Rural Transformation in Jordan

Rural Women: ‘From Beneficiaries to Partners’ in Building Resilient Livelihoods, Stronger Institutions and More Inclusive Communities

Introduction

Jordan is entering the third decade of the twenty-first century with significant development achievements to its credit, alongside new challenges of no less importance. Over the past five decades, the Kingdom has expanded education, health care, infrastructure, community development and public institutions, while contending with acute water scarcity, limited natural resources, rapid demographic change and a volatile regional environment. These achievements have been built through sustained public investment, an active civil society, resilient local communities and long-term partnerships between the government, national institutions and international organisations. The 2025 annual report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Jordan, marking fifty years of its partnership with the Kingdom, documents this trajectory from the perspective of one of Jordan’s oldest development partners, reviewing five decades of partnership with national institutions in support of development priorities and in response to economic and regional change. Added to this is the emphasis of the Economic Modernization Vision, which regards women’s economic empowerment as one of the most vital sectors, particularly in agriculture – a sector in which Jordan is among the countries that rely on farming as a main source of income and food security. This attention is reflected in two main objectives of the Economic Modernization Vision document: raising agricultural productivity and turning agriculture into a more competitive sector, and increasing women’s economic participation, particularly in rural areas. Today’s development landscape differs from the one that shaped earlier generations of policy. Climate change is accelerating pressure on natural resources, so that agricultural production increasingly depends on modern knowledge tools that are evolving at an ever-accelerating pace. Digital technologies are also reshaping the labour market and approaches to public administration, which has been reflected in young people’s new educational aspirations and in different expectations of rural life. Economic competitiveness, too, has become increasingly tied to innovation, productivity and the ability of institutions to respond quickly to changing conditions. The scale of the challenge is plainly visible in the labour market itself: the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) 2026 review of cooperative development under the PROSPECTS programme records that youth unemployment among Jordanians aged 15–24 reached 39.8 per cent in 2024, and notes that Jordan scored 42.5 out of 100 in the World Bank’s 2024 ‘Women, Business and the Law’ assessment, which concerns the legal frameworks affecting women’s economic participation. This calls not merely for incremental improvements in development

and employment programmes, but for an integrated system: a development approach grounded in local context and in the global reach of technological progress, and built on more humane principles.

This paper puts forward the idea that the future of rural Jordan will depend less on the success of individual projects and more on a system of relationships between people – within institutional frameworks and partnerships that exchange knowledge, expertise and natural resources, and within local and global markets better able to meet challenges – through which productivity rises, costs fall, marketing improves and sustainable rural development is strengthened. Rural transformation is understood here not as a sectoral agenda, but as a national development process through which these relationships are strengthened over time.

The paper takes rural women as its principal analytical lens. This is a deliberate choice. Rural women occupy a unique position within Jordan's rural economy and society, because their daily lives intersect simultaneously with agriculture, household well-being, labour markets, food systems, water management, education, health, community organisations and local governance. Their experiences therefore reveal how the wider rural development system works more fully than almost any other single perspective.

This paper does not present rural women primarily as beneficiaries of development programmes, but as participants: producers, entrepreneurs, agricultural workers, caregivers, innovators, community leaders and partners in national development. Their contribution goes beyond economic participation. Through their multiple roles, they connect institutions that are often planned separately but are experienced together within rural households and communities.

The timing of this paper is no coincidence. It comes in the context of the global declaration of 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer and of Jordan's national response, which has included the formation of a multi-stakeholder steering committee and **the drafting of the JAHD Initiative for Women Agricultural Workers, whose zero draft, issued in June 2026, sets out a framework for 2026–2030 covering land and water, finance, technology, value chains, decent work and cooperative leadership. This paper aims to provide the analytical foundation for this national moment.**

The paper draws on a broad body of Jordanian evidence, including national strategies, empirical studies, participatory consultations, international research and nearly five decades of practical experience in community development. Among the studies whose findings feature here are: **the Economic and Social Council's 2026 qualitative study** on women working in agriculture in the northern, central and southern Jordan Valley; the Economic and Social Council's 2025 study on the economic modernisation of Jordanian agriculture; the ILO's 2022 value chain analysis of Jordan's floriculture sector and its 2026 review of cooperative development under the PROSPECTS programme; the 2025 annual report of UNDP Jordan; the 2021 analysis by El-Zubi and Shuaibi of Jordan's role as a regional food hub; El-Zubi's 2026 article 'From Beneficiaries to Partners' on women's investment cooperatives; the multi-stakeholder foresight process for Jordan's food system under the Foresight4Food FoSTr programme, including the quantitative exploration of two possible scenarios for 2040 prepared by Wageningen Economic Research for the food systems transformation workshop held in Amman in November 2024; and the 2024 narrative on the

organising of women agricultural workers in the northern Jordan Valley, entitled ‘Our Unity Is Our Strength’ (*Jama’atna Quwatna*). Rather than reviewing these documents one by one, the paper synthesises their findings into a connected reading of rural transformation in Jordan. It is also guided by the traditions of participatory development, human development and sustainable livelihoods associated with **Robert Chambers, Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen**. In particular, the paper applies throughout the ‘Farmer First’ framework developed by Chambers, Pacey and Thrupp in *Farmer First: Farmer Innovation and Agricultural Research* (1989) – a framework that starts from the knowledge, problems, analysis and priorities of farming households rather than from the priorities of scientists alone – and uses its ‘reversal of roles’ as a recurring test of how Jordanian rural institutions relate to the people they serve. At the same time, the paper affirms that Jordan’s own experience – notably the participatory methodology of the Jordan Human Development Report 2004 and the long-standing work of the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) – provides foundations that are no less important for understanding contemporary rural development.

The central premise of this paper rests on a clear idea: rural transformation happens when capable people, communities and institutions strengthen one another through relationships built on trust, participation, knowledge and shared responsibility. Rural women stand at the heart of these relationships. Recognising their capabilities and strengthening the systems within which they live and work is therefore not only a matter of fairness, but a prerequisite for resilient national development.

This paper is offered as a contribution to Jordan’s ongoing development journey. It does not propose a new programme or a fixed blueprint; rather, it offers an integrated reading of rural transformation that builds on Jordan’s accumulated experience while responding to the challenges and opportunities of the decades ahead.

Part One – Understanding Rural Jordan

Rural Jordan: From Being Seen as a Geographical Margin of National Development to a Strategic National Asset

Rural areas in Jordan are often described in terms of the constraints they face. Water scarcity, climate change, land degradation, unemployment and migration dominate much of the public debate on rural development. These challenges are real and demand sustained policy attention. The findings of the Economic and Social Council's 2025 study on the economic modernisation of Jordanian agriculture set out these challenges systematically: weak institutional and participatory governance; worsening climate impacts; the slow adoption of technology and digitalisation; weak links between agriculture and food processing; limited capacity for research and seed production; a fragile input supply structure; geopolitical constraints on access to external markets; weak institutional responses to crises; and the social and demographic barriers that limit the involvement of women and young people in the sector. Yet the same study concludes that these constraints offer only a partial understanding of contemporary rural Jordan.

Rural Jordan is also a space of production, innovation and resilience. It supplies a fast-changing economy with food, protects environmental resources of national importance, preserves cultural and heritage landscapes, and sustains communities that have shown a remarkable capacity to adapt under difficult conditions. Across the Kingdom, rural households continue to diversify their livelihoods, adopt new technologies, establish enterprises, strengthen cooperatives and invest in education, despite major structural constraints. The Economic and Social Council's study indicates that the agricultural sector holds significant opportunities for transformation and growth if the structural challenges relating to governance, innovation, value chains and technology are addressed – which reinforces the potential to build on existing human and institutional resources.

Understanding rural Jordan therefore requires moving beyond narratives of vulnerability alone. The distinction matters analytically as much as it does rhetorically. In *Farmer First*, Chambers, Pacey and Thrupp describe a 'third agriculture': complex, diverse and risk-prone farming that differs fundamentally from both industrial agriculture and Green Revolution agriculture, and which conventional, standardised approaches have repeatedly failed to serve. The characteristics of this model fit much of rural Jordan: rain-fed farming on the hillsides of the northern highlands, livestock systems in the Badia, and smallholdings that combine crops, livestock and off-farm work under conditions of severe water scarcity. The central finding of *Farmer First* about this kind of agriculture is that what appears to be low potential is often the product of technologies and institutions ill-suited to local conditions, and that those who farm it are not passive victims of circumstance but, in Chambers's words, professional specialists in survival who constantly experiment, adapt and innovate. This reframes the way in which rural Jordan's 'constraints' should be read.

Development policies are shaped by the way societies define their problems. If rural areas are seen primarily as deprived spaces, public policy naturally tends to focus on assistance and compensation. If, however, they are understood as strategic national assets, policy turns increasingly towards investment, capability, productivity and institutional strengthening. The evidence gathered in this paper supports the second interpretation. Rural Jordan should not be viewed as a geographical margin of national development. It is one of the main spaces through which national development is achieved.

Diversity, Not Uniformity

There is no single rural Jordan. Irrigated farming systems in the Jordan Valley differ fundamentally from the rain-fed farming systems of the northern governorates. The Badia presents environmental conditions, livelihood strategies and settlement patterns that differ from those of Ajloun, Jerash or Karak. Communities close to urban centres also experience labour markets, transport systems and investment opportunities that differ from those found in more remote areas.

Even within a single agro-ecological zone, conditions vary. The Economic and Social Council's 2026 study on women agricultural workers was deliberately designed across three sites – Sheikh Hussein in the northern Jordan Valley, Al-Jawfa in the central Jordan Valley and Ghor Al-Safi in the south – precisely because working conditions, crops, transport availability and work arrangements vary along the length of the valley. What holds for citrus and date operations in the north does not automatically hold for vegetable fields in the south.

