equipment or training on processing and climate-smart production, but without sustained grants, loans or marketing support, very few women have been able to grow beyond small-scale, home-based activities. In Lebanon, dried up water reserves also emerged as a significant deterrent to climate-smart practices among women, reiterating how climate change impacts stable wages for women. See Annex 9 for details on types of climate-smart practices currently undertaken across the three countries.

In some contexts, women and girls are entering paid work, especially in urban and better-educated households, driven by rising education levels, economic hardship, supportive male family members and climate-resilient opportunities. In Jordan, participants noted that urban areas are more accepting of women's paid work than rural communities. In Lebanon, shifting norms linked to rising education levels and the economic crisis led some men to acknowledge that *"both must work to survive"* and to encourage their wives to use their skills. Across Lebanon and Palestine, fathers spoke proudly about wanting daughters to *"secure their future"*, framing education as non-negotiable even in hardship and expressing strong support for their daughters' careers. In Palestine, project participants and opinion leaders agreed that more women are now working and that this is slowly becoming more socially acceptable, including in some non-traditional roles such as operating machinery or driving women-only taxis, provided conditions are *"decent and safe"*. Male allies who encourage wives' and daughters' education and employment play a visible role in these shifts. Some participants also observed that widowhood or older age can expand women's freedom to work.

Women across all three countries have very limited access to sustainable, resilient income in farming value chains and beyond, leaving them to rely on their own coping strategies rather than secure livelihoods. Women and men alike described being unable to predict month-to-month income while costs, ration-shop credit and debts steadily accumulate. Where women do work, it is often in precarious, informal roles with limited protections, or in small-scale household farming that is highly exposed to climate shocks, water scarcity and fluctuating seasons, eroding any sense of income stability. Many women intentionally keep home-based projects informal to avoid jeopardising eligibility for social assistance, which further constrains their ability to scale up or formalise more resilient enterprises. Across countries, political instability, inflation and climate stress reduce agricultural production and seasonal work, with couples in Lebanon and Palestine describing long stretches without wages and painful trade-offs, such as skipping meals or buying medicine *"by the strip"*. When men's income dries up, women often step in as shock

absorbers—selling their gold, taking on debts, joining informal savings circles, or relying on family support to bridge gaps. In this context, women’s resilience rests less on secure income and more on their own adaptiveness, thriftiness, family support networks and quiet endurance in the face of chronic insecurity.

“I would not use the term “climate-smart” directly, but I can say that women are capable of changing their practices when they experience concrete losses [...] However, many women lack the financial resources to invest in infrastructure such as wells, water storage or more advanced equipment. This limits their ability to adopt more sustainable and resilient practices, even when the knowledge is available.” (Female participant, Palestine)

5.3.2 To what degree do women have agency and participation in financial decision-making and resource management within the household?⁴⁷ (EQ 3.2)

In summary

Baseline findings demonstrate that women’s agency in financial decision-making at a household level is constrained. Men hold more power in household financial decision-making than their wives. Women’s degree of agency in financial decisions, is in part determined by the attitudes of their husband.

Clear gendered roles in financial decision-making operate across all countries. Women are more likely to have agency in decisions about day-to-day spending and/or be responsible for managing a budget to meet household basic needs throughout the month.

Men tend to retain authority over major financial decisions, such as larger purchases (e.g. furniture, cars, livestock), sale of assets (e.g. gold, leasing land), investing and income generation activities.

Women’s economic agency and participation is further constrained by restrictions over their mobility. Husbands commonly hold authority over women’s income generation decisions and on occasion restrict women’s economic engagement in markets, etc.

Husbands or male household heads hold more power in household decision-making than their wives or female household members. Whilst most male participants felt that they consulted their wives and respected their inputs, women shared that their husbands hold authority over the final decisions. This is true of decisions about expenditure, sale of assets, investment and income generation. This inequality in agency over financial decisions is rooted in inequitable gender norms, whereby financial decisions are considered the role of a husband or man. In Palestine, more so than other countries, there was broad recognition amongst male workshop participants that financial management is tied to

authority and identity, with tension between respect for women's competence and the preservation of male decision-making power.

Male household heads—particularly those in single-income households—hold the power to determine the degree of agency their wives have in financial decision-making.

Where men felt that their wives were better placed to make spending decisions on household needs, they more commonly handed over their full income to their wife to manage. For example, a male participant in Palestine shared, *"For daily spending and household needs, we do not discuss every small thing. All my money stays at home. My wife buys what she needs... The final decision on these items is hers."* However, some men felt that whilst their wife knows what the house needs, they better understand what the household can afford, as observed by a male participant in Jordan: *"Sometimes the husband's thinking is broader than the wife's. The wife is at home and may not know what is going on outside or the financial situation."* In these instances, men are more likely to control household income; they may take requests from their wives, but they retain access to the money and the final decision.

Clear gendered roles in financial decision making operate across all countries.

Stakeholders, opinion leaders and project participants agreed that women are more likely to have agency in decisions about day-to-day spending and/or be responsible for managing a budget to meet household basic needs throughout the month. Women expressed and demonstrated confidence and expertise in day-to-day spending and budgeting income. Both male and female participants agreed that women were often better at managing household finances, particularly relating to food, fuel and bills. Male participants across all countries—particularly older men—commonly see this as part of the responsibilities that sit within the domestic sphere, therefore, a role for their wives. A husband in Lebanon shared, *"My wife handles all decisions regarding daily expenses. I don't discuss these things; they are not important to me."* In Jordan, women more commonly shared stories demonstrating their agency in financial decisions relating to day-to-day spending and large purchases for the household (such as furniture or appliances) than in the other countries.

Men tend to retain authority over major financial decisions, such as larger purchases (e.g. furniture, cars, livestock), sale of assets (e.g. gold, leasing land), investing and income generation activities. Across these areas, men prioritised investment in business and children's education, over investment in home repairs or needs. Both female and male participants generally perceive men as having more relevant experience and expertise to make these decisions, due to underlying patriarchal norms, greater engagement in and exposure to business, formal labour and financial transactions. While women expressed the desire to participate in substantive financial decisions, and occasionally do feed in, their opinions hold less weight in these decisions. In Lebanon, men frequently deprioritised

investment important to women, such as home repairs, increasing women's invisible labour when dealing with issues such as broken appliances. In Palestine, women reported cases where husbands pressurised them to sell personal assets (such as gold) or to spend their savings, usually to fund an income generation venture or investment.

"In the end, he kept at me and made me spend my gold, and we built a plastic greenhouse. From the first planting, the greenhouse and all the metal were blown away, and nothing was recovered."

