

Islamic Development Bank, ICBA present new initiative to empower Arab women scientists

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 16 May 2017 — The Islamic Development Bank ([IsDB](#)) and the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) today presented the *Tamkeen* program, a novel initiative to empower Arab women scientists, at a high-level seminar on the sidelines of the IsDB 42nd Annual Meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

During the seminar titled “Young Arab Women Scientists in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region”, over 150 delegates from different countries collectively called for additional partnerships and support from policymakers, stakeholders and donor agencies to create more opportunities for Arab women scientists.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Director General of ICBA, said: “I’m extremely happy to witness such a huge interest from delegates in this high-level seminar and discussion on the *Tamkeen* initiative. Empowering Arab women scientists is one of our key priorities at ICBA. We are building a coalition around the initiative with donors, implementation partners and beneficiaries to ensure the initiative’s success and inclusiveness. We thank very much the IsDB and the Gates Foundation for their support for the *Tamkeen* design phase and we are looking forward to joining forces with them and other donors to deliver the program that we believe can boost the Arab world development agenda.”

“*Tamkeen* is a great initiative as it facilitates knowledge exchange and networking among women scientists throughout the MENA region and globally by empowering groups of gender champions. It builds a critical mass of advocates for leadership of women in science and agriculture, ultimately contributing to better solutions for improved food security and nutrition,” Dr. Elouafi added.

Participants discussed the findings of assessments carried out during the program’s design phase, especially the constraints faced by Arab women scientists in the MENA region, and explored ways to empower Arab women researchers to become future leaders in science. Success stories of young women in Africa, who participated in a similar program called the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD), were also featured, and participants discussed how the AWARD program model could be utilized to build leadership skills among young people in IsDB member countries.

In his opening speech, Mr. Zaher Rebai, Director of Capacity Development Department, IsDB, said: “IsDB is supporting this important initiative that encourages S&T and develops the capacities of young women scientists. It addresses a number of priorities of the Bank including S&T, agriculture, women empowerment, and youth development. In today’s economy, the acquisition of scientific knowledge is a critical driver of fast growth and sustainable development.”

“We are delighted to be working with ICBA and the IsDB to help empower Arab women researchers to become successful leaders in science, and change agents within their institutions and communities. *Tamkeen* provides women with the opportunity to improve their scientific and leadership skills, network with their peers around the world, and use their skills to tackle the region’s biggest food security challenges,” said Ms. Zahira El Marzouki, Deputy Head for Middle East Relations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

ICBA developed *Tamkeen* in 2016 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the IsDB. The program aims to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment by building and enhancing the capacities of a new generation of Arab women scientists and leaders.

“I would like to congratulate ICBA for thinking about the *Tamkeen* initiative, which is like the AWARD program in Africa. Based on my knowledge and experiences as an AWARD fellow, I’m sure that *Tamkeen* will be an interesting program for women scientists in the MENA

region. *Tamkeen* could ensure that capable, confident and influential Arab women scientists are available to lead critical advances and innovations in agricultural research and development of the MENA region. Women scientists need to be empowered as the gender gap in our agriculture is evident in the developing countries,” said Mrs. Marème Niang Belko, a woman leader and an AWARD fellow from Senegal, an IsDB member country.

ICBA and IsDB are long-term partners. Over the years several events have been organized in IsDB member countries involving policymakers; regional and international donor agencies and international research organizations; academic communities; and NGOs.

The *Tamkeen* side event was organized in collaboration with the IsDB’s Capacity Development Department and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is an international, non-profit, research-for-development organization that aims to strengthen agricultural productivity in marginal and saline environments through identifying, testing and facilitating access to sustainable solutions for food, nutrition and income security.

www.biosaline.org

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy and productive lives. Through collaboration and partnership, the foundation helps fund research and programs to benefit those living in poverty all around the globe. In the Middle East, the foundation is focused on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people. An example is the Lives and Livelihoods Fund, a US\$2.5 billion fund partnership with the Islamic Development Bank that uses innovative financing mechanisms to support sustainable development projects in health, agriculture, and infrastructure.

You can find out more at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Where-We-Work/Middle-East-Office>

About IsDB

The Islamic Development Bank is a multilateral development institution, established in July 1975 with the headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The IsDB provides Shari’ah-compatible funding and technical assistance to its 57 member countries and in line with its overall objective of fostering economic development and social progress, it finances projects and programs in both public and private sectors in member countries by investing in economic and social infrastructure, and promoting foreign trade. The IsDB also assists Muslim communities in non-member countries and undertakes research studies in Islamic economics and banking.

For more information, visit www.isdb.org.