These differences matter because they shape the opportunities available to rural households. Water availability affects agricultural production. Terrain affects transport and access to markets. Population density shapes how public services are delivered. Natural ecosystems determine patterns of land use. Local institutions influence economic opportunity.

National policy must therefore combine consistency with flexibility. *Farmer First* offers one of the most influential frameworks for interpreting this principle. Green Revolution agriculture, as Chambers and his co-authors observe, was convergent: it raised output through standard packages of practices, with environments managed to suit the technology. Complex, diverse and risk-prone agriculture needs the reverse – divergence – in which technologies and institutions are sought to fit environments, and farmers are offered not a fixed package of practices but a basket of options from which to choose. In the language of *Farmer First*, the menu should be à la carte rather than fixed, and should itself respond to the needs that farmers express. For Jordanian rural policy, the implication is direct: shared national goals should be pursued through approaches that recognise spatial diversity rather than assuming that all rural areas face the same conditions, and programmes should widen the options available to rural households rather than prescribing standard models. This spatial perspective enjoys growing international recognition as an important principle of rural development.

In Jordan specifically, spatially differentiated approaches are not merely a theoretical proposition, but a practical necessity arising from the country's environmental, economic and social diversity.

Rural Development as National Development

Perhaps the most important shift this paper proposes concerns the place of rural development within national policy. Historically, rural development has often been treated as a specialised field concerned with agriculture and poverty reduction. That understanding is no longer sufficient. Many of Jordan's most important national priorities converge within rural landscapes. Food security is closely tied to rural production systems. Water security depends on rural water basins. Climate adaptation begins in rural ecosystems. Renewable energy increasingly occupies rural land. Tourism depends on the protection of rural landscapes and cultural heritage. Environmental sustainability depends on the responsible stewardship of natural resources.

The importance of rural Jordan also extends beyond national borders. In a study published in the *Jordan Journal of Agricultural Sciences* in 2021, El-Zubi and Shuaibi argued that Jordan could develop its role as a regional food hub linking at least Jordan, Iraq and Egypt: a platform for improving the flow of food products and inputs, exchanging knowledge, coordinating policy and responding jointly to emergencies. Their argument rests on assets that are largely rural in nature: Jordan's central location in the region, its established footprint in agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seeds and veterinary vaccines, its institutional capacity, and its standing as a regional exporter of tomatoes, citrus fruit and olive oil. From this perspective, investing in rural production systems is at the same time an investment in Jordan's regional economic role.

Investment in rural areas should therefore not be seen as investment in agriculture alone. It is also investment in environmental resilience, spatial balance, economic competitiveness, regional food security and national stability. This broader understanding changes both the purpose and the scope of rural development policy.

The Changing Nature of Rural Livelihoods

Agriculture remains at the heart of rural identity and economic life, but its role is changing. Many rural households no longer depend on a single source of income. Agricultural production increasingly overlaps with seasonal work, small enterprises, food processing, public sector employment, transport services, tourism and digital trade. Livelihoods have become more diverse as households seek to reduce risk, respond to market opportunities and adapt to environmental uncertainty.

This diversification should not be read as a decline in agriculture. Rather, it reflects the evolution of rural economies amid technological change, expanding education and shifting labour markets. Future prosperity will depend on strengthening the wider rural economy that surrounds agriculture: value addition, processing, marketing, innovation, financial services, knowledge and enterprise development. It is increasingly these activities that determine whether agricultural production generates sustainable prosperity. The Economic and Social Council's 2026 study on modernisation identifies the weak link between primary agriculture and food processing as one of the sector's defining structural gaps. El-Zubi's 2026 article 'From Beneficiaries to Partners' makes the same point from the perspective of the rural workforce: real value added in Jordanian agriculture is created not at the moment of harvest but afterwards – in sorting, grading, cleaning, waxing, cooling, packing, processing and marketing – stages that are currently captured largely by intermediaries and exporters rather than by rural communities themselves.

Climate Change and Rural Resilience

Climate change is one of the defining development challenges facing rural Jordan. Rising temperatures, increasing water scarcity and greater climate variability are reshaping agricultural systems across the country. These changes affect not only production, but also employment, household income, migration and investment decisions. The Economic and Social Council's study on modernisation places worsening climate impacts among the most prominent structural challenges facing the sector. The Council's 2026 study on women agricultural workers records the lived dimension of the same phenomenon: women working in open fields under direct sun, in plastic greenhouses whose internal temperature rises far above that of the outside air, and in weeding operations that expose them to fertiliser and pesticide fumes, without safety standards designed for these conditions. Climate adaptation must therefore take account of practical and strategic needs in order to achieve social resilience for women and men alike.

The evidence reviewed in this paper shows that adaptation cannot be understood as a technical challenge alone. It is also an institutional, financial and social challenge. The 2025 annual report of UNDP Jordan describes work with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to develop insurance and climate risk finance tools for rural communities exposed to climate variability, and to align climate action with national development planning in order to mobilise climate finance – both of them examples of the institutional architecture of adaptation, not of field technology alone.

Communities that are able to learn, organise and adapt are more resilient than those that depend exclusively on external interventions. Women play a particular role in this process. Through their responsibilities in agriculture, household resource management, food security and community organisation, they are often the first to respond to environmental change and the first to develop practical adaptation strategies. Climate resilience therefore depends as much on capable communities as on improved technologies.

Rural Women as an Analytical Lens

Most publications present rural women as a population group in need of support. This paper takes a different perspective. Rural women offer one of the clearest ways of understanding how Jordan's rural development system works. Their daily lives intersect with multiple institutions at once: agricultural extension, labour markets, financial services, health, education, municipal government, community organisations, natural resource management, transport and social protection. Because these interactions happen constantly, they reveal how effectively the different parts of the development system reinforce one another.

When institutions cooperate effectively, opportunities expand. When institutional relationships are fragmented, households bear the consequences. Rural women are often among the first to respond to environmental change, because they stand at the intersection of multiple development systems. The Jordan Valley study makes this concrete: the women interviewed reported that agricultural extension services, where they exist at all, deal only with the intermediary or the farm owner, not with the women who do the work. Civil society programmes aimed at this group are also almost entirely absent from their areas. In the terms of *Farmer First*, this is the failure of the transfer-of-technology model in its purest form: knowledge is conceived as something sent down through a chain of

intermediaries, while those who actually do the farm work remain entirely outside the chain. These findings indicate that the institutions existed, but that the actual links between them and women workers remained limited or absent.

Understanding their experiences therefore helps to explain not only gender inequality, but also the strengths and weaknesses of rural governance itself. The rest of this paper builds on this perspective. Rather than treating rural women as a specialised policy issue, it uses their stories and experience to examine broader questions about livelihoods, institutions, governance and the future of rural transformation in Jordan.

It is important to stress that rural transformation will not be inclusive and resilient unless the roles, relationships, power relations and opportunities between men and women within households, markets, institutions and agricultural value chains are analysed, with attention to the differences among women themselves by age, geographical location, marital status, disability, nationality, level of education, type of work and ownership of assets. The visible and hidden barriers and challenges facing women and men – whether social, economic or political – must then be addressed by identifying and tackling the root causes of these phenomena. Such measures include, for example: recognising unpaid work and care work; ensuring decent work and occupational safety; improving access to land, water, finance, technology and extension; securing women's representation in local governance and cooperatives; and disaggregating data and indicators by sex, age and location wherever possible. Gender here refers to the analysis of the roles, relationships, power relations and opportunities among women, men, girls and boys.

Part Two – Understanding Rural Livelihoods

From Community Development to Sustainable Livelihoods

The way societies understand rural development has changed considerably over the past half-century. Earlier approaches focused primarily on increasing agricultural production, expanding infrastructure and extending public services to rural areas. These investments transformed living conditions across much of the developing world, and they remain essential components of national development policy.

Experience gradually showed, however, that improvements in infrastructure and production alone cannot fully explain why some communities continue to prosper while others remain vulnerable despite substantial investment. Similar programmes often produce different results in seemingly similar conditions. Communities with comparable natural resources often follow different development paths. Households with similar incomes also show strikingly different capacities to withstand economic or environmental shocks.

These observations encouraged a broader understanding of development – one that shifts attention from projects to people, from outputs to capabilities, and from isolated interventions to the systems within which livelihoods are created. Jordan's development experience reflects this evolution. JOHUD was established in 1977 in recognition that development cannot be sustained through infrastructure and service delivery alone: communities themselves need opportunities to participate, organise and help shape their own development. This philosophy emerged in Jordan before many of the concepts later recognised internationally through participatory development and sustainable livelihoods had become widespread.

The paper therefore starts from an important premise: Jordan's experience suggests that many of these principles were put into practice there at an early stage, in parallel with their development in the international literature.

Robert Chambers and the 'Farmer First' Model

Few scholars have influenced rural development thinking as profoundly as Robert Chambers. Through his work in Asia and Africa in the second half of the twentieth century, Chambers challenged one of development's most entrenched assumptions: that expertise resides primarily within governments, universities and international organisations.

The fullest formulation of the alternative appears in *Farmer First: Farmer Innovation and Agricultural Research* (1989), which Chambers edited with Arnold Pacey and Lori Ann Thrupp. The book calls the conventional approach the 'transfer-of-technology model': priorities are set by scientists, technology is generated in research stations and laboratories, and the results are then passed through extension services to farmers, who are expected to adopt them. In contrast, the 'Farmer First' model turns the process on its head. It starts not from the knowledge, problems, analysis and priorities of scientists, but from those of farmers and farming households. The farm, not the research station, becomes the primary site of action; and the farmer – whether a man or a woman – rather than the scientist alone, becomes the central experimenter. Chambers and his co-authors are careful to describe the two

models as complementary rather than mutually exclusive: on-station research will remain necessary. But in the complex, diverse and risk-prone agriculture on which resource-poor households depend, the direction of learning must be reversed.