(Female participant, Palestine)

Despite these trends, there are examples of joint financial decision-making, but this is more common in Jordan for two main reasons. Firstly, there is greater respect amongst husbands in Jordan for their wives' skills in financial decision-making, and more women working, which results in more instances in which the husband and wife have equal access to the household income. Secondly, there is more socioeconomic security amongst the sample in Jordan. Female opinion leaders and stakeholders in Jordan shared that joint decision-making at household level was improving in line with socioeconomic security. A female opinion leader shared *"In wealthier homes, decision-making is more joint whereas in poorer households' management of day-to-day spending falls to the wife."*

Decisions about children, especially education, were more commonly shared, than other decisions. A male participant in Jordan described, *"Everything about the children and their schooling... we discuss it together."* Men tend to hold final authority, however there is a higher degree of alignment between husbands and wives on this topic compared to others.

Across all countries, men held final authority over women's mobility and decisions about whether they could work, creating a major barrier to women's access to income generation. Women were widely expected to consult their husbands before leaving the house for work, errands or social activities, as noted by a male participant in Jordan, *"of course she cannot move without my permission"*. Women frequently shared stories in which their husbands had prevented them from working or leaving the house, as a woman from Palestine put it, *"If he says do not go, that is it. I obey him and do not go. I take his opinion."* Men frequently framed this restriction as a religious or social obligation. A male participant in Jordan explained *"That is what our religion says. She [his wife] must be with a male guardian. And if she wants to go to her family, she must inform [me] and seek permission."* These restrictions were more prominent among older, conservative men—particularly in Lebanon and Palestine—some of whom feared reputational damage if their wives worked. During the male project participant workshops in Palestine, this subject sparked debate amongst men and revealed a generational shift in attitudes, whereby younger men were much less likely to prevent their wife from working. Where women do have agency to participate in income generation, it is not uncommon for husbands to retain final authority

over which types of income generation are appropriate. This trend is at risk of influencing the Al Murunah+ economic intervention, with several female participants disclosing that they hoped to get some additional funds from the Al Murunah+ to work on their husband's project rather than their own idea.

These behaviours constrain women's access to paid work and participation in the economy, acting as a barrier to increasing women's participation and agency in financial decision-making within and outside of the household. Where women do not have autonomy over their mobility or financial decision-making, they are less likely to work or to be involved in physically purchasing day-to-day items such as food or fuel. In these instances, it is more likely that their husbands hold control over the household income and make final decisions on expenditure, savings and investment. A male participant in Lebanon explained that his wife *"can make decisions, but I don't give her money; I simply buy everything."* Where women work, they are more likely to have agency over their own income, financial decisions pertaining to it and to hold more agency in decisions about household income. In Jordan, more female participants were working or had recently worked at the time of their interview and shared a higher degree of agency over household financial decisions. A female participant in Jordan shared *"My salary is mine and I spend it the way I want, and he does not ask me to buy things for the house."* This could be reflective of trends toward more equitable attitudes in Jordan around women's financial decision-making skills.

There was a clear message from men, particularly in Lebanon and Palestine, that their respect for their wives wouldn't change if they started working, *"as respect isn't based on money"*. Despite this, there is evidence that women's opinions hold more weight in household financial decision-making if they do work. Several men note that they trusted their wives input more after they started earning income as it increases their capabilities, networks and knowledge to inform and enhance financial decision-making.

"From the beginning I've respected her opinion...but after she started working, I began to value it even more. I saw how much she helped me stand on my feet again and how she carried the family when I couldn't. It made me feel proud of her! Now, when we discuss money or decisions about the house, I listen to her more. I see her as a partner, not just a wife...because she's really part of everything we do." (Male participant, Palestine)

Overall, women expressed confidence and demonstrated strong capabilities in budgeting and resource management at a household level, whereas men demonstrated more confidence and experience in resource management and investment in business. In the project participant workshop, women spoke confidently about managing budgets to meet basic needs and were likely to build savings if and where possible. However, women

feel less confident in making decisions related to business or agriculture and are less likely to use surplus income to invest in a business. Across all countries, male participants acknowledge their wife's role in resource management to meet the households' basic needs. However, in Jordan, workshop participants agreed that household resilience is dependent upon the wife's ability to budget and spend: *"Family success and resilience depends on the woman's organisation and not squandering. Excluding her from financial decisions may lead to difficulty in family resilience and meeting its needs."*

5.3.3 What is the evidence of and pathways through which a) addressing gender inequitable norms and attitudes (including those that contribute to IPV) and b) increasing women's agency and economic participation could contribute to household resilience longer term? (EQ 3.3)

In summary

The baseline found that households in the sample are facing economic and food insecurity. Households face unique contextual factors that impact household resilience including climate, conflict and economic shocks. Climate-related shocks are reducing households' ability to generate income or be self-sufficient through farming or value chains.

Households were generally better able to withstand minor shocks but lack the capacity to build resilience to protracted insecurity. Many described a strong mindset of endurance that helped them manage immediate impacts, but few had the resources or capacity needed to plan for the future.

Household resilience was broadly viewed as a shared responsibility, but shaped by traditional gender roles. Men were expected to provide income and protect the family during crises, while women were responsible for managing the household budget and daily needs.

The baseline found evidence that gender inequitable norms undermine household resilience by limiting women's ability to contribute to income generation and financial decision-making. Single-income households are more at risk of severe impacts of shocks, and restricting women's work increases this exposure

According to the evaluation ToC, the project has several causal pathways and assumptions that link IPV and women's economic empowerment to household resilience to climate shocks. The evaluation seeks to identify evidence that the pathways and assumptions are likely to hold true. To do this, the baseline first aims to understand the current state of household resilience and examine the evidence that suggests that gender

inequitable attitudes, norms and practices contribute to decreased resilience at household level.

During the inception phase, IWMI, FCDO and the evaluation team **defined household resilience as “a household's capacity to withstand, adapt to and recover from climate shocks (particularly to water scarcity) that have the potential to lead to financial crises.”** However, it is clear from the project participants that household resilience has been significantly impacted by other crises in recent years including economic crises and conflict, making it difficult to explore resilience to climate shocks in isolation. Therefore, these findings explore a broader definition of household resilience as “a household's capacity to withstand, adapt to and recover from shocks, including climate shocks”.

Across the programme, participants’ understanding of household resilience differs slightly to the project/evaluation definition, with slight nuance across each of the countries. In Jordan, a resilient household was described as a supportive, cooperative household able to withstand hardship through diverse sources of income. In Lebanon, a broader definition was provided of households in which the wife and husband support one another, where there is sufficient money to buy food, water and other basic needs, and where household members feel safe. In Palestine, resilience centred on having sufficient resources during crises, managing budgets wisely, and remaining steadfast and united as a family. Across all countries, there was a similar sentiment that household conflict negatively impacts a household’s resilience.

