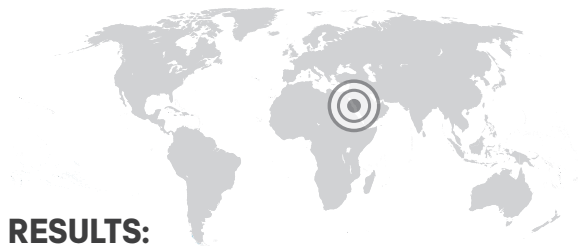


# Stories of Impact

*A series highlighting achievements in disaster risk management*

## Encouraging Women's Contribution to Resilient Cities

**REGION:** MIDDLE EAST  
AND NORTH AFRICA  
**FOCUS:** COMMUNITY AND  
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT  
**COUNTRY:** EGYPT, LEBANON, DJIBOUTI



### RESULTS:

- A grant from GFDRR has helped mobilize \$200,000 from partnering investment funds and venture capitalists to help women-led start-ups and provide mentoring to winning start-ups for one year at the end of the competition.
- This program represents the MENA region's first start-up competition for women seeking to contribute to resilience in cities in the region.
- More than 150 teams have entered the competition. An accompanying public awareness campaign is expected to reach over 300,000 people in the region through social media channels.



The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been affected by 388 disasters in the past 35 years. The number of natural disaster in the region has nearly tripled since 1980. With 62% of the population living in cities, the region's rapid urbanization increases the vulnerability of people and economic assets to disaster events.

In response, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and the World Bank have organized a Women Entrepreneurship Resilient Cities (WE'Resilient Cities) competition in the MENA region. This competition, which began in Djibouti, Beirut, and Cairo in early 2015, is designed to promote the creation of women-led risk management start-ups. It is the result of a strong public-private partnership between the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Johnson & Johnson, Instituto Empresa (IE) Business School, the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), the MENA Early Stage Investment Facility (ESIF), and Smart Data Science.



**GFDRR**  
Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery



**WORLD BANK GROUP**

## CONTEXT:

Over the past 30 years, climate-related disasters have affected 50 million people in the MENA region and cost approximately \$11.5 billion. The high concentration of population and assets in urban areas makes the impact of these disasters even more devastating. Evidence shows that in societies where economic and social rights are equal for both men and women, disaster-related fatalities between both sexes do not differ significantly.

Contrarily, when women's rights and socio-economic status are inferior to men's, fatalities among women are greater in adverse natural events. Despite progress toward gender parity in education and health, only 21% of women participate in the labor market and 40% are unemployed in MENA. Women face limited self-employment opportunities and more jobs are needed in the private sector to absorb the growing number of female job seekers. Women in MENA face unequal pay and occupational choices, as well as limited self-employment opportunities through entrepreneurship.

## APPROACH:

With support from GFDRR and other private partners, has organized a start-up competition for women to tackle these issues and address urban disaster risk. Seed-funding of \$70,000 to organize the competition has been provided by GFDRR, while the financial awards for the winning start-ups will be funded by private sector partners. Awards for winning projects will be up to \$100,000.

Significant challenges faced by MENA entrepreneurs relate to (i) marketing products and services, (ii) building a team, and (iii) obtaining funding. The WE'Resilient Cities Competition is working closely with MENA governments, banks, universities, and foundations to provide competition participants with much-needed support in these areas. In addition to project funding, the competition will offer:

- Crash-courses in marketing and business, made available by IE Business School, one of the world's leading business schools.
- Guidance to help participants build teams and learn how to retain talent during the competition and beyond.
- Connections to regional and international financiers, thereby bridging the gap in communication between investors and entrepreneurs.

The initial phase of the program accepted proposals from March 10 to April 10, 2015 via [www.weresilient.org](http://www.weresilient.org).

## NEXT STEPS:

In addition to awards of funding and mentorship, the winners, to be announced in early 2015, will be connected to local, regional, and international financial institutions that focus on promoting women's entrepreneurship, such as Lebanon BLC Bank or the Goldman Sachs Foundation, to improve their scalability and access to capital. At the end of the first selection process, four short-listed candidates of each city will sit for Design Thinking training made available by IE Business School.

Building on the World Bank's existing disaster risk management programs and the ongoing first phase of the competition, 30 additional cities in the MENA region have expressed interest in participating in the second phase, and as many as 100 are expected to join later in 2015.

### Contact

Olivier Lavinal  
olavinal@worldbank.org  
[www.gfdr.org](http://www.gfdr.org)

\*ALL MONETARY VALUES IN USD



*"WE'Resilient Cities competition provides an invaluable opportunity for female leaders to transform city risk into sustainable, profitable, and long-lasting business ventures."*

– Andrea Zanon, Program Leader,  
WE'Resilient Cities Competition

## LESSONS LEARNED:

**Innovative programming with multiple partners is inherently complex to build.** As the MENA region's first entrepreneurship competition on city resilience, developing and managing partnerships for the Women Entrepreneurship Resilient Cities Competition has proved challenging. There are no substantial precedents for the organizers and partners to draw on. Additionally, given ongoing political turmoil in the region, responding to natural disasters is a low priority for governments, private sector actors, and individuals alike. This lessened interest around disaster risk management initiatives has rendered the development of partnerships more difficult.

**Adapting to diverse audiences is essential.** To secure buy-in from different stakeholders, including female participants, the competition team tailored its communication efforts to reach a broad regional audience. Instead of focusing on "disaster risk management," a term with limited public resonance, the campaign highlighted the expected results of the program around making cities safer, more competitive and more resilient. In response to this approach, more than 180 entrepreneurs and partners attended February 2015 information sessions in the three target cities.