Three activities carried out by farmers recur throughout the evidence in *Farmer First*: analysis, choice and experimentation. Farmers analyse their conditions, choose between options according to their own criteria – which often differ from those of scientists – and conduct their own informal experiments, constantly adapting. Supporting these activities creates new roles for outsiders: as facilitators, catalysts and advisers for farmers' analysis; as searchers and suppliers who widen the options available; and as supporters and consultants for farmers' experiments – not as teachers bearing 'higher' technology. What is transferred in this mode is not messages but methods, not precepts but principles, and not a package of practices but a basket of choices. *Farmer First* stresses that the test of any technology is farmers' own evaluation: it is their judgements, interest and adoption that count.

This understanding fundamentally changed development practice. Participation no longer meant consultation alone; it became a method of analysis. Communities became contributors to evidence, not merely subjects of study. Experience became a legitimate source of knowledge. Participatory rural appraisal, community-driven development, local planning, social accountability and citizen engagement all descend, each in its own way, from these reversals of roles and of the direction of learning.

Jordan's experience strongly reinforces this conclusion. The participatory consultations conducted during the preparation of the Jordan Human Development Report 2004 showed that statistical indicators alone cannot explain how communities experience poverty, exclusion or opportunity. Dialogue with local and grassroots communities revealed qualitative dimensions that do not appear in conventional databases, such as feelings, attitudes, the ability to express one's views, weak access to services for structural or hidden reasons, and barriers to participation in decision-making at every level. This confirms that understanding rural transformation requires combining quantitative data with qualitative data in particular – data that listen closely to the voice of the local community.

Two decades later, the Economic and Social Council's 2026 study on the Jordan Valley followed the same logic. Rather than relying on labour force statistics, it held focus group discussions with sixty women agricultural workers across the valley's three areas – farmers' analysis in the sense Chambers intended, with the researchers acting as facilitators – and it was precisely this listening that revealed a reality no administrative database records: the mechanics of the labour brokerage system, the informal rules governing wages and absence, and the daily ordeal of transport.

This lesson remains vital today. Future rural transformation will require institutions capable not only of generating evidence, but also of listening systematically to the people whose lives that evidence seeks to describe.

Human Development and the Expansion of Choice

The emergence of the human development model marked another major shift in development thinking. Led by Mahbub ul Haq and deeply influenced by the work of Amartya Sen, human

development challenged the assumption that economic growth alone can adequately measure national progress: income remained important, but it was no longer sufficient. Development came to be understood as an expansion of people's freedoms and capabilities, so that education, health, participation, security, dignity and opportunity became development goals in their own right, rather than mere by-products of economic growth.

Jordan embraced this perspective through successive Human Development Reports, which broadened the national debate beyond conventional economic indicators. Among these publications, the Jordan Human Development Report 2004 holds a special place in the country's development history, and it is cited deliberately in this paper despite its age. Its statistical findings have naturally been overtaken by more recent data two decades on, but they are not why it is cited here. What has not aged is its methodology. By combining quantitative analysis with a broad and structured process of participatory consultation with communities across the Kingdom, the report showed that communities themselves offer indispensable knowledge about the realities of development, and it remains the most complete Jordanian model of how to design and conduct a national dialogue of this kind. That is precisely why it has not lost its value: methodologies age more slowly than data. The Economic and Social Council's 2026 study on the Jordan Valley, built on listening through focus groups two decades later, applies the same logic and confirms its enduring strength; and the consultation process that preceded the 2004 report offers a ready-made model for the national dialogue that the JAHD Initiative and the International Year of the Woman Farmer need today. The report thus anticipated many contemporary debates on citizen engagement, evidence-informed policy and collaborative governance, and its methodology retains particular value for the design of participatory national dialogues.

Sustainable Livelihoods

The sustainable livelihoods approach emerged from this wider intellectual evolution. Rather than focusing primarily on employment or income, it posed a more fundamental question: how do people build and sustain their lives under conditions of uncertainty? The answer extends beyond economic activity. Livelihoods comprise the capabilities, assets, relationships and activities through which individuals and households secure their well-being, adapting constantly to changing conditions. The approach recognised that resilience depends on more than productive assets. Human capability matters. Natural resources matter. Social relationships matter. Infrastructure matters. Financial resources matter. Institutions matter. Most importantly, these assets interact constantly rather than operating independently: households combine them in different ways according to opportunities, risks and changing circumstances.

This systems perspective remains one of the most valuable contributions of the sustainable livelihoods tradition. In Jordan, its relevance is immediate. Rural households rarely depend on a single occupation or a single source of income. Agriculture overlaps with seasonal work, livestock rearing, food processing, micro-enterprises, public employment, informal work and family support. These combinations evolve constantly as households respond to climate variability, market conditions and changing family circumstances. The studies reviewed in this paper consistently confirm this pattern. Livelihoods are dynamic systems, not fixed occupations.

The Livelihoods of Women Agricultural Workers: The Jordanian Evidence

The most detailed recent evidence on the livelihoods of rural women in Jordan comes from the Economic and Social Council's 2026 study on women working in agriculture in the Jordan Valley. Conducted between September and November 2025 through focus groups with sixty women in Sheikh Hussein, Al-Jawfa and Ghor Al-Safi, the study documented a livelihood system whose features recur in all three areas.

Women carry out varied and skilled agricultural tasks: thinning vine leaves, hoeing and turning the soil, harvesting, irrigation, weeding and packing. Yet the organisation of their work is almost entirely informal and seasonal. These tasks should be called what they are: applied agricultural expertise. *Farmer First* shows at length how the skills and knowledge of resource-poor rural people – in selecting, sorting, improvising, adapting and testing – go professionally unrecognised because they are held by the 'wrong people' in the 'wrong places'. The women of the Jordan Valley are a clear Jordanian case in point: every institution around them treats them as unskilled workers, while they perform work on which the quality of the crop depends. Wages range from JD 1 to JD 1.25 an hour – around JD 6–7 for a working day that usually starts at six in the morning and ends at midday, with occasional night shifts for irrigation. Out of these wages, women bear the cost of food at work, their own tools and treatment if they are injured on the job. A woman forced to leave early because of a family emergency may lose the whole day's pay. There are no written contracts and no social security coverage.

Access to work itself runs through the *shawish* – an intermediary, whether a man or a woman, who coordinates between the women and the landowner, allocates the available daily work at their own discretion and is paid by the farmer for doing so. The study found that maintaining a good relationship with the *shawish* is, in practice, a precondition for getting any daily work at all. Some women described intermediaries and farm owners as cooperative and fair; the structural point, however, is that women's access to income depends on an unregulated personal relationship rather than on any institutional guarantee.

Transport emerged as one of the most persistent daily burdens, and work sites generally lacked the most basic facilities: shade for rest, clean drinking water and toilets. The study's recommendations flow directly from these findings: strengthening labour inspection in the Jordan Valley; adopting binding standards for work sites, including shade, water and mobile sanitation; organising safe and affordable transport through a partnership between farm owners and the Land Transport Regulatory Commission; expanding agricultural extension, with oversight of its providers; and implementing sustainable programmes that build women's individual capacities and their awareness of labour rights.

El-Zubi's 2026 article reads the same evidence economically, and not only socially. It argues that women agricultural workers form the de facto backbone of the agricultural workforce in many areas, yet occupy the lowest link in the value chain: they bear the hardest work for the smallest share of the value their hands create – often around JD 10 a day – with no contract, no social security and no share in the value produced. Their situation is not a welfare problem on the margins of the sector, but

a structural bottleneck within it: it keeps the sector's productivity low, deprives the national economy of a trained workforce and reproduces rural poverty across generations.

This pattern is not confined to the Jordan Valley. The ILO's 2022 value chain analysis of Jordan's floriculture sector found a sharp gender imbalance in a different, higher-value sub-sector: there are almost no women among farm owners and very few women workers on farms, and women make up only around 20 per cent of retailers. Most women working in the sector are not formally employed, are paid less than men and work at sites with limited occupational safety and health measures, where non-permanent workers receive no protective equipment. In other words, the exclusion of women from ownership, formality and protection appears to be a feature of how agricultural value chains are organised in Jordan, rather than a characteristic of any particular crop or area.

A deeper constraint, rarely accounted for in the organisation of agricultural work, is bound up with these conditions: unpaid care work and family responsibilities. The care of children, older people and the sick, together with the running of the household, falls mostly to women and is one of the most important barriers limiting their economic participation. This burden restricts the number of hours a woman can offer, the distances she can travel and her access to job opportunities, training, extension services and markets. The testimonies from the Jordan Valley show this constraint clearly: when a child falls ill or a family emergency forces a woman to leave early, she may lose the whole day's pay. Unless care responsibilities are taken into account in the design of work, programmes and services, the economic participation of rural women will remain capped at a level that bears no relation to their skills or their desire to work.

Evidence on the Ground – A Working Day in the Jordan Valley

Based on the Economic and Social Council's 2026 study, which used focus group discussions with sixty women agricultural workers in the northern, central and southern Jordan Valley.

The day begins before six in the morning, when transport – if there is any – collects the women on their way to the farms. Work continues until around midday: thinning vine leaves, weeding, harvesting, packing or irrigation – sometimes at night. The wage ranges from JD 1 to JD 1.25 an hour, or JD 6–7 a day. Food, tools and the cost of any injury come out of the worker's own pocket. Leaving work early because of a sick child can mean losing the whole day's pay.

Getting work the next day depends on the *shawish*, the intermediary who allocates the daily opportunities at their own discretion. There is no contract to refer to, no social security number, no inspector who visits the site and – as the participants reported – no extension officer or civil society programme that reaches the women themselves rather than the intermediary or the farm owner.

Sixty per cent of the participants were aged between 31 and 45; two-thirds were married; more than half had secondary education or less, and lived in households of four to six members. They are skilled working mothers who stand at the heart of their household economies, yet they remain almost invisible to most of the institutions that shape the terms of their work.

