



Women and Chambers of Commerce

Case Studies from the Gulf

Abstract

This briefing note seeks to look at how women in the Arab Gulf region have entered the mainly male-dominated business sector. It draws on the experience of countries in the Gulf region that have tried to integrate women into chambers of commerce and industry. It also explores some examples of innovative projects and initiatives that have been undertaken to encourage women to participate more effectively in their national economies.

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Bahrain: Electing a woman to the Board of the BCCI

In October 2001, the Bahraini Chamber of Commerce and Industry elected its first woman board member. Mona alMoayyed is an active member of the Bahraini Business Women Society and the managing director of a family trading business called Y.K. Almoayyed & Sons one of the oldest and largest companies in Bahrain, employing over 2000 people.

The 18-member Chamber also established a special businesswomen's committee within the Chamber, headed by Ms AlMoayyed. The committee's principle objective is to further develop the role of women in the country's economy and compliment the work of the Bahraini Businesswomen's Society.

Email: mona@almoayyed.com

Bahrain: Using ICT to support Women's Business Activities

A new business portal was launched in February 2003 to help women in their daily business activities. **Women Gateway** – *Bawabat al-Mar'a* – is a joint initiative between the Bahrain Business Women Society (BBS) and Al-Nadeem Information Technology. The English/Arabic portal claims to have all the resources necessary for the launch and management of business ventures in Bahrain. The site has links, articles, regulations and other resources of relevance to Bahraini businesswomen. There are plans to gradually expand the portal to cater to the needs of businesswomen all over the Arab world.

Visit the site at: <http://www.womengateway.com>

Kuwait: Embracing women traders¹



The Kuwaiti stock exchange has created a special trading room for women, allowing them to participate directly in the market for the first time.

Wafa Alrasheed, a spokeswoman for the exchange, said the decision had been made following a high number of requests from women. "Every stock exchange has one trading floor, but because of the nature of our society we have decided to create two," Ms Alrasheed said.

Women have already been allowed to invest in shares over the telephone or through a male relative or stock broker. But until recently they have been excluded from participating directly in share trading.

"They will now be able to come and sit at their ease, discuss market information and watch their own investments," Ms Alrasheed said. The two trading rooms will be linked electronically, and the exchange is considering introducing female stockbrokers as a second step, if there is enough demand.

Kuwait's stock market was one of the world's best performers last year, with trade volume rising 39%.

“Women will be able to come, discuss market information and watch their own investments”

Wafa Alrasheed
Kuwaiti stock exchange

¹ BBC On-line

UAE: Emirates Businesswoman Award²

Instituted by the Dubai Quality Group under the umbrella of the Professional Women's Subgroup, and in Association with Shell, the Emirates Businesswoman's Awards aims at recognizing women's contribution in the business and professional world. The awards are presented annually to recognize UAE women – both nationals and expatriates – for performance excellence.

The awards will recognize outstanding businesswomen through a stringent set of criteria judged by a panel of well-known business achievers, and will recognize women who run their own businesses as well as professionals who lead major organizations or corporations. The award will give weight to various factors that make a successful businesswoman, such as visionary leadership, future goals, professional achievements, career achievements and community contribution.

According to organizers, participating in the award campaign itself offers valuable benefits including the feedback report prepared by the London-based UKQC consultancy company that every applicant receives. That report contains important inputs that can assist in self-improvement.

According to figures released by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there is a five-fold rise in businesswomen in the past 10 years. The Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry has also recorded a four-fold increase in women operating businesses in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain. Nearly 60 percent of the businesswomen in the UAE are Emirati women.

² Khaleej Times, 27 January 2003

UAE: Chambers form Business Women's Council and Committees

In February 2002, one year after it was first announced, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in the UAE formally launched the UAE Businesswomen's Council to motivate women to step up their activities and stimulate their role in economic and social development. The Council is authenticated by the Arab League's Arab Businesswomen's Council, regional and international associations and councils. It is run by an elected 15-member Board of Directors.³

Soon after the formation of the Council, the local chambers of commerce within the UAE, including Dubai and Abu Dhabi were encouraged to establish their own Businesswomen's Committees. These committees represent their respective chambers within the UAE Businesswomen's Council.

Specifically, the Abu Dhabi National Businesswomen's Committee (ADNBC) was formed with the objective of promoting the scope of participation of women in various spheres of trade, commerce and industry. The ADNBC will also provide opportunities for women to train and qualify in order to expand the range of participation in business and professional fields. It will strive to cooperate with local, Arab and foreign institutions to take advantage of their programmes and raise the level of contribution of women to the growth and development process. The committee offers three categories of membership and a five-member executive board sets plans, policies and strategies, supervises and implements the committee's plans and agenda besides recommending appropriate action to the ADCCI, to lend help and support to businesswomen.⁴

UNDP in the UAE has been working in collaboration with the UAE Businesswomen's Council as well as with the Businesswomen's Committees to plan and organize training workshops to increase the marketing and exporting capacities of small projects run by women. Although still a pipeline project, UNDP UAE is hoping to be able to collaborate with UAE businesswomen to offer training that helps women benefit from commercial information, and the latest developments in IT and communications. For more information about UNDP UAE's initiative, and for contacts of prominent businesswomen in the UAE, please contact **Ruba Al-Hassan**, UNDP UAE: +(971) 2 641 3600 ext. 202; email: ruba.alhassan@undp.org

³ Gulf News, 5 February 2002

⁴ Khaleej Times, 10 October 2002

References & Contacts of Prominent Businesswomen in the Gulf⁵

Bahrain:

Mona Almoayyed, Managing Director of YK Almoayyed & Sons, member of the board, BCCI

mona@almoayyed.com

Khayriya Abdulla Aldashti, Secretary General, Bahrain Businesswomen Society

Tel Off: +973-730000

Mobile: +973-9620222

Naima Marhoun, Bahrain Women Society

Mobile +973-940-9383

Kuwait:

Sheikha Hussa Saad Al-Sabah, President of the Council of Arab Businesswomen

Alia Al-Qatami, Board Member, Kuwait Businesswomen's Committee

Tel: +965-5718184

Silver_katami@yahoo.com

Fawzia Mubarak Al-Hasawi, Vice president, Kuwait Businesswomen's Committee

Tel: +965- 5731605

f.al-hassawi@eudoramail.com; fhsuite@hotmail.com

Qatar:

An Anoud Khalifa Bin Hamad Al-Thani, President, Qatari Business Women Forum

Tel: +974-4827555

qcc@qatar.net.qa

Huda Hassan Al-Ansari, Member, Qatari Business Women Forum

Tel: +974-4677990

qbwf@hotmail.com

Aisha Ebrahim Al-Moataz, Member, Qatari Business Women Forum

Tel: +974-4366365

Mobile: +974-5521933

Riviera777@hotmail.com

Saudi Arabia:

Aisha Almana

alamana@awalnet.net.sa

Leila Al Doghaither, lawyer

Tel: +9661-4783388 ext 305

Leila@hejailan.com

UAE:

⁵ Many of the contacts here have been shared by **Ms. Fatima Almana**, ESCWA. Others were found through a literature search.

Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, Managing Director of Tejari.com
Tel Off: +971-4-3913777

Salwa S. Shaibani, CEO, Maltex International, and Member of the
Executive Board of the Abu Dhabi National Businesswomen Committee