“A resilient family is one that knows how to save and manage what it has by preserving water and food for hard times and saving money when possible. In my case, I don’t work during winter because the rock mill closes, so I stay home.” (Male participant, Lebanon)

Household resilience is largely seen as a shared responsibility, but with distinctly gendered roles. Men were widely seen as responsible for securing income and protecting the household during crises, reflecting norms that position them as providers. Women, meanwhile, were perceived as crucial to managing the household budget and ensuring basic needs are met – a role that many participants described as essential to a family’s ability to stay resilient. Several of the households in the sample have experienced crises over recent years that have had significant impacts on their resilience, whilst climate shocks are noted amongst these, they are not the most pressing or prevalent crisis in all contexts (see Table 9 below).

Table 9. External shocks affecting household resilience

Jordan	Lebanon	Palestine
Climate shocks: Wadi Al Seer is facing rising temperatures and decreased rainfall, resulting in water scarcity. This is having a significant impact on the availability for water to meet basic needs and for agriculture. Irrigation challenges are lowering crop yield, reducing viable crop diversity, and affecting livestock, leaving households with declining income and subsistence capacity. Economic shocks: Wadi Al Seer's population includes both Jordanian nationals and Syrian immigrants/refugees, but economic insecurity is more acute among Syrians, who are more likely to rely on agriculture or other low skilled, informal labour.	Climate shocks: Drought and rising temperatures are negatively impacting food security and household income, especially in project implementation locations where there is reduced rainfall and long-term water scarcity. Economic shocks: Lebanon's severe economic collapse, with a 95% currency devaluation, has caused hyperinflation, wage erosion, unemployment and deep household insecurity, which participants noted had significantly impacted household resilience. Conflict shocks: A fragile security environment continues to affect households, particularly in Qaa near the Syrian border, where there have been historical terrorist attacks and ongoing regional volatility.	Climate shocks: Rising temperatures, declining rainfall, and IDF-imposed restrictions are driving water scarcity and reducing yields, particularly in Wadi al Faria'a. However, participants raised climate impacts less often than other threats. Economic shocks: The escalating conflict has had a devastating impact on the economy in the West Bank. After the October 7th attacks, Israel revoked Palestinian work permits, triggering a sharp rise in unemployment that severely impacted many households. Conflict shocks: Across the West Bank, Israeli occupation is increasing conflict-related violence, displacement and insecurity. Frequent IDF raids, property loss, forced displacement and, in some cases, deaths were described as among the most immediate and devastating threats to household resilience.

Households are facing climate shocks that are impacting their ability to generate income or be self-sufficient through farming or associated value chains. Across all countries there is a similar causal chain through which climate change is impacting household resilience, however, the extent of the impact differs. Stakeholders, participants and opinion leaders confirmed that water scarcity and rising temperatures are reducing the yield and viability of crop or livestock-based agriculture. In Lebanon and Jordan, these issues are particularly pertinent, impacting resilience of several households. Households are facing decreased yield, burning of crops and a reduction in the diversity of crops that can withstand the climate. A male participant summarised this well: *"We cannot grow anything except figs because there is not enough water for other crops."* This has had several impacts for households: 1) reduced jobs available in farming; 2) reduced income from selling crops

grown by individuals; and 3) a reduction in crop yields available for food processing or subsistence.

Reduced rainfall and increased drought are resulting in increased care costs of livestock. Reductions in seasonal rainfall have contributed to long-term drought and water-scarcity are also reducing free grazing available for livestock and increasing the price of feed, and as a result project participants reported having to sell their livestock. Across the project locations, this is more prevalent in Aarsal (Lebanon) which is the most rural location of project implementation. A female participant in Lebanon shared, *"Because of drought, shepherds have to buy ready-made food for the livestock... The food for livestock is very expensive."*

Households also described lacking sufficient water for drinking, cooking and maintaining basic hygiene. For example, a female participant in Lebanon shared, *"This summer, we had to buy water for showering and drinking, and I would clean the house with only one pot of water."* Purchasing water added a significant and unavoidable expense for many households and was noted as a particular challenge in Lebanon and Jordan.

Households were generally able to withstand minor shocks but lack the capacity to build resilience to protracted insecurity. Across the contexts, many described a strong personal mindset of endurance that supported households to withstand the immediate impact of shocks, but far fewer had the resources or capacity needed to adapt to or recover from shocks. This was particularly pertinent in Palestine and Lebanon where conflict and economic crises have had severe impact on household resilience. In Lebanon, for example, several households reported being unable to regain the level of financial security they had before the financial crisis, illustrating how recovery remains out of reach even when day-to-day coping is possible.

"The last two years pressed on everyone's neck... the war, closures, rising prices. If tougher days come, we will adapt... I was raised to depend on myself... to keep walking even when the road narrows... Faith helps... you say bismillah, get back on the horse, and move again." (Male participant, Palestine)

Across all countries, households are focused on meeting their basic needs and very few have adequate income to plan longer term. The majority of households in the sample were struggling to meet their basic needs with the income they were able to generate. Female and male participants of workshops – across all contexts – stated that they have no capacity to save or invest, mainly due to debt and insufficient income. One participant in the Palestine explained that *"there is not enough to invest."* Economic security and household resilience was seen to be lower across Lebanon and Palestine, whilst in Jordan there was more variability in socioeconomic background of households.

Households’ resilience levels are seen to be lower across single-income households and households reliant on agriculture or informal labour. Households reliant on agriculture are facing uncertainty in income due to the impact of climate shocks on crops and livestock. Across the sample, climate-smart agricultural practices are not commonly known or utilised, reducing the adaptive capacity of households. Households reliant on a single stream and form of income are less likely to save and more at risk of economic and climate shocks plunging the household into economic insecurity. In both instances, these households are more likely to employ negative coping mechanisms¹ at time of crisis.

There were a mix of coping mechanisms reported, including both positive and negative coping mechanisms. However, it was far more common for households to rely on negative coping mechanisms than positive, predominantly due to a lack of resources to prepare for shocks. Commonly noted negative coping mechanisms include selling useful assets (e.g. cars, livestock), taking on debts, reducing food intake and deprioritising healthcare. In Palestine, healthcare was seen as a privilege not a necessity – one man shared *“We live with pain.”* However, in Lebanon a male participant shared *“I was forced to take loans with interest. I sold my car and even my wife’s gold to survive”* to meet the household’s health needs. Across all contexts, external shocks impacting the household – particularly shocks that result in economic insecurity – were seen to act as drivers of conflict and IPV (see Section 5.1.2 for more information).

Positive coping mechanisms employed often included reducing expenditure on non-essential items or preserving food. Across all countries, there was an understanding of the need to *“tighten the belt”* and the sale of assets purchased to hold value (e.g. gold). However, in both Lebanon and Jordan, farming and food processing were more commonly seen as a mechanism to cope with financial shocks. Across both countries there are several examples of households that grow crops on their land for subsistence and/or preserve food for hard times. One male participant in Lebanon described how *“We preserve food, like Kishik (a dairy local homemade food) and cabbage, for hard times.”* For a full list of positive and negative coping mechanisms across the countries, please see Table 7 in Annex 9.