Assets Exist; Relationships Are Weak

Although the sustainable livelihoods approach provides an important conceptual foundation, the Jordanian evidence suggests that contemporary rural development needs a broader reading. The studies synthesised here consistently show that many of the constraints affecting rural women arise not simply because households lack assets, but because the relationships between those assets remain weak.

Knowledge exists, but it does not always reach producers: the Jordan Valley study found that extension services deal with intermediaries and farm owners rather than with the women workers themselves. Finance exists, but it remains hard to access: El-Zubi documents how the absence of collateral, ownership and a credit history excludes rural women from formal lending despite their daily economic activity. Markets exist, but value chains often exclude small producers and women workers, as the floriculture analysis shows link by link. Institutions exist, but they often work independently. Programmes exist, but they may remain disconnected from one another.

The challenge therefore lies not only in strengthening livelihoods, but in strengthening the institutional environment within which livelihoods develop. This distinction is one of the main arguments this paper advances. Livelihoods should be understood not only as household strategies, but also as the outcomes of institutional relationships.

Beyond the Five Capitals

The conventional sustainable livelihoods framework identifies five forms of capital: human, natural, physical, financial and social. These remain important analytical categories. Jordan's experience suggests, however, that two additional dimensions have become increasingly important. The first is institutional capital: the quality of governance, organisational capacity, professional competence, transparency and cooperation that turns resources into opportunities. The second is knowledge capital. Knowledge increasingly determines productivity, innovation and resilience. It resides within universities, research centres, government institutions and civil society organisations, and within local communities themselves. The challenge lies not only in generating knowledge, but in connecting knowledge to practice.

These additions do not replace the original livelihoods framework; they extend it to reflect the realities of contemporary rural development.

Participation as Capability

Participation is often treated as a mechanism for improving project implementation. This paper proposes a broader understanding: **participation builds capability**. Communities that take part in analysing problems become better able to solve the problems of the future. Institutions that engage continuously with citizens become more responsive and adaptable. Women who take part in cooperatives, local governance and community organisations strengthen not only their own capabilities as individuals, but also the capabilities of the institutions with which they interact.

The clearest recent Jordanian demonstration of this comes from the northern Jordan Valley itself. The 2024 narrative 'Our Unity Is Our Strength' documents the first year in which women agricultural

workers in the northern valley organised themselves collectively. The narrative begins with an individual grievance: a skilled worker in a packing house is harassed by a supervisor who pursues her with constant, arbitrary demands, and she asks herself the question that recurs throughout the testimonies: 'Why me?' Over a year of joint work, that individual question became a collective answer, summed up in the name the women gave to their effort: 'Our Unity Is Our Strength'. This is farmers' analysis in the precise sense that *Farmer First* describes: the people who live the problem analyse it themselves, while outsiders play the roles the book assigns to them – facilitators and catalysts, not teachers and trainers. Confrontations that no woman could risk alone – challenging a supervisor, or negotiating working conditions – became possible collectively. Participation in this narrative is not a project methodology, but the process through which women who were powerless as individuals built the confidence, leadership, sense of security and collective action that changed the way they are treated.

Participation therefore generates lasting public value beyond individual projects. It builds self-confidence, leadership, mutual trust, collective action and institutional learning. These capabilities become more important as development challenges grow more complex.

Livelihoods and Dignity

The evidence gathered in this paper consistently shows that livelihoods cannot be understood through employment statistics or household income alone. People are looking for more than economic survival. They seek safe work, recognition, fair treatment, voice, opportunity and respect. These dimensions are closely bound up with dignity. For rural women, dignity is lived through everyday interactions: safe transport to and from the farm; pay that is not withheld when a child falls ill; shade, clean water and a toilet at the work site; access to work that does not depend on an intermediary's favour; an extension officer who speaks to the woman who does the work; responsive public institutions; and participation in decision-making.

Safeguarding this dignity calls for a safe working environment resting on three interconnected requirements. The first is basic occupational health: shade, clean water and sanitation facilities should be treated as binding standards at work sites, not as discretionary arrangements left to the employer's goodwill. The second is freedom from violence and harassment in the world of work, in line with ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment, which recognises the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. The third is an institutional system of protection: labour inspection that reaches the women workers themselves, not only intermediaries and owners; accessible and confidential reporting channels; effective response mechanisms; and a guarantee that filing a complaint will not cost a woman tomorrow's work. Without such a system, standards remain a dead letter and rights remain hostage to unequal power relations in the workplace.

These matters are not separate from development. They are expressions of it.

Towards a Jordanian Reading

The traditions of participatory development, human development and sustainable livelihoods have profoundly influenced international development thinking. Jordan's experience suggests that these

traditions are complementary rather than competing. Participation explains how communities contribute knowledge. Human development explains why expanding capability matters. The sustainable livelihoods approach explains how households combine resources to build resilience. Jordan adds another important lesson: the effectiveness of livelihoods depends increasingly on the quality of the institutions that connect people to opportunity.

Part Three – Institutions, Communities and Systems

Development Beyond Projects

The evidence reviewed in this paper points to a single, consistent conclusion: sustainable rural transformation is not determined primarily by the number of projects implemented, the volume of investment mobilised or the duration of external support. These factors remain important, but they do not fully explain why some communities continue to progress long after individual programmes have ended, while others remain dependent on repeated interventions. The decisive factor, increasingly, is institutional capacity. Projects are temporary; institutions endure. Projects produce outputs; institutions sustain outcomes. Projects introduce innovation; institutions preserve, adapt and scale it up over time.

This distinction is especially important in Jordan. Over five decades, successive governments, civil society organisations, universities, development partners and local communities have implemented hundreds of initiatives in agriculture, livelihoods, women's empowerment, youth employment, natural resource management and local governance. Viewed individually, these programmes vary widely in scale, funding and duration. Viewed collectively, they represent something more important: a national process of institutional learning. The central question is therefore no longer whether Jordan has sufficient development experience. It clearly does. The more important question is whether this accumulated experience is connected, preserved and used systematically to guide future policy and practice.

Institutions as Development Capital

The development literature frequently refers to human, financial and natural capital. Institutions themselves, as productive assets, have traditionally received less attention. Yet institutions determine how effectively every other resource is used. An irrigation system needs efficient management. Financial services need reliable regulatory institutions. Agricultural innovation needs effective extension systems. Education depends on capable schools and universities. Markets depend on transparent rules and predictable governance.

Institutions therefore play a catalytic role. They turn potential into opportunity, coordinate relationships between actors, reduce uncertainty, enable cooperation and preserve continuity through political and economic change. The quality of institutions is thus not merely a governance issue, but a productive resource. Notably, the Economic and Social Council's 2025 study on modernisation places weak institutional and participatory governance at the top of the structural challenges facing Jordanian agriculture – ahead of climate, technology and finance – because governance determines the sector's capacity to respond to everything else.

JOHUD and the Evolution of Community Development

The establishment of the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development in 1977 was an important milestone in Jordan's development history. JOHUD was founded at a time when community development was attracting growing international recognition as an essential complement to economic and structural investment. Rather than focusing exclusively on service

delivery, JOHUD developed a national network of Community Development Centres that rooted development within local communities.

This institutional model deserves particular attention. The Community Development Centres were never merely sites where projects were implemented. They became places where relationships are built – where communities gather, women organise themselves, young people develop their skills, local leaders emerge, partnerships form and trust accumulates. These less visible functions were often more important than the individual activities carried out within the centres themselves. Over almost five decades, this sustained local presence has enabled JOHUD to accumulate something of great national value: institutional memory. Unlike project reports, institutional memory captures the practical knowledge that arises from sustained engagement with communities over many years.

Institutional Intelligence

Institutional memory becomes more valuable when it feeds institutional intelligence: the capacity of institutions to observe, learn, adapt and continuously improve through their interaction with the communities they serve. Institutional intelligence brings together evidence and experience, professional and local knowledge, planning and reflection, and policy and practice.

Institutions with high levels of institutional intelligence do not merely implement programmes efficiently; they gradually become better able to understand complex realities and to respond to them appropriately. The concept is particularly important for institutions such as JOHUD, whose comparative advantage lies not only in infrastructure or geographical reach, but in the practical knowledge accumulated over decades of sustained relationships with communities across Jordan. This is knowledge that cannot easily be replicated through short-term projects or external consultancies.

Community Capacity

The development literature often describes communities in terms of their needs: poverty, unemployment, limited services and environmental vulnerability. Although these realities demand attention, they offer only one perspective. Communities also possess capacities. They organise themselves collectively, resolve disputes, pass knowledge between generations, develop local leaders, adapt production systems, support vulnerable households and respond to crises.

These capacities often remain invisible because they are embedded in everyday social life rather than in formal institutions. When the women agricultural workers of the northern Jordan Valley documented in ‘Our Unity Is Our Strength’ began, they had no formal organisation, no budget and no external mandate. What they did have was precisely this latent capacity: familiarity with one another, a shared grievance and social bonds between women who had worked the same fields for many years – which a single year of collective effort turned into a visible, organised force. Community capacity therefore represents far more than participation. It is people’s collective ability to analyse problems, organise resources, negotiate partnerships and shape their own future.

Cooperatives and Collective Action

The evidence reviewed in this paper highlights the renewed importance of cooperatives within Jordan's rural economy, and recent years have produced a substantial body of Jordanian experience on which to build. The ILO's 2026 review of cooperative development under the PROSPECTS programme documents the state of the movement at the start of the reform phase: weak representative structures, uneven technical capacities and barriers affecting women, young people and refugees. It also documents what has changed: the 2025 Cooperatives Law was introduced to strengthen the institutional framework of the cooperative sector, improve governance and support the participation of women and young people in the sector. Most importantly for this paper's argument, it made women's representation on the Board of Directors of the Jordan Cooperative Corporation mandatory, reserving at least three of the twelve seats for women – a precedent for gender-responsive governance within the apex institution of the cooperative movement.

