

ARAB WATCH COALITION

SPECIAL ISSUE

On the Ground

Monitoring World Bank Projects in 4 Countries



Community members in Egypt participate in an outreach session on World Bank-funded projects, grievance mechanisms, and their rights as potential beneficiaries.

Civil Society Monitoring of World Bank Agricultural Projects across Lebanon,
Jordan, Tunisia, and Egypt

Evidence, Engagement, Impact

Based on the project "Towards Sustainable Agriculture Policies and Practices in the MENA Region"
July 2024 – January 2026

March 2026

In this issue: how CSO monitoring got 3,000 Lebanese farmers registered for project benefits. What an independent evaluation revealed about the gap between policy and practice in Jordan. Why Tunisia’s job-creation targets masked unused grievance mechanisms. And how Egyptian civil society built advocacy infrastructure when its target project disappeared.

The World Bank has [committed](#) \$22.3 billion in lending for food and agriculture globally over the last five years, and is [committing](#) to double its agri-finance investments to \$9 billion annually by 2030. In the MENA region alone, the Bank [maintains](#) an active portfolio exceeding \$27 billion across 139 projects, with agriculture among its priority sectors.

With investments of this scale, the question is not only what is financed — but how these projects are governed and implemented. Environmental and social standards exist on paper. Stakeholder engagement plans are formally in place. Grievance mechanisms are established.

But do they work in practice? Who checks?

Between July 2024 and January 2026, the Arab Watch Coalition and eleven member organizations across Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Egypt monitored World Bank-funded agricultural programs through structured, evidence-based engagement using the Bank’s own Environmental and Social Framework as an analytical lens. What follows is not a project report. It is a record of what happens when informed civil society applies accountability frameworks to real programs, in real communities, under real constraints.

From the Four Countries

Each country tells a different story about what civil society monitoring can achieve — and what structural barriers remain.



Building Community Knowledge on IFI Financing



AWC's program coordinator explains how the World Bank finances projects in Egypt and the accountability resources available to affected communities.

Egypt's story is different. AWC and its Egyptian partners identified a World Bank agricultural project for monitoring — then it disappeared from the Bank's project portal. It had been postponed. In a context where civic space is already constrained, this kind of programmatic volatility could have ended the engagement entirely.

Instead, partners pivoted to strategic capacity building. They organized consultative workshops with civil society groups, professional syndicates, and grassroots farmers' organizations across Cairo, Giza, Fayoum, and Beni-Sweif. They sat with farmers, union representatives, and rural workers to produce four public awareness videos — accessible, explainers on how the World Bank finances projects, what accountability looks like, and what communities can do when it falls short. They also produced two analytical papers: one tracing decades of World Bank agricultural lending in Egypt, the other examining how Bank-supported governance reforms intersect with domestic legal frameworks and austerity-driven policies.

4

Public awareness videos explaining the World Bank's financing model, accountability systems, and grievance mechanisms.



Opening Institutional Doors on Agricultural Governance



Community members in Lebanon participate in an outreach session on World Bank-funded projects, grievance mechanisms, and their rights as potential beneficiaries.

Lebanon's [GATE](#) project — a major World Bank intervention supporting the agri-food sector during the country's deep economic crisis — is being implemented across fragile institutions and low public trust. AWC's Lebanese partners prepared seven analytical and position papers and sent them to every institution involved: Parliament, the World Bank, the Ministry of Agriculture, CDR, Ministry of Environment, the Green Plan, and the Directorate of Cooperatives. Before the loan agreement was ratified, they submitted a formal discussion paper to the Parliamentary Cabinet.

They held a direct meeting with the World Bank's Lebanon office, secured written responses clarifying grievance channels and institutional responsibilities, and filed a formal Access to Information request for the project's operations manual — which was denied, documenting a transparency/ access to information gap for future advocacy.

And in 15 community awareness sessions across the country, they found something that hadn't appeared in any official report: most farmers weren't registered with the Ministry of Agriculture — which meant they were locked out of project benefits entirely. The sessions changed that, one community at a time.

3,000+

farmers registered with the Ministry of Agriculture after CSO-led awareness sessions. In one village, registration went from 2 to 45.

Partners: TERRE Liban · Lebanon Eco Mouvement · Lebanese Union for Physically Disabled Persons



Between Policy and Implementation: Monitoring the ARDI Program in Jordan



A field visit to an ARDI program site in Jordan, where AWC partners assessed implementation of environmental and social safeguards on the ground.