At baseline, there is evidence that gender inequitable norms and IPV undermine household resilience by limiting women’s ability to contribute to income generation and financial decision-making. As shown across EQ 1, 2 and 3, these norms restrict women’s access to sustainable forms of work, and reduce their agency in managing household finance – both of which are central to household resilience. Single-income households are more at risk of severe impacts of shocks, and restricting women’s work increases this exposure. At the same time, women are widely recognised as skilled budget managers, yet

¹ Negative coping mechanisms are defined as harmful strategies adopted by households in response to climate, conflict or economic crisis, they often exacerbate challenges and hinder long-term recovery.

constraints on their financial decision-making reduce households’ ability to manage resources efficiently in times of crisis. Strengthening women’s access to resilient livelihoods and their agency in financial decision-making therefore has clear potential to improve household resilience. The evidence at baseline supports the theory that these aspects are interlinked, however, it isn’t until the endline that the evaluation can comment on causality and impact of the project.

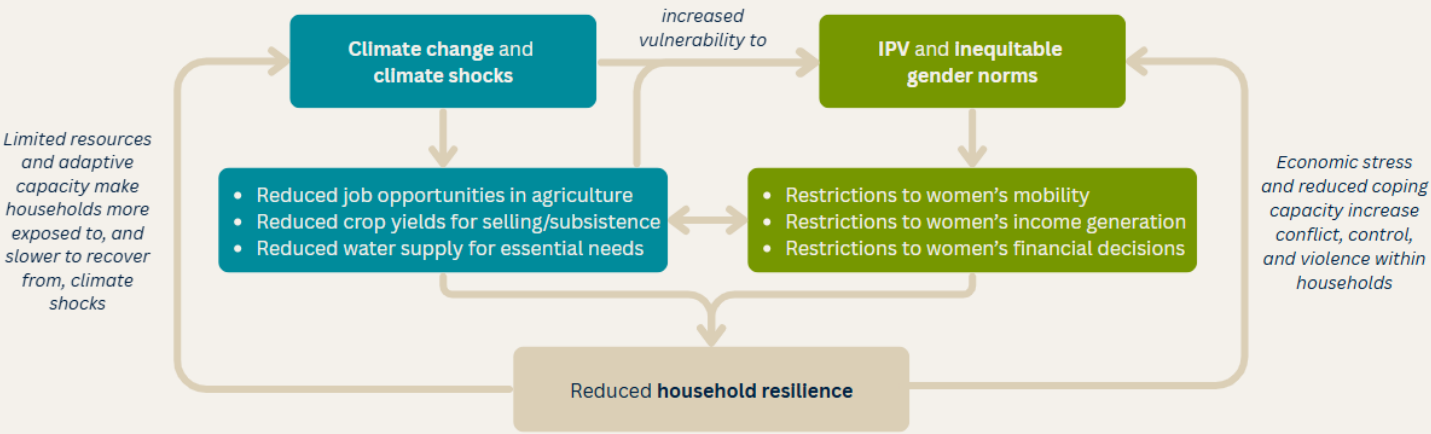


Figure 6. Links between climate, IPV and household resilience

5.4 Enabling and hindering factors, and sustainability (EQ 4)

Across the pilot countries, progress towards the project’s intended outcomes is shaped by a mix of enabling and hindering factors at three levels.

Table 10. Overview of enablers and barriers

Programmatic	Enabling
	Project participants. There was interest among participants in upskilling in climate-smart skills and strengthening household resilience.
	WROs. The project delivers the EA\$E curriculum through WROs and facilitators that bring strong contextual knowledge.
	Hindering
	Recruitment. The recruitment strategy for participants did not account for women's employment and interest in agricultural work. Opinion leaders selected represent very broad backgrounds, at times with limited linkages to the agriculture sector. Limited information was shared with participants on project activities, hindering their ability to fully engage with some of the baseline content.
	Design. At the time of baseline data collection, there was limited clarity on planned economic interventions, and how they reflect market characteristics, account for existing opportunities for women or align to the ToC.

	Implementation. Uncertainty around funding decisions has caused challenges for IWMI and delays to implementation timeline, reducing the timeframe for implementation. Conflict has also hindered programme activities. Coordination Challenges. There were coordination challenges between IWMI, the implementing partners and the women's rights organisations which at times caused delays or gaps in the implementation.
Institutional	Enabling Laws and policies. Formal policy commitments to women's rights and GBV prevention have expanded in the region over the past decade. Education. There have been substantial improvements in female enrolment rates at all educational levels in all implementation countries. Organisational structures. Across pilot locations, emergency response, mental health and psychosocial support services are available for survivors of IPV. NGOs operating in the region are creating work opportunities for women.
	Hindering Laws, policies, and infrastructure. Implementation gaps persist, driven by weak enforcement mechanisms and limited institutional capacity. Limited availability of transportation and child care services also affect women's work. Business structures/processes. There is weak enforcement of inclusion policies in workplaces and cooperatives, limiting representation/participation of women. Greater social acceptance and land ownership requirements make it easier for men to obtain leadership positions in agricultural cooperatives.
	Enabling Economy and work. Insecurity resulting from external shocks (e.g. conflict, financial crisis) is leading more women to take up paid work. Couples who are younger, more educated, and residing in urban centres are more accepting of women's work.
	Hindering Climate. Water scarcity, drought and rising temperatures are negatively affecting agricultural yields and access to water for consumption, sanitation and hygiene. Economy and work. Financial crisis in Lebanon continues to affect the economic resilience of households through hyperinflation, devaluing wages, increased unemployment and economic insecurity. Rising costs and economic instability is enhancing vulnerabilities across all pilots. Conflict and security. Conflict in Palestine and Lebanon is affecting the physical safety and psychological wellbeing of project participants. Mobility restrictions significantly affect the availability of stable work opportunities. Social norms. Norms that view women's role as limited to the domestic sphere, and social stigma against men engaging in domestic tasks, hinder women's engagement in productive roles. Notions of privacy and family honour at times limit women's help-seeking behaviours.
Contextual	

The programmatic level refers to factors related to how the project is designed, delivered, and managed – including approaches, tools, staffing, targeting, sampling, coordination and day to day implementation decisions.

At the programmatic level, challenging regional context and funding uncertainties from FCDO have created challenges for project design and implementation resulting in delays, lack of clarity and rushed implementation. Interviews with programme participants and stakeholders suggest that this might hinder the economic and opinion leader interventions more than the EA\$E curriculum.

There were some communication and coordination challenges amongst the consortium implementing the project. At times there was a lack of coordination between IWMI, the implementing partners and the WROs. This resulted in delayed timelines, rushed design and implementation during inception and throughout implementation. Delays in receiving implementation guides and intervention materials meant that at times quality assurance or technical advisory support was not possible, this may have contributed to divergence from the project and pilot ToC.