The same review finds that women, who are often marginalised in the wider labour market, have found in cooperatives a more accessible platform for economic participation, and that the reform process has raised women's awareness of labour rights and social protection. Historically, cooperatives have often been seen primarily as economic organisations. Yet their contribution extends much further. Effective cooperatives strengthen local governance, increase bargaining power, ease access to markets, support innovation, promote knowledge exchange, create opportunities for women's leadership, encourage democratic participation and build trust among members. In this way, cooperatives contribute to economic productivity and institutional development alike.

Universities and Knowledge Systems

Knowledge has become one of the main determinants of rural competitiveness. Climate-smart agriculture, digital technologies, water management, food processing, renewable energy and market intelligence all depend increasingly on the generation, exchange and practical application of knowledge. The Economic and Social Council's study on modernisation identifies limited research capacity and weak domestic seed production among the sector's structural constraints – a reminder that knowledge gaps are not an abstract matter, but translate directly into dependence on imported inputs.

Jordan has universities and research institutions capable of making important contributions in these areas. At the same time, rural communities hold generations of practical knowledge of agriculture, water management, livestock systems and environmental stewardship. Yet these knowledge systems often remain disconnected. Researchers study communities, but communities rarely shape research agendas. Extension services pass on recommendations, but local experience is seldom integrated into institutional learning. *Farmer First* offers a precise vocabulary for assessing this relationship, ranging from the contractual and consultative modes to the collaborative and collegiate modes, which strengthen farmers' informal research and their capacity to influence the formal research system. Measured against this standard, much of Jordan's agricultural knowledge system still operates in the contractual and consultative modes. The Jordan Valley study reveals the starkest

form of this disconnection: an extension system that reaches the farm, if it reaches it at all, addresses the intermediary or the owner and bypasses the workforce entirely.

Future rural transformation should strengthen this relationship, so that universities become partners in solving practical national problems, communities are recognised as contributors to national knowledge, and their informal experiments are treated as part of the national research system rather than as a curiosity outside it. Knowledge then becomes a shared national resource.

Civil Society and Public Trust

Civil society organisations occupy a distinctive position in Jordan's development landscape. They often work at the interface between communities and public institutions. This position allows them to contribute in ways that go beyond project implementation: facilitating dialogue, promoting participation, identifying emerging needs, supporting innovation, developing local leadership and creating trusted spaces for cooperation.

Perhaps their most important contribution is to public trust. Trust is rarely regarded as a development resource. Yet it strongly influences whether communities will participate, whether institutions will cooperate and whether policies will be implemented successfully. High-trust environments lower transaction costs, improve cooperation, strengthen accountability and encourage collective action. Trust therefore functions as invisible development infrastructure. The Jordan Valley study also records the cost of civil society's absence: participants reported a clear shortage of activities and interventions aimed at women agricultural workers in their areas – a gap that the study's recommendations call on civil society organisations and cooperative societies to fill.

Government as System Integrator

Government remains the central actor in rural transformation, but its role is evolving. Contemporary development challenges increasingly cut across traditional institutional boundaries. Climate adaptation affects agriculture, water and energy simultaneously. Women's economic participation depends on policies on labour, transport, childcare, education and finance. A single recommendation of the Jordan Valley study – on safe transport for women agricultural workers – requires coordinated action between farm owners, the Ministry of Labour and the Land Transport Regulatory Commission – three actors whose mandates rarely meet. Food systems, too, link production, processing, logistics, health and environmental sustainability.

Effective governance therefore requires stronger integration across institutions. Government is increasingly becoming not only a provider of public services, but an integrator of systems. Its success depends on creating coherence between policies, institutions and partnerships. *Farmer First* adds both a warning and a direction here: normal bureaucracy tends towards centralisation, standardisation and simplification, and is therefore ill-suited to the geographical dispersion, variability and complexity of resource-poor rural households. Serving complex, diverse and risk-prone agriculture requires decentralised resources and authority, and a reversal in the direction of demands, so that priorities come more from farmers below than from officials above.

Development Partners and National Ownership

Jordan has benefited greatly from long-standing international cooperation. Development partners have supported institutional reform, humanitarian response, economic development, governance, education and environmental sustainability. The evolution this paper calls for is already visible among the partners themselves. The 2025 annual report of UNDP Jordan, published in the fiftieth year of its partnership with the Kingdom, describes a deliberate shift 'from implementer to systems designer and finance facilitator': a move away from traditional grant-based interventions towards models in which public finance reform, policy innovation and de-risking help to unlock investment and attract private capital, so that development investments become financeable and scalable rather than permanently dependent on grants.

The next phase of cooperation should mainstream this principle. International partnerships achieve their greatest impact when they strengthen national institutions rather than create parallel systems. Success should therefore be measured not only by project outputs, but by the capabilities that remain once projects have ended: professional institutions, improved governance, knowledge systems, community capacity and collaborative partnerships. This is the lasting legacy of successful development cooperation.

A Learning Development System

A single idea connects all the institutions discussed in this part: learning. Communities learn. Organisations learn. Universities learn. Government learns. Civil society learns. The quality of development depends increasingly on whether these different forms of learning reinforce one another. Jordan has considerable institutional experience. The challenge is to turn accumulated experience into continuous learning, through mechanisms by which evidence guides policy, communities influence planning, research supports practice, practice generates new research questions, institutions cooperate rather than compete, and knowledge circulates rather than remaining isolated.

Implications for Rural Transformation

Several conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, rural transformation should be understood as an institutional process as much as an economic one. Second, Jordan already possesses many of the institutional foundations needed for this transition; the challenge lies less in creating new organisations than in strengthening the relationships between existing ones. Third, community capacity is a strategic national resource that should increasingly guide the design, implementation and evaluation of policy. Fourth, institutions such as JOHUD demonstrate the long-term value of institutions rooted within communities, rather than of those operating only through time-bound projects. Finally, future investment should strengthen institutional capacity, institutional learning and institutional collaboration, alongside improvements in livelihoods and productivity.

Only through capable institutions can capable communities build livelihoods resilient enough to endure across successive generations.

Part Four – An Integrated Framework for Rural Transformation

From Livelihoods to Rural Transformation

The previous parts argued that rural transformation cannot be understood through agriculture, livelihoods or institutions alone. Each offers a necessary perspective, but none is sufficient on its own. Livelihoods are shaped by institutions. Institutions draw their effectiveness from capable people and communities. Communities depend on knowledge, natural resources, markets and governance. Together, these relationships form a single development system.

The central premise of this paper is therefore that rural transformation should be understood as the progressive strengthening of this system, not as the implementation of isolated interventions. Conventional development planning often starts with sectors: agriculture, employment, education, water, health and the environment. Each sector sets its own objectives, budgets and programmes. Coordination comes later, often through inter-ministerial committees or project-level partnerships. The experience reviewed in this paper suggests that this sequence should increasingly be reversed. Planning should begin with the rural system itself. Only then should sectoral interventions be designed to strengthen the different components of that system. This approach does not diminish the importance of sectoral expertise; rather, it places it within a broader framework that recognises the interconnected nature of rural life.

The Rural Development System

Every rural household exists within a web of relationships. It depends on natural resources for production, public infrastructure for mobility, markets for income, financial institutions for investment, schools for education, health services for well-being, community organisations for collective action, government institutions for regulation and public services, and knowledge systems for innovation.

None of these relationships operates independently. Failure in one part of the system affects the performance of the others. Poor transport reduces access to markets; poor market access lowers farm income; lower income limits investment; limited investment slows innovation; and declining productivity increases vulnerability. The Jordan Valley evidence shows the same chain at the level of a single worker's life: unreliable transport limits the farms a woman can reach; access through an intermediary determines how many days she works; informal work strips her wage of any protection; and the lack of assets and a credit history closes the path from worker to producer.

Conversely, strengthening a single relationship often generates multiple benefits. Better extension increases productivity; higher productivity supports household income; greater income widens educational opportunity; education strengthens innovation; and innovation improves resilience. Development thus becomes cumulative. The aim of public policy should be to raise the quality of these mutually reinforcing relationships.

Seven Forms of Capital

The sustainable livelihoods approach traditionally identifies five forms of capital. Jordan's experience suggests that contemporary rural transformation requires a broader understanding. This paper therefore proposes seven interconnected forms of capital.

Human capital encompasses education, health, skills, practical knowledge, self-confidence and leadership. Its importance extends beyond labour productivity. Human capability enables people to innovate, participate, organise collectively and respond to changing conditions. The profile of the participants in the Jordan Valley study – skilled workers, most of them with secondary education or less and, as the study notes, with low awareness of their labour rights – shows where investment in rural women's human capital must begin: not with technical skills alone, but with rights awareness, confidence and leadership. Investment in education and lifelong learning is therefore an investment in long-term national resilience.

Natural capital encompasses land, water, biodiversity, ecosystems and environmental resources. In Jordan, this capital is of particular strategic importance because of growing water scarcity and climate change. Protecting natural capital is therefore not only an environmental objective, but essential to economic resilience, food security and intergenerational equity. Future rural transformation depends on managing natural resources more productively while ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Physical capital encompasses transport, irrigation systems, digital infrastructure, renewable energy, processing facilities, storage, schools, health centres and public buildings. Infrastructure should increasingly be assessed by the relationships it enables, not by its physical presence alone. Roads connect producers to markets. Digital infrastructure connects communities to knowledge. Childcare facilities connect women to job opportunities. Safe daily transport – the demand voiced most consistently by the participants in the Jordan Valley study – connects women to work itself. In particular, safe, affordable and accessible transport determines, in practice, whether work, training, markets and public services can be reached at all. Transport should therefore be treated as a core investment in rural transformation, not as a secondary logistical detail left to chance. This point links directly to the Jordan Valley study's recommendation that safe and affordable transport be organised jointly by farm owners and the Land Transport Regulatory Commission. Infrastructure thus serves as the connective tissue of development.