Jordan's [ARDI](#) program is a significant World Bank-supported agricultural initiative, financed through a combination of Investment Project Financing (IPF) and Program-for-Results (PforR) instruments, which link disbursements to agreed performance indicators. AWC's Jordanian members conducted a structured, independent mid-term evaluation: desk reviews, field visits to project sites including tree nurseries, qualitative interviews with government officials and implementing staff, and consultations with beneficiaries.

The evaluation found strong alignment with national agricultural policy at the central level — but uneven awareness and application at decentralized implementation levels, particularly on environmental and social standards. Safeguards were formally in place but varied across sites. Grievance mechanisms existed but were barely used. And critically, the evaluation identified gaps in disaggregated data that made it impossible to assess the program's effects on gender, age, or vulnerability.

Partners organized three community awareness sessions, social media awareness campaigns, and a policy discussion with the Jordanian Parliament's Environment and Climate Change Committee — where they discovered that parliamentarians had almost no prior knowledge of World Bank projects in their own country.

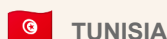
6 parliamentarians

attended a CSO-organized policy session — having had virtually no prior awareness of World Bank agricultural programs operating in Jordan.

Partners: Phenix Center for Economic Studies · Al Hayat Rased · Dibeen Association

“Results-based financing strengthens financial accountability. But it does not automatically ensure attention to social inclusion, beneficiary experience, or environmental risk management. Independent civil society evaluation doesn't duplicate official reporting — it completes it.”

— Finding from the cross-country evaluation



Looking Beneath the Numbers on Job Creation

Tunisia's [TRACE program](#) targets job creation and entrepreneurship in three rural governorates — Jendouba, Kairouan, and Gabes. On quantitative measures, it was meeting its targets. Beneficiaries reported income improvements. But AWC's Tunisian partners conducted a mixed-methods evaluation that triangulated official program narratives against what beneficiaries actually experienced. The evaluation relied on a desk review of program documentation, including environmental and social standards and implementation reports, alongside interviews with officials, beneficiary surveys, and qualitative interviews to assess implementation, transparency, and access.

The findings revealed a more complex picture. The program applied clear procedural rules, but heavy reliance on digital platforms excluded some potential beneficiaries. Information dissemination was uneven, especially in remote areas. Environmental and social standards were formally in place, but many beneficiaries were unaware of their environmental obligations or occupational health and safety standards.

Most strikingly, grievance mechanisms existed but awareness was so low that utilization rates were negligible. Among the few who did file complaints, responses were inconsistent.

Grievance gap

Formal grievance channels existed — but awareness was so limited that they functioned as symbolic safeguards rather than real ones. A mechanism no one knows about protects no one.

Partners: Onshor · Association Tunisienne de Droit du Développement (ATDD)

Across Four Countries, Three Shared Patterns

The Shared Pathway. In every country, the approach followed the same logic: evidence production, then institutional positioning, then structured dialogue, then influence. The tools varied — position papers in Lebanon, independent evaluations in Jordan and Tunisia, video and analytical research in Egypt — but the pathway was consistent.

The Shared Barriers. Access to information was hard everywhere. Stakeholder engagement tended to be procedural rather than genuine — strongest during project design, weakest once implementation began. Grievance mechanisms existed on paper but were barely functional in practice. Environmental and social standards varied widely across sites and regions. These are not local problems. They are patterns — systemic features of how IFI-funded agricultural programs are rolled out across the region.

The Regional Added Value. Working together through AWC, organizations could see what they couldn't see alone. Individual country findings became a regional pattern. AWC helped organizations contextualize their experiences, compare methods, and identify patterns that would have been difficult to surface within a single country. As a result, the findings carry a collective weight that individual country reports alone could not provide.

What This Work Produced

7 Position & analytical papers sent to Lebanese institutions	2 Independent evaluation reports (Jordan & Tunisia)
2 Analytical policy papers on WB engagement in Egypt	4 Public awareness videos on IFI financing & accountability
18 Community awareness sessions across 3 countries	11 Member CSOs strengthened across the region

What Needs to Change

This initiative showed that the World Bank’s Environmental and Social Framework is most effective when accompanied by active community engagement and sustained civil society monitoring. Without independent oversight, environmental and social standards and accountability mechanisms risk remaining formal requirements rather than lived protections.

Moving forward, AWC and its members are calling for the institutionalization of World Bank engagement with civil society — through scheduled quarterly topical meetings in each country and quarterly engagement reports published by World Bank country offices. All project documentation must be translated into local languages. And civil society must move from ad hoc consultation to structured, ongoing participation in project oversight.

World Bank agricultural programs in the Arab region are recurrent. The capacities, networks, and methodologies built through this project are not tied to a single funding cycle. They are a sustainable foundation for the next round of engagement — whenever and wherever it comes.

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