On Girls’ and Young Women’s Empowerment

UNICEF Jordan Country Office

“Only through the equal participation of women can we benefit from the intelligence, experience, and insights of all humanity.

Women’s equal participation is vital to stability, helps prevent conflict, and promotes sustainable, inclusive development.”

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration on Gender Equality, which set forth global strategic priorities, as well international and national institutional and financial arrangements, as a platform to advance women’s empowerment. In the past decades, 131 countries enacted 274 legal and regulatory reforms in support of gender equality, and the global maternal mortality ratio dropped 38% between 2000 and 2017. Girls’ primary school enrollment has increased by 10% globally and tertiary gross school enrollment has increased by 25%.

In his speech in 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations underscored the importance of striving for and achieving gender equality in this century as a necessary measure to achieving sustainable development for the whole of humanity. Gender equality is a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goals and represents the challenges that women disproportionately experience. Nonetheless, women, and particularly young women between the ages of 20 and 24, who make up 288 million people of the world population, present an immense demographic opportunity globally.

Studies have shown that gender equality would stimulate economic growth, increase the GDP per capita, and allow society to better adjust to socioeconomic and demographic challenges. Refugee women could generate up to $1.4 trillion to annual global GDP if employment and earning gender gaps were closed in each of the top 30 refugee-hosting countries.

Women, particularly young women, absorb the shock of destitution due to their central positioning within the domestic and social realms. Globally, women and girls are 4% more likely than men and boys to live in increased poverty and are at 10% higher risk of experiencing food insecurity than men.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, Jordan ranks 138th out of 153 countries on global gender equality, with a 145th ranking in women’s economic participation and opportunity, 81st in educational attainment, and 103rd in health and survival. The Department of Statistics reports that women’s unemployment was 27.5% compared to 17.1% for men in 2019. The majority of employed women are employed in the service sector (83.5%).

UNICEF has been implementing interventions around the world to contribute to social change and gender equality. According to the UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018-2021, offered programmes operate under two themes: gender equality in life outcomes for girls and boys from 0 to 18 years old and gender equality in care and support of women and children, with the goals of contributing to the achievement of gender equality in the by 2030.

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“All barriers must therefore be eliminated to enable girls without exception to develop their potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information”

*Beijing Declaration on Gender Equality, 1995*

UNICEF Jordan Country Office, implements its programmes to ensure that young people, especially young women between the ages of 10 and 24, are supported in their transition to productive and resilient adulthood. Not only are interventions geared toward maximizing the opportunities for young women to thrive within their sociocultural contexts, but also gender responsive throughout the entire programmatic cycle. UNICEF Jordan employs a participatory programme design approach, in which young women’s voices are central to the design, implementation, and review of programmes – by girls for girls.

**Empowerment**

UNICEF Jordan invests in educating young women to facilitate their transition into adulthood. UNICEF's comprehensive skills-building package not only offers comprehensive soft-skills, such as critical thinking, communication and active citizenship, but also new knowledge from the 21st century, such as financial and digital literacy.

**Education**

With one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, and women's youth unemployment nearly triple, the girls' potential in Jordan is largely unrealized. Investing in girls and young women can be transformative for Jordan, as women can play a crucial role in promoting Jordan's social and economic development.

With this in mind, UNICEF's youth program in 2019 reached over 180,000 vulnerable youth (more than 50% girls) with access to skills development, as well as opportunities for civic and financial engagement.

In 2019 alone, over 145,000 youth (55% women) acquired key skills that facilitated their self-development and transition to employment and practiced the skills by engaging with their communities.

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Employment

UNICEF’s youth economic engagement program offers opportunities for especially vulnerable youth and girls to have access to technical skills, employability, and apprenticeship opportunities that better link them to employment. The program reached almost 50% girls and young women; this represents an important success, especially because Jordan’s female population is among the least active in the labor market globally.

Innovative examples of programs designed with a girls’ perspective in mind -- with girls for girls -- are UNICEF’s partnership with Chloe, which in Jordan focuses on building digital knowledge and employability for the most vulnerable youth, focusing on girls. As part of this three-year project, young girls will have access to innovative program models that contribute to gender equality, including marketable digital skills, social entrepreneurship, and access to mentorship.

One of these efforts includes the establishment of a digital sourcing platform that will connect young women with microwork access, outsourced by private companies and organizations. This will help young women be included in the digital economy and address obstacles to cultural limitations and family responsibilities.

Leadership

In addition to skills development, young women have the power to gain leadership skills and improve their self-confidence to increase their capacity as agents of change in their households and their communities. This is why UNICEF Jordan recently launched a girl leadership program in collaboration with a government partner, which aims to champion girl’s leadership and allow girls to become agents of change and sources of inspiration within their communities.

Lessons Learned

UNICEF Jordan has been implementing programmes to support girls and young women’s positive development for multiple years. One of its established interventions, the economic engagement programme, has demonstrated the ways in which the “By Girls For Girls” design is vital in delivering scalable and long-term results for young women, who are one of the most vulnerable populations in Jordan.

As part of the economic engagement programme pilot conducted in 2017, UNICEF Jordan witnessed high drop-out rates among female youth participating in Technical and Vocational Training and Apprenticeship. In order to improve the programme as part of accountability to the population of focus, UNICEF Jordan began incorporating the female youth’s families in the job-matching process, such as inviting them to visit the potential locations of employment, to remedy drop-out and create a smooth pathway for young women’s economic engagement in the TVET sector. Multiple strategies, in addition to the aforementioned, served to allow young women and their families to be assured of the dignified workspace that is respectful of cultural norms. This intervention has been successful in linking over 3,000 young people with technical and employability training to date, with a 70% employment rate upon graduation from training.