Financial capital extends beyond income. It encompasses savings, credit, insurance, investment and access to financial services. The evidence gathered in this paper consistently shows that financial inclusion remains uneven across rural Jordan, particularly for women, seasonal workers and small producers. El-Zubi's analysis pinpoints the mechanism precisely: without collateral, without ownership and without a credit history, rural women remain outside the formal financial system despite being economically active every day. Strengthening financial capital therefore requires not only expanding credit, but financial systems that respond to the realities of rural livelihoods: flexible products, accessible institutions, appropriate risk management, collective guarantees that compensate for the absence of individual collateral, and support for enterprise development. These investments strengthen productive capacity, not consumption alone.

Social capital refers to trust, networks, cooperation and collective action. Communities with strong social capital organise themselves more effectively, respond to crises more quickly and adopt innovation more successfully. Jordan has rich traditions of mutual support and community engagement, and the experience of the women of the northern Jordan Valley documented in 'Our Unity Is Our Strength' shows how this capital can be built and deliberately put to use within a single year. These traditions should be recognised as productive assets, not merely as cultural characteristics. Cooperatives, local associations and Community Development Centres all contribute to strengthening social capital.

Institutional capital is one of the distinguishing features of this framework. It refers to the capacity of institutions to perform effectively, cooperate, learn continuously and earn public trust. It includes the quality of governance, professional competence, transparency, accountability, coordination, adaptive leadership and institutional memory. These attributes determine how far communities can turn available resources into sustainable development. The 2025 Cooperatives Law – with its mandatory representation of women on the Board of Directors of the Jordan Cooperative Corporation – is a concrete recent investment in institutional capital: it does not change the resources available, but it changes how the institutions that govern them are constituted. Investment in institutional capital generates returns across every other dimension of development.

Knowledge capital completes this framework. Research, innovation, digital technology, traditional knowledge, professional expertise and community experience all shape future productivity. The contribution of *Farmer First* to this category lies in its insistence that the informal research and development carried out by farmers – their continuous analysis, choice and experimentation – falls within the definition of knowledge capital, not outside it. Knowledge capital is strengthened when universities collaborate with communities; when extension services facilitate learning rather than one-way communication – and reach women workers, not only intermediaries and owners; when research addresses practical national challenges; and when communities contribute their experience to policy development. Knowledge grows through exchange, and its value increases when it is shared.

Relationships Matter More Than Assets

The seven capitals should not be read as separate categories requiring separate interventions. Their significance lies in their interaction. A cooperative with strong social capital but without sound financial management will struggle to expand. Excellent infrastructure without capable institutions produces disappointing results. Knowledge without effective extension remains untapped. Natural resources without good governance become more vulnerable. Development therefore depends less on the quantity of individual assets than on the quality of the relationships between them. This principle distinguishes rural transformation from conventional sectoral planning. The aim is not only to increase each form of capital independently, but to strengthen the links that enable these capitals to reinforce one another.

The Food System as a Whole: The FoSTr Foresight Framework in Jordan

The systems reading advanced in this part is not a theoretical abstraction. Jordan has already begun to apply it in practice through the Foresight4Food FoSTr programme, a three-year initiative supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and implemented in partnership with the University of Oxford, Wageningen University & Research and the University of Jordan. Between the scoping visit in November 2022 and the food systems transformation workshop held in Amman on 11 November 2024, the programme brought Jordanian stakeholders together in a series of multi-stakeholder workshops to map the national food system, assess trends and uncertainties, build scenarios and explore pathways of change. Alongside this participatory process, the programme produced a food system overview; policy briefs on nutrition, food loss and waste and the food footprint, followed later by briefs on governance, wholesale markets, the private sector and civil society; and a quantitative exploration of two possible futures for Jordan's food system. The process matters to this paper for two reasons: its framework formalises the systems perspective this paper argues for, and its findings demonstrate empirically why isolated interventions fail.

The FoSTr framework describes the food system as a set of drivers, activities and outcomes linked by feedback. The drivers – demography and development, consumption patterns, technology, markets, climate and the environment, and policy and geopolitics – set the direction in which the system evolves. The core activities – production, storage, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal – take place within supporting services such as logistics, finance, communications, and research and education, and within an institutional environment of laws, regulations, standards, norms and informal rules. The system produces three categories of outcome – food security and nutrition, economic and social well-being, and environmental sustainability – which in turn feed back into the drivers and reshape them. The correspondence with this paper's framework is direct. The food system's supporting services are expressions of physical, financial and knowledge capital; the institutional environment is institutional capital in practice; and the feedback loops embody the premise that relationships matter more than assets. Rural women, moreover, are present in every core activity of Jordan's food system: as producers in the Jordan Valley and the highlands, as processing workers in home-based and cooperative food enterprises, as distributors and traders, and as the principal managers of household consumption and food waste. The food systems approach therefore reinforces the analytical lens adopted in this paper rather than competing with it.

Using scenarios designed with Jordanian stakeholders and quantified by Wageningen Economic Research through the MAGNET model for long-term economic simulation, the foresight process compared a 'business as usual' future with a desirable future for 2040. Under FoSTr's MAGNET-based business-as-usual scenario – modest economic growth of around 2.6 per cent a year, population growth to around sixteen million by 2040, a continuing shift towards a Western diet, recurrent disruption to cereal imports and mounting climate pressure on agricultural productivity – food affordability and exports improve, but diets become measurably less healthy, dependence on imports increases, fertiliser use intensifies by around 30 per cent, and greenhouse gas emissions from the agri-food sector rise by almost half. The desirable scenario – accelerated growth of 5.6 per cent a year in line with the Economic Modernization Vision, slower population growth, a shift towards

a Jordanian Mediterranean diet consistent with healthy and sustainable diets, a halving of food loss and waste, and trade that is resilient to regional conflict – improves every social and economic indicator at once: the healthy diet index, agri-food self-sufficiency, food affordability and food exports all rise strongly. Even so, the desirable future carries trade-offs of its own, including intensified pressure on land and water and a marked rise in fertiliser use as production expands to serve domestic health needs and export markets – what the analysis calls the 'efficiency paradox'.

Two lessons follow. First, the modelling confirms that isolated interventions are insufficient to achieve a full transformation of the food system: halving food loss and waste is best for sustainability but leaves diets unhealthy; shifting to a Mediterranean diet is best for human health but intensifies the use of water, land and fertiliser; and accelerated growth and technological change are best for food security but worsen unhealthy diets and environmental damage. Only a package of desirable interventions, implemented holistically, increases the likelihood of achieving a prosperous, healthy and sustainable food system. This is the same argument made about the seven capitals: their importance lies in their interaction, not in their separate accumulation. Second, the trade-offs that appear even within the desirable scenario confirm why anticipatory governance matters. Foresight clarifies the future consequences of today's action or inaction, builds a society-wide understanding of the desirable directions of systemic change, and enables adaptive policy and investment. Scenarios should therefore be monitored and revised, rather than treated as a destination fixed in advance.

Rural Women Within the System

The analytical significance of rural women becomes particularly clear within this framework. Women interact simultaneously with all seven forms of capital. They contribute to human capital through education, health and the transmission of knowledge. They manage natural resources within households and in agricultural production. They use physical infrastructure to reach work, services and markets. They take part in the financial management of households and enterprises. They strengthen social capital through community organisations and informal support networks. They engage with public institutions through multiple services. And they produce knowledge and pass it on between generations. Because these interactions happen constantly, rural women offer one of the clearest perspectives from which to understand how the entire rural development system works. Improving their opportunities therefore strengthens not only individual well-being, but also the effectiveness of the wider rural development system.

Capability as the Organising Principle

Ultimately, the framework proposed in this paper is organised around a single concept: capability. Capability explains why the seven capitals matter. Resources become valuable because they strengthen capability. Institutions become valuable because they strengthen capability. Participation becomes valuable because it strengthens capability. Knowledge becomes valuable because it strengthens capability. Here the paper's two principal intellectual sources converge: *Farmer First* stresses that the main objective of farmer-first approaches is 'not to transfer known technology, but to enable farmers to learn, adapt and do better' – which is Sen's expansion of capability expressed in the language of agricultural practice.

Capability exists at multiple levels. Individuals become capable through education and health. Households become capable through resilient livelihoods. Communities become capable through trust and collective action. Institutions become capable through learning and cooperation. Countries become capable when these different forms of capability reinforce one another. This understanding aligns closely with Jordan's development trajectory, and it offers a practical organising principle for future rural policy.

Measuring Rural Transformation

If rural transformation is understood as the strengthening of capability, then evaluation must evolve too. Conventional indicators remain essential: agricultural productivity, employment, income, exports, school enrolment and water efficiency. These measures capture important outcomes. They should, however, be complemented by indicators that reflect institutional and community capacity. Are women participating more effectively in producer organisations and local governance? Have cooperatives become more accountable and more economically sustainable? Are public institutions cooperating more effectively across sectors? Are extension services improving the adoption of innovation – and are they reaching women workers, not only intermediaries and owners? Are communities showing greater resilience during environmental or economic shocks? Is knowledge moving more effectively between universities, government and rural communities?

El-Zubi's 2026 article proposes an additional measurement principle of particular importance: performance indicators must measure women's share of ownership and profits, not merely the number of women beneficiaries. A programme may multiply its number of beneficiaries indefinitely without changing the economic position of any one of them; ownership and profit share, by contrast, record whether women are moving from being recipients of assistance to owners of productive assets. *Farmer First* provides the complementary principle for evaluating knowledge and technology: the decisive test is farmers' own evaluation – their judgements, interest and adoption – not that of project staff. Adopting these two principles together would move evaluation beyond project performance towards system performance.