The engagement of local WROs has strengthened the relevance and safe design of the EA\$E curriculum, making efforts to contextualise the curriculum to facilitate relevance. This appears to have been effective and well aligned in all locations, however, in Lebanon a decision was made to exclude the child marriage component despite high levels of child marriage across the sample.

At the time of the baseline, most participants had limited knowledge of the project and activities, and among local partners there was limited clarity on planned economic interventions, and how they reflect market characteristics and existing opportunities for women. Recruitment strategies employed by partners have not consistently considered women's background in agriculture, resulting in a portion of the female participants not engaged in agriculture and a few cases where women did not wish to pursue it. However, a notable number of female participants recruited show strong appetite for climate-smart work and upskilling, if it means having a source of recession/ climate proof income like livestock products, particularly women in Palestine. In Jordan, many women already manage household plots and have clear ideas about the support they need.

The implementing partners' recruitment approach for opinion leaders was unclear, and has resulted in a diversity of leaders, many with limited agricultural background. Particularly across the economic and opinion leader interventions there has been some divergence from the ToC. This includes 1) economic interventions that span into work beyond climate-smart agriculture or food processing and 2) opinion leader interventions that do not address all

items outlined in the ToC and project descriptions, particularly losing the focus on workplace policies.

The institutional level refers to systems, structures, and policies of relevant institutions at national and sub-national levels – such as government bodies, local ministries, cooperatives, associations and businesses – that shape how programmes are supported, regulated and sustained.

At the institutional level, policy commitments to women's rights and GBV prevention have expanded in the past decade across all countries, and most governments have articulated formal commitments to gender equality through national development strategies, women's empowerment plans and sectoral policies. In Palestine and Jordan, gender has been mainstreamed into National Adaptation Plans. In Palestine, this was reinforced by the presence and support of government community centres that are considered safe by participants, which may assist the implementation of EA\$E sessions. International NGOs are actively pushing for women's inclusion, and efforts to expand girls' education across the three countries lay important groundwork for future change. Agricultural work frequently lacks formal protection measures or response mechanisms for injury. Inclusion policies in cooperatives and farmer groups are weakly enforced, land ownership remains male-dominated, and social networks often ease men's paths into leadership far more than women's. Transport and childcare gaps, combined with limited institutional capacity and discriminatory personal status laws, contribute to persistent implementation gaps.

The contextual level refers to the broader national and community context in which programmes operate – including social norms, economic conditions, political and security dynamics, and climate and environmental factors that influence what is possible for households or communities.

At the contextual level, broader crises and shocks both constrain and, paradoxically, create openings for women's participation as previously discussed. Several households have experienced forced displacement. Many participants are based in refugee camp settings which are often disrupted with IDF raids. Israel's revocation of travel and work permits left a significant number of Palestinians previously working inside the Israeli border without employment. Work opportunities within or near displacement camps remain scarce and are often informal and precarious in nature. In Lebanon and Jordan, Syrian refugees are often more economically insecure and engaged in low-skilled and informal labour in addition to experiencing social hostility.

6. Conclusions

This section lists conclusions, which have been derived from the most important findings across the EQs.

Conclusion 1: Men hold more power and authority within households, and across decision-making and leadership structures.

Within households, workplaces and households, men hold more authority and power in decision making. Within households, gender roles are perceived as "natural" and "complementary" rather than negotiated. While women exercise significant day-to-day agency in domestic management, their authority is clearly bounded, with husbands retaining the "final say" over finances, employment, and engagement with the external world. While women's participation in work, including agricultural production and value chains, has expanded due to economic necessity, this presence has not translated into genuine influence; greater access to cooperatives and markets, nor final authority over financial and market-facing decisions, which remain predominantly male led. Because male opinion leaders often frame women's contributions as a necessity-driven "aid" rather than a rights-based entitlement, these entrenched hierarchies of masculinity—defined by provision and guardianship—continue to function as a primary barrier to equality in both the private and public spheres.

Conclusion 2: Emotional and economic forms of IPV are prevalent but rarely recognised as violence and are largely normalised.

Examples of emotional and economic violence were prevalent across all contexts, whereas physical violence was most prevalent in Lebanon. Unlike physical violence, which is widely condemned, emotional and economic IPV are not widely understood as a form of violence and are more normalised, often explained disingenuously as "protection" or attributed to men's natural authority. This normalisation acts as a primary driver of IPV. These forms of violence carry critical consequences: they undermine women's psychological well-being and their ability to engage in the labour market.

Conclusion 3: Restrictions to women's autonomy and mobility is a prevalent and intersecting form of emotional and economic IPV, which is used to maintain the status quo.

The requirement for "permission" to move, work, or socialise forms a powerful mechanism of control that keeps women dependent on their male partners. These restrictions are often framed as "protection" or "guardianship," but their practical effect is to isolate women from both economic and, in some cases, social opportunities. Because these behaviours are deeply embedded in religious and cultural interpretations of male authority, preventing IPV

necessitates directly challenging the norms that justify the monitoring and restriction of women's choices and movements. Such restrictions act as a significant barrier to achieving gender transformative change, women's economic empowerment and household resilience.

Conclusion 4: Structural and attitudinal barriers hamper women's access to and participation in decision-making and leadership spaces, hindering gender equitable shifts within workplaces, cooperatives and associations.

The baseline evaluation found that decision-making and leadership structures are gender inequitable, with women facing significant barriers to equal participation and voice within these structures. These included harmful gender norms and attitudes amongst powerholders, as well as structural barriers such as discriminatory inheritance laws, limited land ownership for women, political patronage and nepotism. This entrenches gender inequitable practices within workplaces, cooperatives and associations as female opinion leaders are more likely to model gender equitable practices. While the project is designed to shift attitudes that restrict women's participation in decision-making and leadership structures, it is less equipped to address the structural barriers which are likely to persist. Leveraging the influence of female leaders as change agents, while simultaneously shifting gender inequitable attitudes and practices of male opinion leaders will be critical.

Conclusion 5: Women face significant barriers to accessing work at individual, household, community and structural levels, many of which are not targeted in the project design.

The evaluation found that women face several barriers to accessing resilient income sources, and while the project addresses some of these barriers at individual and household level, significant gaps persist at community, workplace and societal levels. These include restrictive social attitudes, norms, and stigma towards women working, exclusionary workplace policies and practices, and unsafe and inaccessible transport and workplace infrastructure. Although the project intended to leverage opinion leaders to address some workplace barriers, the evaluation found that several of the enrolled opinion leaders were not associated with cooperatives or associations. The evaluation also did not find evidence from the desk review or stakeholder interviews of external interventions filling these gaps, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of women's economic empowerment in the project sites.

Conclusion 6: There is evidence of interlinkages between women's economic empowerment and agency, and household resilience.

