Players from Libya and Egypt at the “Our Game, Our Goals” closing ceremony. Nejmeh Stadium, Beirut. August 1, 2015.
“I was so encouraged by the sight of the little girls. I didn’t just feel like a football player but also a leader.”
In summer 2015, Lebanon’s first international women’s football & cultural festival took place from July 26th to August 1st.

DISCOVER FOOTBALL (DF) was proud to be part of the organising team, alongside the Girls Football Academy of Lebanon. Under the banner “Our Game, Our Goals,” the festival continued DF’s model of combining an international football tournament with workshops. The themes of the workshops focused on the challenges surrounding women’s football and women’s rights as well as on female empowerment to question gender stereotypes on and off the pitch. The project hosted a series of one-day events in cities across Lebanon to reach local girls (many living in Palestinian refugee camps) with limited access to travel within Lebanon.

Players on the teams from Palestine, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and our own German team, not only played against each other, but also helped run girls’ football training and gave workshops to the local girls focusing on children’s rights, women’s rights, gender sensitivity and nutrition. As well as empowering the adult players, this combined workforce allowed 225 young girls (aged 11-18) from Zgharta, Sour/Tyre, Bhamdoun and Beirut to take part in workshops led by women from their own region serving as powerful role models. The workshops were led in partnership with Right to Play Lebanon and World Vision Lebanon.
Rasha from Libya leads a workshop with girls from Sour, Sour Stadium. July 28, 2015.
Results of the Festival

1. Active **exchange and networking** between players from various Arabic countries; overcoming national, cultural and religious borders.

Many initiatives that use women’s football to address gender-specific themes suffer from having limited resources for their work and come up against social and political challenges in their countries. As we’ve found in previous DISCOVER FOOTBALL projects, networks between people function as a fantastic resource in the face of these difficulties, both through sharing knowledge and experiences, and through creating greater awareness of shared interests, challenges and concerns. “Our Games, Our Goals” established such networks between women from a variety of Arabic countries who would otherwise not encounter one another. Women from very different cultural contexts worked alongside one another, and the festival also included a workshop for players on gender roles and women’s football, which allowed an exchange of experiences.
Libyan players take part in a workshop led by Right To Play. Nejmeh Stadium, Beirut. July 26, 2015
2. Strengthening women’s and girls’ autonomy and freedom to act

In order to improve access to sport for women and girls, it is vital to encourage the women and girls who want to participate to be engaged with their right to play sports. Through taking part in this festival, the girls and players received valuable recognition as athletes. They could also freely share their own stories with each other and make their experiences visible, which they may not often have the opportunity to do. The festival helped build confidence in both the international players and the local girls in claiming their right to play.
"In this event we weren’t just there as football players: we were the essence of the event. It was the best feeling I ever felt!"
3. Achieving acceptance for women and girls who play football and fight against discrimination on various levels

For women all around the world, playing football comes hand-in-hand with facing discrimination, whether on the level of practicalities (e.g. limited access to funds and pitches) or social expectations and stereotypes concerning gender (e.g. ‘real’ girls/women shouldn't play football or be strong and physical). In their countries, the women and girls involved in this festival face varying but often intense forms of discrimination. “Our Games, Our Goals” provided a safe space with a dramatically reduced level of discrimination, making real the goal of always aiming towards a level playing field. As well as providing the physical access to play football, the festival’s workshops positively challenged gender-based stereotypes.
“I learned so many things in this event that I can say I came back home a different person”
4. Raising the public visibility of women’s and girls’ football in an Arabic context

Seeing female role models is crucial for women to achieve further equality in society in general, and sport is no exception. The festival raised visibility on two levels. First, it provided the young female participants with countless role models, including the international players, the festival’s organisers, and the leaders of the workshops and football training. Second, the combination of an international tournament with the girls’ football-workshop program attracted a lot of media attention and the festival was documented by our photographers and promoted on social media. All of this made the experiences of the girls and women accessible to a larger audience and made visible the power of football to overcome boundaries and to empower women and girls.

Wadi Degla players celebrate the only goal scored during the final match. Nejmeh Stadium, Beirut. August 1, 2015.
The Libyan team celebrated their freedom every day and every moment of the festival. Nejmeh Stadium, Beirut. August 1, 2015.
Ithamar from the GFA plays during a workshop with girls from the area around Bhamdoun. Bhamdoun Stadium. July 29, 2015.
Girls in Sour getting ready for a small tournament after a day of training and workshops. Sour, July 28, 2015.
“For the first time in my life I feel that I am part of something big and I really wanted to be in this part, a part with responsibility and freedom.”