Implications for National Policy

Several implications follow from this framework. First, rural transformation should become an organising principle that connects existing national strategies rather than replacing them. Second, investment decisions should increasingly consider how proposed interventions strengthen relationships within the rural development system. Third, institutional collaboration should be recognised as a development outcome in its own right. Fourth, women should be recognised not only as beneficiaries of rural policy, but as strategic partners whose experience offers insight into the effectiveness of the system as a whole.

A fifth implication concerns the care economy. If unpaid care work is among the most significant constraints on the economic participation of rural women, rural transformation policy must integrate a care economy perspective rather than treating care as a private family matter. This includes investing in care services – childcare, care for older people and long-term care – so that they are available within rural communities themselves; recognising care provision as a source of decent work in its

own right, a large share of which is likely to go to rural women; and designing programmes, training schedules and extension services around the reality of care responsibilities, rather than assuming a full-time availability that does not exist. The care economy is not a burden on rural development, but part of its infrastructure: it enables women to participate while also generating decent jobs within local communities.

Finally, the framework shows that Jordan already possesses many of the assets needed for successful rural transformation. The challenge is no longer primarily one of creating resources, but one of integration.

If rural transformation depends on stronger relationships between institutions, communities, markets and knowledge systems, then implementation requires a different model of partnership. The next part therefore considers how government, civil society, universities, municipalities, the private sector, cooperatives and development partners can contribute to a shared national effort that strengthens resilient rural livelihoods and builds capable institutions for future generations.

Part Five – A New Rural Compact for Jordan

From Coordination to Collaboration

The previous parts argued that rural transformation depends on the relationships that bind people, institutions, markets, knowledge and natural resources to one another. If this interpretation is accepted, an important consequence follows: no single institution can achieve rural transformation on its own. No government ministry, municipality, civil society organisation, university, cooperative, private company or development partner possesses, on its own, the authority, resources or knowledge required to address the complexity of contemporary rural development.

The future therefore depends less on institutional expansion and more on institutional collaboration. This represents an important evolution in development practice. Coordination means that institutions continue to pursue separate objectives while avoiding duplication. Collaboration goes further. It requires institutions to define shared objectives, exchange knowledge continuously, align investments and assess success collectively. This paper proposes that rural transformation should increasingly be governed through collaborative systems, not through parallel programmes.

Government as Steward of the System

Government remains the principal steward of national development. Its responsibilities include legislation, public investment, regulation, service delivery, environmental protection and national planning. Within the framework proposed here, government performs an additional function: it becomes the steward of the rural development system itself.

This requires attention not only to the effectiveness of individual ministries, but to the quality of the relationships between them. Agriculture must connect with water policy, education with labour markets, climate policy with economic development, transport with employment, and women's empowerment with the productive sectors. The reform agenda emerging from the evidence gives this stewardship practical substance: the labour inspection, work-site standards and transport coordination recommended by the **Economic and Social Council's study** on the Jordan Valley; the legal recognition of productive cooperative companies and the blended finance architecture proposed by El-Zubi; and the integration of rural women's enterprises into the Economic Modernization Vision 2033, rather than treating them as a marginal welfare issue. Public administration increasingly succeeds when it enables integration rather than fragmentation. This does not require new institutions; it requires existing institutions to work together more effectively around shared national objectives.

Civil Society as a Strategic Partner

Jordanian civil society has made a substantial contribution to national development over several decades. Its greatest contribution has not been the number of projects implemented, but its ability to remain close to communities while maintaining constructive partnerships with government and development partners.

JOHUD illustrates this role particularly clearly. Its Community Development Centres across the Kingdom have demonstrated the value of a sustained local presence, long-term trust and continuous engagement with the issues facing local communities. Rather than acting solely as implementing agencies, institutions such as JOHUD create spaces in which government, communities, universities, municipalities and private organisations can work together. This integrating role becomes more important as development challenges grow more complex.

Civil society therefore offers more than services: it offers institutional memory, community intelligence, innovation, participation and public trust. These contributions should be recognised as strategic national assets and directed – as the Jordan Valley study urges – towards the rural women whom existing interventions have so far largely failed to reach.

The Jordanian National Commission for Women: Between Policy and Practice

The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) occupies a complementary position within this proposed rural compact. Where JOHUD brings decades of practical community engagement, the National Commission provides national leadership in policy development, legal reform and institutional coordination on women's rights and gender equality.

The relationship between these two institutions illustrates the broader argument of this paper. Policy and practice should reinforce each other. National strategies need to be implemented at local level. Community experience should inform future policy reform. And evidence generated through practical engagement – such as the findings of the Jordan Valley focus groups – should strengthen legislation, regulation and institutional learning. Together, JOHUD and the National Commission demonstrate how complementary institutional roles can generate a greater collective impact than any single institution could achieve alone. This partnership exemplifies the collaborative governance that rural transformation increasingly requires.

In partnership with JOHUD and other relevant institutions, the Jordanian National Commission for Women could play a normative role in developing tools grounded in the principles of gender equality and equity to identify gaps in rural development, and in developing programmes and budgets that take these gaps into account and address them institutionally – translating the national vision into clear implementation requirements in agricultural extension, cooperatives, decent work, finance, transport, value chains and local leadership.

Universities and Knowledge Partnerships

Jordanian universities possess considerable scientific and professional expertise relevant to rural development, spanning agriculture, engineering, economics, public policy, environmental science, business administration, health, digital technologies and the social sciences. The challenge lies not in the availability of knowledge, but in the relationship between knowledge and practice.

Future rural transformation should encourage universities to engage more directly with communities, municipalities, cooperatives and civil society organisations. Research questions should increasingly arise from practical national challenges. Communities should become partners in generating knowledge, not merely subjects of research. Students should gain greater exposure to applied rural

development. And evidence should flow continuously between research institutions and practitioners. Knowledge then becomes a national partnership, rather than merely a specialist activity.

The Private Sector and Productive Rural Economies

The future of rural Jordan depends fundamentally on productive enterprise. Private investment creates jobs, stimulates innovation and strengthens value chains. The regional dimension raises the stakes: El-Zubi and Shuaibi's food hub research places Jordanian agriculture – input industries, fresh produce exports and logistics services – within a regional market extending to Iraq, Egypt and the Gulf, which means that improvements in grading, packing and cold chain capacity translate directly into export competitiveness.

The aim should not be to replace public investment with private enterprise, nor should public institutions attempt to perform functions that markets perform better. Rather, each sector should contribute according to its comparative advantage. Government creates the enabling conditions. The private sector creates productive opportunities. Civil society strengthens participation. Universities generate knowledge. Communities contribute experience and initiative. When these functions reinforce one another, rural economies become more resilient and more competitive. Particular attention should be given to enterprises that generate local added value, strengthen agricultural competitiveness, support women's entrepreneurship and create meaningful opportunities for young people – including the management, logistics and digital marketing roles that women's productive enterprises can create for rural youth.

From Beneficiaries to Partners: The Next Generation of Women's Cooperatives

This paper has presented cooperatives not only as economic organisations, but as institutions of local governance. The question this part must answer is: **what should the next generation of Jordanian cooperatives – and of women's cooperatives in particular – become?**

El-Zubi's 2026 article 'From Beneficiaries to Partners' offers the most developed Jordanian answer. It argues that the traditional cooperative, in its prevailing form, has become a service entity of limited ambition: it buys inputs in bulk, disburses the occasional loan, organises a training course – and stops there. What is needed is a qualitative shift in both concept and practice: the cooperative as a productive investment company that owns capital assets and is run on the logic of profitability and efficiency, not on the logic of subsidy and mutual aid.

In this model, a women's cooperative is established as a productive cooperative company that owns a sorting and grading line, a citrus waxing unit, cold storage and a packing line. Women contribute to the capital – in cash, in kind or through concessional finance – and become shareholder-owners of an investment asset that generates an annual profit distributed according to shareholdings, rather than beneficiaries of a temporary development project that ends when donor funding runs out. The distinction is fundamental: a development project sustains a household for a season, whereas an owned asset provides a permanent source of income that can grow and be passed on.

Success depends on positioning in the higher-value links of the chain rather than in low-return harvesting, with each cooperative specialising according to the comparative advantage of its area: aggregation, sorting and grading, which turn a scattered and uneven harvest into a uniform product that commands a higher price; cleaning, packing and standards-compliant packaging for regulated and export markets; citrus waxing, a high-value service currently brought in from outside the production area; post-harvest handling and cold storage, which reduce the losses that consume a large share of Jordan's harvest before it reaches the consumer; seedling production and plant propagation, knowledge-intensive work that continues all year round; home-based and semi-industrial food processing, which turns seasonal surpluses into storable products; and direct e-marketing, which bypasses intermediaries and builds a local brand. Read through the lens of *Farmer First*, this is an application of the farmer-first triad – analysis, choice and experimentation – to the rural economy itself: women analyse the value chain in their area, choose a link within it from a basket of options rather than having a standard model assigned to them, and build enterprises that are, in essence, sustained experiments that they own and evaluate. The supporting institutions – finance, training and marketing platforms – take on the roles the model assigns to outsiders: researchers and providers of options, and supporters and advisers to the women's own enterprises.

The hardest constraint remains start-up finance for capital assets. The solution, El-Zubi argues, lies not in waiting for a grant, but in engineering multi-layered blended finance: the Central Bank of Jordan's refinancing programmes, with reduced interest rates for productive sectors and small and medium-sized enterprises, as a natural starting point; the Agricultural Credit Corporation, as the lending arm closest to agriculture, provided that it designs products for cooperative entities and not only for individuals; bringing in commercial banks and microfinance institutions through collective guarantees that replace the missing individual collateral; and financing from local and international development funds for high-cost fixed assets – sorting lines and cold rooms – through grants conditional on members' contributions, to secure their commitment. Capital is thus layered: a grant or concessional finance for the major fixed assets, commercial credit for working capital, and members' contributions that establish ownership and commitment. These layers make the cooperative creditworthy instead of keeping it dependent on aid.