The findings suggest that when women's economic participation is paired with increased decision-making power and mobility, households are better equipped to navigate crises. However, for women's economic gains to translate into resilience, they must have the agency to control their earnings and the autonomy to move freely. Restrictions on what is

considered “acceptable” women’s work, and the persistent perception of domestic labour as a woman’s role, create a “double burden” that triggers household conflict and undermines the sustainability of economic gains. True resilience is achieved only when women are recognised as equal household partners. This requires an appreciation of women’s economic contributions that moves beyond limited thresholds toward full participation in the family’s strategic future, supported by a fundamental redistribution of domestic labour. Social norms change and building household resilience are both complex, long-term objectives requiring a holistic approach delivered over several years. Unless the project successfully achieves changes in attitudes and practices across male participants, at household, community and structural level, the impact of women’s economic empowerment on household resilience remains precarious.

Conclusion 7: Despite the incredible strength amongst households to endure crisis, resilience at household level is low and exacerbated by multiple economic, conflict and climate shocks.

The evaluation team and project defined household resilience as ‘a household’s capacity to withstand, adapt to and recover from climate shocks (particularly water scarcity) that have the potential to lead to financial crises’. Households showed remarkable emotional endurance in the face of crisis and withstand the shock. However, they are less able to adapt to or recover from shocks. Across the sample, the majority of households rely on insecure, fluctuating salaries and struggle to meet their basic household needs, leaving little ability to build adaptive capacity through saving or investing, and pushing many toward negative coping mechanisms during crises that further erode household resilience. In Palestine and Lebanon, conflict and economic crises were especially damaging to household resilience, while climate change and specifically water scarcity posed a universal but unequal threat to households, hitting low-income, agriculture-dependent households hardest.

Conclusion 8: Climate change is not the most urgent shock affecting household resilience, but it compounds the impact.

Households in the project locations have experienced several crises over recent years that have had significant impacts on their resilience. Whilst climate shocks are noted amongst these, they are not the most immediately urgent crisis in all contexts, climate change does exacerbate other more pertinent shocks. Across Palestine and Lebanon, there are protracted conflict related and economic crises which are having significant impacts on household resilience, relationship quality, health and psychosocial well-being. Climate change is seen to intersect with and exacerbate these stressors. For example, during times of economic crisis households are seen to turn to home-based and small-scale farming to feed their family, however as a result of climate change these coping strategies are less reliable due to decreased yields. There is not sufficient evidence that the project ToC has

accounted for these contextual factors or their compounding impact on household resilience.

Conclusion 9: There are several significant hindering factors at programmatic, institutional and contextual level that, unless addressed, could hamper the progress of the project towards it's intended outcomes.

The hindering factors outlined under EQ4 range from factors within and factors beyond the projects sphere of control or influence. Those at a programmatic level point to challenges in project design, implementation and management including challenges with coordination and delays in timeline. There is recognition that this is a complex social norms project with ambitious outcomes, operating in a complex and volatile environment and to a short and uncertain timeline. In addition, the project has faced uncertainty in the funding environment, FCDO have been unable to guarantee continued project funding for a large proportion of the inception and implementation phase which has delayed implementation, confused project design and forced rushed decision making. This creates the potential to cause harm amongst vulnerable households in fragile environments, particularly if funding was terminated abruptly.

7. Recommendations

Design, implementation and management of GBV prevention and climate change programming

Ensure the projects ToCs account for complex contextual factors (Conclusion 5, 8 and 9). The evaluation recommends regular reviews of the ToC for Al Murunah+, to ensure that it adequately acknowledges the changing context and any hindering factors that arise at community and structural level. We would suggest that the project holds periodic workshops during implementation with all implementing partners and the technical partner to reflect on the ToC to ensure that the design adequately acknowledges contextual factors that impact implementation and households, through clear assumptions and risks. It is important that the ToC reflects on the assumptions and risks outlined regularly to test whether they are holding true, this is particularly pertinent in changeable and dynamic contexts.

Review the project implementation design against the projects ToCs (Conclusion 5, 8 and 9). Based on the current registration patterns of the opinion leaders and diversity of economic interventions (beyond climate-smart agriculture), the potential exists for the project implementation to diverge from the initial proposed design, and risks falling out of alignment with the ToC. One suggested option would be to review the implementation plans and intervention overview documents - particularly for the economic empowerment and opinion leader pathways - against the ToC, and the evaluation findings. This would support the project to identify any existing gaps in implementation design and adapt them for the remaining length of the project.⁴⁸

Engage extended family members and community (Conclusion 2 and 4). The attitudes amongst extended family and community members drives conflict and reinforces inequitable gender norms within households, which in turn poses barriers to achieving gender transformative outcomes. Whilst resources don't currently exist for a community level intervention, in future iterations the project could consider moving beyond the couple-unit to also engage influential family members and the wider community (beyond opinion leaders). The project could also consider: Introducing a new module into EA\$E, with couples, on how to manage influence of extended family or community attitudes, inviting extended family members to selected EA\$E sessions or introducing norms diffusion approaches, specifically targeting the wider community, with a focus on widening women's role within and outside the family. Importantly, any engagement of extended family should be piloted with small groups initially to test feasibility and ensure participant safety before wider implementation.

Strengthen coordination and communication channels within the project (Conclusion 9). The project experienced challenges with their coordination across IWMI, implementing partners and WROs throughout inception and early implementation. For the remainder of the implementation IWMI should review the existing programme management, communication and coordination mechanisms between IWMI and the implementing partners specifically. This would support risk management, quality adaptive design and timelines.

Strengthen safeguarding system for project staff and participants (Conclusion 2).

The evaluation received several disclosures of violence and a handful of safeguarding incidents raised by project participants. Researchers on the evaluation team experienced vicarious trauma, and we used safeguarding mechanisms to support them. The evaluation team has fed back to IWMI the need to build in safeguarding expertise to the project and to strengthen safeguarding protocols, processes and resources to prevent harm to project participants, community or staff. This could include hiring a safeguarding expert to lead a review of reporting mechanisms, referral pathways, provision of well-being support functions for staff (particularly facilitators) and ongoing support for implementing partners (capacity building and technical advice to address any emerging gaps and challenges).

FCDO should continue funding for the AI Murunah+ project to allow for appropriate time to address recommendations and affect change (Conclusion 9). Social norms change and building household resilience are both complex, long-term objectives requiring a holistic approach delivered over several years. The funding uncertainty experienced by the project has directly impacted design and implementation of the project to date. We recommend that FCDO continue funding for the AI Murunah+ project into financial year 2026/2027 to allow the project time to implement activities and to contribute learning to the global evidence base. FCDO should also exercise adaptive MEL principles, working with the project to review how feasible project outcomes are following the context of uncertainty. We would also encourage IWMI to explore other funding avenues for long term funding in line with best practice guidance for social norms programming.

