



Near East Foundation

Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment



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Near East Foundation's (NEF) mission is to promote more prosperous, inclusive, and resilient communities through innovative, sustainable, community-led economic and social development. NEF achieves this mission through a **Knowledge, Voice, and Enterprise** framework, which underpins all of our programs. It reflects our conviction that individuals need tools and opportunities to participate in the development of their communities meaningfully: knowledge to participate in civic and economic life, a voice in decisions that affect their well-being, and a safe and dignified way to make a living. Today, NEF delivers tailored programs in nine countries in the Middle East, Africa, and the Caucasus.¹ NEF delivers concrete, measurable impacts at scale in challenging operating environments.

Our mission centers on **inclusive economic development**—a transformative approach that empowers marginalized groups and strengthens their resilience, both socially and economically. By promoting models that prioritize accessibility, sustainability, and community ownership, we help people not only survive but thrive. NEF's Inclusive Economic Development programs are guided by a set of **complementary, cross-cutting priorities** aimed at strengthening resilience and promoting equity within vulnerable communities, **one of the most fundamental being gender equality and women's empowerment.**²

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to NEF's work. Through inclusive economic models, NEF fosters equal access to economic opportunities and resources, enabling both women and men to benefit from accessible financial and business support services. Our programs also advance women's leadership and agency by promoting collective actions, social innovations, and greater involvement in decision-making processes at all levels. Additionally, NEF's focus on addressing gender-based violence (GBV) ensures that survivors receive the support they need for empowerment, independence, and safe livelihoods, while also reducing risks of violence through systemic-level partnerships with GBV programs and institutions.

¹ Morocco, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Armenia.

² Additional themes include climate-resilient development, the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, access to basic services such as water supply and sanitation, participatory governance, and meaningful youth engagement.

1. Equal Access to Opportunities and Resources

Advancing gender equality through improved community-centered equal access to economic opportunities and markets as well as accessible and sustainable financial and non-financial resources such as lending products, enterprise investments, and business advisory services.

Supporting and partnering with women and men, change agents, governance actors, membership organizations and networks, and governance actors; urban youth and rural farmers; and gender-based violence survivors.

2. Agency and Leadership

Advancing agency through improved collective actions and social innovations, community-centered campaigns, systemic change, economic advisory services, and influencing on decision-making and leadership in community structures, governance systems, and economic membership organizations.

Supporting and partnering with women leaders, membership organizations, public and private sector institutions, academic and research institutions, and networks.

3. Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Reducing risks of gender-based violence and supporting survivors through transformative partnership with GBV programs and institutions while facilitating individual journeys to empowerment, independence, self-reliance and safe livelihoods.

Supporting and partnering with community leaders, gender-based violence survivors and at-risk population, community structures and civil society organizations, membership organizations, protection and governance actors, health and legal institutions, media, and networks.

Powerful, measurable improvements for individuals and communities³

- **26,839 women self-reported increased income:** Empowering women through increased financial stability and reducing income inequality, contributing to economic independence and resilience.
- **23,904 women received loans or grants from financial service providers to establish or grow their businesses:** Supporting women entrepreneurs in accessing financial resources, fostering economic independence, and driving community development.
- **6,414 women reported increased control over resources and decision-making:** Strengthening women's influence in household financial decisions, fostering equitable households, and advancing gender equality.
- **18 women-led organizations reported enhanced technical and managerial capacity in delivering market development programs:** Strengthening women's leadership and capacity to drive economic growth and ensure the sustainability of market initiatives.



³ As of late 2024.

Evidence from Morocco—Women's cooperatives as engines of post-earthquake recovery and market resilience

Our Morocco programming (2024–2026) shows how NEF can accelerate post-crisis recovery by investing in women-led cooperatives as front-line market institutions that rebuild local economies after shocks. Following the September 2023 earthquake, NEF supported 20 rural women's cooperatives that had lost equipment, markets, and operational continuity by delivering business development and financial services alongside governance and formalization support. At baseline, 50% were not operational and 35% were only partially operational. By project close, all 20 were fully operational and generating revenues, restoring local production capacity and reactivating community-level economic activity.

The program generated broader community spillovers. Cooperative membership grew from 254 to 375 members (+48%), reflecting improved reputation and renewed participation—an expansion that typically translates into wider household-level benefit flows in rural communities. Assessments also highlight women's empowerment effects beyond the cooperative: women reported increased confidence speaking in collective spaces and greater recognition of their economic role within their community environment, strengthening agency and social norms that influence local resilience. At ecosystem level, the program helped catalyse a cooperative peer network (knowledge-sharing, solidarity, and problem-solving across communities), and strengthened coordination with other NGOs to reduce duplication and reinforce collective impact in the affected provinces.

Quantitatively, the program also led to strong market outcomes. 95% of cooperatives reported improved revenues, and turnover bands shifted sharply upward: pre-project, 50% reported annual revenue below €30,000 and only 15% exceeded €100,000; by endline, 85% exceeded €100,000, including 35% above €200,000. These gains were driven by structural improvements in market access and local economic connectivity: average trading partners increased from 0.65 to 2.65 per cooperative, and 100% had active commercial partnerships by project close.



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To learn more about our work or to get in contact, email info@neareast.org