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Photo: WUSC Jordan



# Design Flexibility Helps Tackle Women's Agency in Jordan

By Ariane Ryan, Niveen Bataineh and Tania Jordan

A beacon of stability in the Middle East with an educated workforce, Jordan has nonetheless struggled to create employment and growth, especially for women. Despite a female literacy rate of 86%, the highest in the Middle East, [Jordan has one of the region's lowest female economic participation rates](#) at 15.6% (compared to 69% for men).

The WE LEAD project targets this particular challenge in Jordan. Implemented by [World University Service of Canada \(WUSC\)](#) and Canadian Leaders in International Consulting (CLIC) with funding from Global Affairs Canada, WE LEAD seeks to increase women's economic empowerment through market-relevant vocational training in the health sector while also addressing two key barriers to women's participation in the workforce: access to affordable child care and safe transport. The project aims to benefit about 520,000 working-age women (18-60) in the governorates of Amman, Salt and Irbid.

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To help ensure sustainable outcomes, WE LEAD takes a systems change approach, which includes fostering local partnerships, building on local initiatives and capacities, and acting as a facilitator rather than a delivery agent. With every activity, WE LEAD seeks to identify local actors who can lead and sustain change. This approach also emphasizes experimentation and flexibility, allowing the project team to shift or adapt activities to respond to emerging opportunities in the local context.

From the outset, the project team knew that lack of access to child care was a key barrier to women's education and economic participation. Accordingly, WE LEAD needed to include solutions to address access to child care in order to achieve its goal of increased women's employment and economic empowerment.

At the time of WE LEAD's design, Jordan did not have a national child care strategy or framework. Moreover, the country did not have any national early childhood development (ECD) training programs or the means to certify individual caregivers -- contributing to a lack of trust among women who need child care to participate in education or economic opportunities. Given these circumstances, the project team designed a flexible fund at the proposal stage, with resources allocated to research, to allow WE LEAD to test, learn from, and adapt activities to improve access to child care without defining at the outset what the activities would be.

Following WE LEAD's launch, a significant advance was made in the ECD sector: the Jordanian government recognized the need for a [national strategy](#) to help boost women's economic participation. While the government strategy is still under development, it is already [funding different approaches](#) to improving childcare provision.

Because WE LEAD's design had built-in flexibility

Photo: WUSC Jordan



*WE LEAD program beneficiaries attend a training session in Jordan*

to pursue different approaches to improving child care, it could work with the government to develop their strategy. In partnership with the Jordanian National Council for Family Affairs and the private sector, WE LEAD is piloting two approaches to address access to quality ECD services. The result of these will hopefully help inform the national strategy.

In the first pilot, WE LEAD is supporting the establishment of nurseries in two institutions: a vocational training institute with whom it is working to provide women with skills needed for employment in the health sector; and a private hospital. This pilot will allow WE LEAD and the government to assess the ability of these types of institutions to manage an ECD centre and determine the impact of the on-site centre on women's participation in education and employment.

Second, WE LEAD is supporting Vocational Training institutions in Jordan to develop an ECD training program. The ECD training will apply lessons WE LEAD learned in developing TVET training for women in the health sector, including market relevance, connections with employers, locally relevant curriculum, accreditation, and integration with the Jordanian education system.



As an additional benefit: a strong, trusted ECD sector opens other employment opportunities for women.

The built-in flexibility of the WE LEAD program allowed it to take advantage of emerging local developments in order to amplify its impact. Had it been required to identify all of the activities at the design stage of the program, WE LEAD would not have been able to take advantage of the government's emerging interest and investments. As it stands, the program's ability to build relevant partnerships, pilot different approaches, learn, and feedback into the emerging government process will ensure the program's investments bring additionality, maximum impact and sustainability. Ultimately, WE LEAD hopes to be able to contribute to meaningful improvements in women's access to quality child care at the national level, contributing to increased agency by women to make decisions about their education and economic participations.