EA\$E curriculum: gender transformative curriculum for couples

Based on the findings from this baseline evaluation, the evaluation team recommend the following adjustments to future iterations of the EA\$E sessions under AI-Murunah+ (Conclusion 1, 2,3 and 6):

- **Facilitators should acknowledge and recognise the context of severe economic insecurity of the households, holding safe space to speak about challenges and allowing this to inform the sessions.** Acknowledging the wider environment and the impact this has on families more directly would ensure the sessions were

grounded in the lived realities of the couples, and provide a grounding for the discussions focused on finances. For example, the session on household expenditure could be further adapted to recognise the reality faced by many households to avoid harm and backlash

- **The economic components of the intervention should be a mandatory part of the implementation package:** The baseline found that the economic intervention has provided a strong incentive to participate and many of the households place a high value on receiving this due to severe economic hardship. Rolling out EA\$E without this economic component could cause harm or risk of harm for facilitators and participants.
- **Adjust couples' dialogues to expand participants understanding of violence beyond physical harm.** EA\$E / couples sessions should be modified to facilitate structured reflection on emotional violence, including how restrictions on mobility, isolation from family, and the appropriation of assets can be as damaging to dignity and safety as physical assault.
- **Strengthen norms and pathways for help-seeking.** Facilitators should normalise safe, survivor-centered support services above and beyond male-dominated informal mediation structures that often reinforce the status quo. By actively deconstructing norms of privacy and reframing help-seeking and survivor-centered support as a protective resource that can preserve household stability, the intervention can help prevent the long-term intergenerational harm, trauma and shame associated with unresolved conflict or violence.
- **Leverage and expand women's existing agency to deepen programme impact.** The couples' reports demonstrate that some women already hold substantial responsibility and agency in daily household management. The EA\$E / couples sessions can be adapted to leverage these existing management skills/areas of responsibility as an entry point to expand women's agency into more constrained areas including financial planning, livelihoods decisions, and mobility.
- **Reframe women's agency to work as a necessity for the household.** Across the sample there is growing understanding that the sole-provider model is becoming increasingly untenable under severe economic restrictions; women's economic participation can be reframed as a vital household resilience strategy. However, for this shift to be sustainable, livelihoods interventions must be paired with explicit dialogue on the redistribution of unpaid labour. EA\$E / couples sessions should include a specific focus on redistribution of unpaid work and address fears of social judgement and loss of status associated with care work and shared domestic responsibilities amongst men.

Opinion Leader Intervention

Review the inclusion criteria and registration approach for opinion leaders

(Conclusion 1 & 4). The evaluation found that several of the opinion leaders registered and enrolled into the project are not engaged within leadership spaces across agriculture value chains, cooperatives, associations or water boards. This is a crucial pathway for addressing change in women's access to water and contributing to more gender equitable workplaces. The evaluation recommends reviewing the opinion leaders currently enrolled and refreshing the recruitment criteria.

Strengthen gender transformative norm change among male opinion leaders

(Conclusion 1 & 4). Given that male opinion leaders were shown to practice more rhetorical support for gender equality and their perceptions of roles were strongly gendered, the programme would benefit from more targeted gender transformative dialogues for male opinion leaders, to promote power-sharing and decision-making authority, and for them to recognise structural barriers faced by women. We would suggest engaging male champions (like retired leaders, council heads, cooperative founders) to model inclusive leadership.

Promote importance of inclusive and safe work environments (Conclusion 1, 4 & 5).

Given that safety concerns were reported across all countries (including harassment, reputational risk, unsafe transport, and lack of occupational protections), the programme can co-develop with opinion leaders' gender-responsive agricultural safety standards (such as anti-harassments policies, safe transportation mechanisms, complaint/reporting mechanisms) and advocate for cooperatives to implement them.

Build and encourage women's collective agency and networks (Conclusion 4 and 5).

Female opinion leaders demonstrated strong transformative attitudes and practices, but these were often isolated from formal agricultural power structures. Having strong women-led networks is likely to enable them to build stronger bargaining power in largely male dominated spaces. This could be coupled with facilitating mentorship programmes that link emerging women farmers with experienced leaders in the sector and supporting women's access to higher-value jobs in the value chain (like transport, negotiation and wholesale markets).

Economic Intervention

Reassess the economic intervention to ensure it responds to market analysis, meets women's needs and does no harm (Conclusion 4,5 and 6).

- **Consider and mitigate risks of causing harm to female participants or perpetuating harmful patterns of male agency over financial decision making.** Clear trends of male authority in financial decision making prevail at the household level, and could continue to be replicated through the economic

intervention grants. The project should consider different methods for provision of grants that ensure women's access to and agency over resilient sources of income. This might include considering conditional transfers or prioritising funding for collective projects for women in the community.

- **Understand the priorities of female participants that are already employed in high skilled labour.** The sample across all countries, but particularly in Jordan, included women in high skilled labour outside of agriculture, this brings into question the ToC and the assumptions underpinning it. The project should understand the drive of these women to participate in the project and the economic intervention, and whether future exclusion or inclusion criteria should be created to ensure those women who can most benefit from the full intervention package should be selected.
- **Prioritise funds for home-based work or women's access to cooperatives.** Across the project locations, there was a clear preference for home-based work or working within single sex workplaces. There could be merit in prioritising these types of employment within the economic activities to strengthen buy-in amongst the couples.
- **Consider economic interventions that encourage investment, rather than debt alleviation.** Several households are facing severe economic insecurity and have accrued significant debts. Whilst there was a motivation amongst participants to invest in projects, in several cases participants stated that they would likely use any additional cash to settle debts. Whilst paying off debts provides short-term relief, options that encourage investment in business such as conditional transfers, provision of agriculture supplies or machinery, investing in climate smart practices and associated materials, might be more aligned with the TOC and encourage longer term sustainability.
- **To strengthen the economic interventions ability to link climate change with resilience, a climate lens is applied should be applied to all economic interventions.** Water scarcity is having a detrimental impact on income resilience of project participants currently engaged in agriculture. Alongside the provision of funding for agricultural practices, it is essential to deliver training on climate smart practices that might mitigate the impact of drought on crops and livestock, and enable couples to better adapt to reduced rainfall and increased temperatures such as drip irrigation methods, agroforestry, resilient crop varieties or cover cropping.
- **For those not engaged in agriculture, climate smart farming or food processing economic interventions could act as a useful coping mechanism to strengthen household resilience.** Several households in the baseline relied

on home-based, small-scale farming or food processing for self-sufficiency to support the family during hard times. Climate change was impacting the reliability of this coping mechanism, due to water scarcity and increased temperatures crop yields were lower. Supporting these small scale initiatives to be more resilient to climate change could strengthen household resilience and adaptive capacity.