The model has useful international precedents: Amul in India, which turned millions of rural women from marginal producers into owners within one of the country's largest food brands through ownership of collection, chilling and processing; women's coffee-sorting cooperatives in Rwanda, which enabled women to capture added value that previously leaked to intermediaries; and women's argan oil cooperatives in Morocco, which showed that owning the production line and the brand multiplies women's returns compared with selling the raw material. The common lesson is clear: real returns materialise when women own the asset and operate a processing link – a lesson fully applicable to the Jordanian context, with its diversity of crops and its proximity to Gulf markets.

Realising this model requires policy action: a legal framework for the productive cooperative company that permits asset ownership, shareholding and profit distribution, and distinguishes it clearly from the traditional service-oriented cooperative society; a blended finance product led by the Central Bank and the Agricultural Credit Corporation; a national fund for shared infrastructure that women's cooperatives own and operate profitably; the assignment of each cooperative to a specific

high-value link according to the comparative advantage of its area, to avoid duplication and destructive competition; a unified national e-marketing platform and a collective brand linking cooperative products to domestic and export markets; training in management, accounting and quality built into the financing package as a condition, not as an afterthought; and performance indicators that measure women's share of ownership and profits. When this agenda is integrated into the Economic Modernization Vision 2033 and its drivers for sustainable agriculture, women's empowerment and rural development, it shifts the logic from 'employing the poor' to 'creating new owners' – which, as El-Zubi concludes, is the essence of any sustainable rural development.

Communities as Co-producers of Development

Perhaps the most important implication of this paper concerns the changing role of citizens themselves. For years, development discourse has referred to communities as beneficiaries. Although this language is understandable in programme management, it no longer reflects how development actually happens. Communities do not merely receive development; they create it. Households invest in education. Farmers adopt innovation. Women's groups establish enterprises and – as the women of the northern Jordan Valley showed in a single year of collective action – organise themselves to change their working conditions. Young people develop businesses. Communities organise collective action. Municipalities cooperate with local organisations. These activities are not an adjunct to development. They are development itself.

The paper therefore proposes a shift in perspective: communities should increasingly be recognised as co-producers of development. This understanding changes the relationship between institutions and citizens. Participation becomes essential rather than optional. Listening becomes part of governance. And development becomes a shared national endeavour.

Steering Towards the Desirable Food Future

The new rural compact proposed in this part aligns closely with the food system transformation levers identified by the FoSTr foresight process in Jordan. The November 2024 workshop organised its policy discussions around four levers – wholesale markets, food system governance, the private sector and civil society – each of which was the subject of a dedicated policy brief. These are the very actors and arenas around which this paper organises the compact: government as steward of the system, civil society as a strategic partner, the private sector as a builder of productive rural economies, and communities and cooperatives as co-producers of development. The foresight process also drew on the six conditions of systems change identified by Kania, Kramer and Senge in 2018: explicit structural change in policies, practices and resource flows; semi-explicit relational change in relationships, connections and power dynamics; and implicit transformative change in mental models. The compact deliberately works at all three levels. Legal reform, labour inspection and blended finance address structures; collaborative governance, a federation of cooperatives and knowledge partnerships address relationships and power; and reframing rural women from beneficiaries to partners addresses the mental models that ultimately hold existing arrangements in place.

Foresight adds a further discipline to the compact. The future, as the Foresight4Food process reminds participants, is shaped by the way it is imagined today. Where there is a shared vision, shared interests and effective communication, the food system can be steered in a desirable direction; if, on the other hand, Jordan is pushed towards an undesirable scenario by regional conflict, climate shocks or drifting dietary patterns, the same collaborative capacities will determine how the country responds and adapts. Steering towards a desirable food future for 2040 – healthy diets, efficient use of scarce water and minimal food waste – is therefore not an agenda separate from rural transformation. It is one of its clearest expressions, and rural women, present in every activity of the food system, are among its most influential actors.

The International Year of the Woman Farmer

The designation of 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer offers Jordan an important opportunity – one it has already begun to seize. In June 2026, **a national steering committee prepared the zero draft of the JAHD Initiative for Women Agricultural Workers**: a framework for 2026–2030 organised around six pillars – land, natural resources and water; finance and financial inclusion; technology, digital transformation and innovation; value chains, markets and entrepreneurship; decent work, social protection and resilience; and leadership, decision-making and cooperatives – together with governance and coordination mechanisms, defined roles for partners, an implementation roadmap, a monitoring and evaluation matrix, an integrated communication and advocacy campaign, and explicit links to Jordan's national frameworks.

The correspondence between the initiative's six pillars and the framework proposed in this paper is close and encouraging: land and water stand for natural capital; finance for financial capital; technology for knowledge and physical capital; value chains and entrepreneurship for the repositioning of women within the rural economy; decent work and social protection for the dignity agenda documented by the Jordan Valley study; and leadership and cooperatives for institutional and social capital. In other words, the initiative is already designed systemically rather than sectorally. One test remains, set by *Farmer First*: whose analysis and whose priorities will drive implementation? A JAHD Initiative built on farmer-first logic would involve women agricultural workers themselves directly in analysis, priority-setting and evaluation, with demands rising from the fields rather than descending from the steering committee; and it would treat women's own judgement of each intervention as the ultimate measure of its success.

The significance of this opportunity should extend beyond a single year of activities. It should encourage lasting institutional change. The greatest legacy will not be more short-term projects, but a renewed national commitment to recognising rural women as producers, entrepreneurs, leaders, innovators and partners in development. This paper proposes that the International Year – and the JAHD Initiative it has inspired – should mark the beginning of a wider transition towards integrated rural transformation: one that strengthens existing national strategies, deepens institutional collaboration and places rural women at the heart of a long-term national development agenda.

Looking Ahead to 2035

By 2035, successful rural transformation will be visible in the everyday lives of Jordanian communities. Rural economies will be more diverse. Agriculture will generate greater value through innovation, processing and stronger market integration, with sorting lines, waxing units and cold rooms owned by women's cooperatives, so that this value is retained within rural communities. Water will be managed more efficiently. Digital technologies will support production, education and public services. Young people will find meaningful opportunities within rural communities. Women will exercise growing leadership in cooperatives, enterprises, municipalities and public life, building on the precedent of guaranteed representation set by the 2025 Cooperatives Law. The woman working in the fields of the Jordan Valley will have a contract, travel safely, work under binding safety standards and have a realistic path from wage worker to owner.

Public institutions will collaborate more effectively. Communities will take part routinely in planning and evaluation. Knowledge will flow continuously between universities, practitioners and local communities. Development will increasingly be understood as a process of learning, not as a series of projects. These ambitions are high. But they are achievable, because they build on institutions, expertise and capabilities that already exist within Jordan.

Conclusion

The argument advanced in this paper is deliberately simple. Jordan's future rural prosperity will not be determined by agricultural productivity alone, by economic growth alone or by public investment alone. It will be determined by the country's ability to strengthen the relationships that connect people, institutions, knowledge, markets and natural resources.

Rural women stand at the heart of these relationships. Their lives show how policies are experienced, how institutions interact and how livelihoods are built in practice. The sixty women who spoke to the Economic and Social Council's researchers in the Jordan Valley, and the women of the northern valley who discovered that 'Our Unity Is Our Strength', have shown what the evidence in this paper sets out at length: that the distance between rural women and the institutions meant to serve them is the truest measure of the state of the rural development system. Closing that distance requires the reversals that *Farmer First* placed at the core of its argument almost four decades ago: a reversal in learning, so that institutions learn from rural women and not merely about them; a reversal of roles, so that outsiders facilitate, research and support rather than lecture; and a reversal of direction, so that priorities rise from the fields rather than descend upon them.

Recognising this reality changes the purpose of rural development. It becomes less about delivering isolated interventions and more about building capable people, capable communities and capable institutions that reinforce one another over time. This understanding does not discard earlier approaches to development; it builds on them. Jordan's long tradition of community development, the participatory legacy of the Jordan Human Development Report 2004, the human development approach, the sustainable livelihoods tradition, the National Strategy for Women, the Economic Modernization Vision and the practical experience accumulated through institutions such as JOHUD together provide a strong foundation for the next phase of national development. This paper also seeks to involve rural women in policymaking, asset ownership, knowledge management and the distribution of value, while stressing the importance of adopting an approach that engages men and boys in redistributing the burden of care and domestic work, in combating violence and harassment, and in broadening social acceptance of women's economic leadership. Equality is not a benefit for women alone, but a condition for improving household productivity, market fairness and public trust in institutions.

The task ahead is not to start again. It is to connect these strengths more effectively.

Afterword – The Next Fifty Years

Development is measured not only by what one generation achieves, but by what it enables the next generation to achieve.

Jordan's modern development story has been marked by resilience, pragmatism and sustained investment in people and institutions despite considerable structural constraints. The next stage of this journey demands the same qualities. The challenges of climate change, technological transformation, water scarcity and changing labour markets cannot be met with fixed solutions. They require institutions able to learn, communities able to adapt, citizens able to participate and partnerships able to endure.

This paper has argued that rural transformation is, at its core, a process of strengthening these capabilities. Its purpose is not merely to improve rural livelihoods, but to strengthen Jordan's capacity to shape its own future. The International Year of the Woman Farmer offers an opportunity to recognise a group whose contribution has long been undervalued. Its lasting legacy, however, should be broader. The Year should encourage a national commitment to building a Jordan in which capable people, capable communities and capable institutions continuously learn from one another.

In the end, Jordan's greatest renewable resource is neither its land nor its water. It is the capability of its people. The future of rural transformation will depend

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