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## Q&A with Editors Siwan Anderson, Lori Beaman and Jean- Philippe Platteau

### Interview by Kate Grantham

Despite substantial progress on certain aspects of gender equality - primary school enrollment, for instance - women and girls around the world continue to experience discrimination in social norms, legal rights and economic opportunities. The new edited collection, [\*Towards Gender Equity in Development \(2018\)\*](#), brings together high-quality, high-impact economic and social research to "explore key sources of female empowerment and discuss the current challenges and opportunities for the future." Edited by Siwan Anderson, Lori Beaman and Jean-Philippe Platteau, the collection explores the domains of marriage and women's household bargaining power, the options available to women outside of marriage in terms of economic opportunities and collective action, and overarching discriminatory laws and cultural norms.

I had the opportunity to connect with the editors to discuss the motivation, process and findings of this work.

**Q: This book features research from over a dozen countries, written by more than thirty contributing authors. What was your inspiration and motivation for publishing this impressive collection of work?**

Empowering women in the developing world has been a primary policy goal for the past few decades and there has been significant research



on the topic. We wanted to bring together established scholars in the field to generate research which would highlight key gaps, both in opportunity and capability, and policy recommendations on how to continue to move forward. The chapters reflect the variety of empirical methodologies, the wide-ranging data available, and the far-reaching topics which now define the frontier of research on gender and development.

**Q. The collection is organized into three key domains of research on gender equity: marriage, outside options, and laws and cultural norms. What is the significance of these three domains as an organizing framework for the book?**

We can think of the three domains as representing three different sets of constraints that women face. Beginning with the most intimate is marriage, where the constraints placed on a woman are typically enforced by her husband - they can restrict her physical mobility, health choices, and sexual freedom. The next set of constraints are defined by the local economic environment and community where she resides. They tend to dictate her economic and educational opportunities outside of her marital home. The final set of constraints are defined by society at large. They include restrictive social and cultural norms as well as discriminatory government policy and laws.

**Q: Why is the research and analysis presented in this collection so important today in 2019?**

While significant progress has been achieved over the last few decades, and at an unprecedented pace, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence at all stages of their lives and in all parts of the developing world.

**Q. Who should read this book? Was it published with a particular audience in mind?**

It's targeted audience is researchers in the field as well as students. Great efforts were also taken to ensure that the main findings are relevant and communicable to key policy-makers in developing countries.

*Siwan Anderson is a Professor at the Vancouver School of Economics at the University of British Columbia in Canada.*

*Lori Beaman is an Associate Professor of Economics at Northwestern University in the United States.*

*Jean-Philippe Platteau is a Professor at the University of Namur, Belgium.*





# Women's Economic Empowerment: What We Measure and Why it Matters

The first in a series of seminars run by the ISID McGill WED Lab in partnership with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) was held in Ottawa on April 17.

Facilitated by Sonia Laszlo (McGill University), the topic for this seminar was "Women's Economic Empowerment: What We Measure and Why It Matters." It was a full house with nearly forty individuals in attendance for the in-person event, while a hundred more tuned in over Zoom. The seminar covered state of the art research on measurement of women's economic empowerment. A diverse panel of experts from the worlds of research, policy and practice discussed contemporary challenges, opportunities and approaches for measuring this complex concept. The panel featured, Arjan de Haan (IDRC), Francois-Philippe Dubé (Global Affairs Canada) and Lindsay Mossman (Aga Khan Foundation Canada).

Visit the [WED Lab website](#) to watch a video recording of this seminar and access related materials including the facilitator's power point presentation, a list of recommended readings on the topic of measurement, and a policy brief on the challenges of measuring women's economic empowerment in IDRC's Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program.



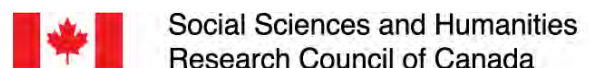
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*The GrOW Research Series brings together scholarly research on women's economic empowerment and growth in low-income countries, and provides a conceptual and empirical basis for policy-making. It is also the official research platform for the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) program. This series is housed at the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID) at McGill University in Montreal.*

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