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- ¹ IWMI (2025) *Resilient Nature Based Water Solutions (RNBWS) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region)*. Unpublished.
- ² Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015) [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience, and aiding recovery](#).
- ³ WHO (n.d.) [Intimate Partner Violence](#).
- ⁴ IWMI (2025) *Resilient Nature Based Water Solutions (RNBWS) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region)*. Unpublished.
- ⁵ Belhaj Fraj, M.; Fragaszy, S. R.; Abdelwahab, N.; Maowod, G.; AbdelMegeed, A.; Elhariry, R. T.; Samarasekara, V. 2025. [Baseline assessment report for Resilient Nature-based Water Solutions pilot in Izbat Al-Hamra, Egypt](#). Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Water Management Institute (IWMI).
- ⁶ CAPSEAH (2024) [Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse, and Sexual Harassment](#).
- ⁷ The societal level includes structural, environmental, institutional factors in the operating environment.
- ⁸ For the purpose of this evaluation, we define ‘financial decision making and resource management’ as any decision or process that relates to income generation, expenditure, savings, budgeting and the investment in and management of assets.
- ⁹ The data for Palestine was not available across the areas listed in the table.
- ¹⁰ World Population Review (2023) [Water Stress by Country 2025](#).
- ¹¹ UNFPA (n.d.) [Lebanon GBV Dashboard](#); UNFPA (n.d.) [Jordan GBV Dashboard](#). UNFPA (n.d.)
- ¹² Arkeh, J. and A. Hamzaway (2024) [Climate Change in the Middle East and North Africa: Mitigating Vulnerabilities and Designing Effective Policies](#). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- ¹³ World Resources Institute (2025) [Aqueduct Country Rankings](#).
- ¹⁴ Muratoglu, A. and F. Wassar (2024) [Water at the intersection of human rights and conflict: a case study of OPT](#). *Frontiers in Water*: 6.
- ¹⁵ IUCN, IWMI, and UK Aid (2022) *Al Murunah Building Climate Resilience through Enhanced Water Security in MENA: Inception Report*. Unpublished.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ FAO (2024) [The Unjust Climate: Measuring the Impacts of Climate Change on Rural Poor, Women and Youth](#). Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- ¹⁸ Shehata, (2024) [Climate Change, Conflict, and Gender Inequality in the MENA Region](#), *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*.
- ¹⁹ Spotlight Initiative and Dalberg (2024) [Colliding Crises: How the Climate Crisis Fuels Gender-based Violence](#).
- ²⁰ Moneer, Z. (2024) [Women and Climate Change in MENA: Turning Adversity into Opportunity](#), Middle East Institute.
- ²¹ UNICEF Middle East and North Africa (n.d.) [Gender and Climate Change](#).
- ²² Moneer, Z. (2024) [Women and Climate Change in MENA: Turning Adversity into Opportunity](#), Middle East Institute.
- ²³ World Bank (2026) [Women, Business and the Law Index](#). The data corresponds to the legal framework score for each country across the categories shown on the table (e.g. mobility, workplace, pay).
- ²⁴ Arab Barometer (2025) [Education and Working Women in the Middle East and North Africa. Arab Barometer](#).
- ²⁵ World Bank (2022) [Gender and Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Evidence and Policy Priorities](#). Washington, DC: World Bank, 2022.
- ²⁶ Lwamba E, Shisler S, Ridlehoover W, Kupfer M, Tshabalala N, Nduku P, Langer L, Grant S, Sonnenfeld A, Anda D, Eysers J, Snilstveit B. [Strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality in fragile contexts towards peaceful and inclusive societies: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#). *Campbell Syst Rev* 18(1).
- ²⁷ World Bank. [Gender in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues, Evidence, and Policy Directions](#). Washington, DC: World Bank, updated 2024–2025.
- ²⁸ Nazier, H. (2019) [Women's Economic Empowerment: An Overview for the MENA Region](#).
- ²⁹ FAO (2023) [The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems](#). Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

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- ³⁰ Roche, M. (2022) [Gender Attitudes and Trends in MENA](#). Arab Barometer.
- ³¹ Arab Barometer (2025) [Gender-Based Violence and Sources of Support in the Middle East and North Africa \(2023-2024\)](#).
- ³² World Bank Group (2018) [Proportion of women who have ever experienced intimate partner violence](#).
- ³³ UNFPA (n.d.) [Lebanon GBV Dashboard](#). UNFPA (n.d.) [Jordan GBV Dashboard](#). UNFPA (n.d.). Data from Palestine was not available in this dataset.
- ³⁴ Roche, M. (2022) [Gender Attitudes and Trends in MENA](#). Arab Barometer.
- ³⁵ IWMI (n.d.) [AI Murunah Project Brief](#).
- ³⁶ In its integral form, the EA\$E package includes three key components: village savings and loans associations for women, business skills training for women, and the discussion group series for women and their spouses. Source: IRC (2012) [Program Implementation Manual: Economic and Social Empowerment \(EA\\$E\)](#).
- ³⁷ The numbers of enrolled individuals included in this section refer to the first cohort of participants. The number of participants for the second cohort has not yet been confirmed.
- ³⁸ However, the evaluation team will engage with any other evaluations taking place under AI Murunah and explore any overlap between the broader programme and the gender transformative pilots at the baseline stage if appropriate.
- ³⁹ Theory-based approaches follow an explicit ToC and aim to test whether the anticipated causal linkages between different levels of change that are outlined in the theory hold true. Source: INTRAC (n.d.) [Theory-based evaluation](#).
- ⁴⁰ Contribution analysis is an evaluation methodology used to assess the contribution that a project or intervention has made to observed changes. It is characterised by six steps: 1) set out the attribution problem, 2) develop a ToC, 3) gather existing evidence against the ToC, 4) assemble contribution stories, 5) seek out additional evidence and 6) revise and strengthen the contribution story. Source: INTRAC (n.d.) [Contribution analysis](#).
- ⁴¹ The original EQs can be found in the ToR in Annex 1.
- ⁴² Artificial intelligence was not used to support data collection or analysis in this baseline evaluation.
- ⁴³ The evaluation was guided by SDDirect's Ethical Policy and Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults (Safeguarding) Policy and international best practice and standards of ethical conduct. These principles were translated into measures aiming to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, data protection, reduction of direct and indirect risks to interviewees, and safe and meaningful participation as outlined in section 7.1 of Annex 7.
- ⁴⁴ See UNEG (2008) [Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System](#), WHO (2016) [Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence Against Women](#), and UN (2018) [Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners](#).
- ⁴⁵ i.e. private (household) / public (work, community, leadership) spheres.
- ⁴⁶ This refers to the degree to which women's work is regarded as socially acceptable, respectable and appropriate within their families and communities.
- ⁴⁷ For the purpose of this evaluation, we define 'financial decision making and resource management' as any decision or process that relates to income generation, expenditure, savings, budgeting and the investment in and management of assets.
- ⁴⁸ The evaluation only focused on child marriage within the countries in which the implementation planned to address it. However, the evaluation findings found that child marriage was prevalent in Lebanon, despite the decision to exclude the module.