

Gender Equality & Entrepreneurship

White Paper

February 2020

1. Overview

- **Roundtable on Gender Equality and Entrepreneurship:** On 19 November 2019, Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) and the U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi co-hosted a roundtable entitled “Gender Equality and Entrepreneurship”. Over 50 men and women participated in the session including entrepreneurs, investors, government, corporations, senior leaders from the financial services sector and not-for-profit organizations and accelerators.
- **High Level Participants:** The session was attended and supported by H.E. Ahmed Al Sayegh, Minister of State (UAE) and Chairman of ADGM, The Honorable John Rakolta, Jr., U.S. Ambassador to the UAE, and H.E. Salama Al Ameemi, Director General, Ma'an Authority for Social Contribution.
- **Objective of the roundtable:** The objective of the roundtable was to discuss key challenges and opportunities within the entrepreneurial ecosystem and possible solutions and suggested actions with a focus on gender equality.
- **Shared insights:** During the roundtable, participants shared their insights supported by relevant data on the topics discussed. There was a consensus on the need for tangible results through the use of specific, targeted and collaborative actions and initiatives to achieve measurable impact, in addition to providing access and boosting progress for regional entrepreneurs.
- **Key outcomes of the roundtable:** This white paper outlines three key issues identified by the group along with suggested actions and next steps addressing the information gap, structural issues affecting gender equality in entrepreneurship and unconscious gender bias.

The purpose of the white paper is to serve as a tool to drive effective change in addressing the key challenges and maximizing the existing opportunities in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to bring about gender equality.

- **Call for the formation of a working group:** This white paper calls for the formation of a working group comprised of private and public institutions, both local and international, to serve as a platform for cooperation and collaboration aimed at driving effective change in addressing the challenges identified in this white paper.

2. Gap in Information and Access

The UAE ranks as a leading country for gender equality in the region according to the [World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap report](#). This achievement comes from the fundamental belief that men and women are equal partners in society. Through a series of public and private sector initiatives, women play an increasingly stronger role in business.

There is a need in the UAE to improve the connectivity between the many female-focused business groups and networks operating across a myriad of industries. This is necessary to assist business-owners in converting their business ideas into successful companies across many sectors.

Discussion points

- **Difficult access to business opportunities information:** Participants noted the general difficulty in accessing relevant information on business opportunities, in both public and private sectors, for SMEs and entrepreneurs. An information gap regarding opportunities for accessing capital and market opportunities exists, a barrier for men and women entrepreneurs alike.
- **Lack of access to information and processes:** Furthermore, information on the applicable regulations and requirements for opening a business are not always easily accessible, and the lack of transparency for the selection process in obtaining contracts are perceived as obstacles in the efforts to encourage small businesses to grow.
- **Need for better coordination:** A key outcome of the roundtable was a strong agreement that better coordination of information as well as educational and support resources are essential in making consistent progress in gender equality in entrepreneurship. Many participants highlighted the existence of current platforms that address this issue. Nevertheless, the lack of coordination and transparency are leading to inefficiencies in accessing the information relevant to SMEs.

Key existing initiatives to counter gaps in information and access, include for instance:

- **MorEquity** (formerly Women's Empowerment and Equality board): was established in 2016 by Sheikha Shamma bint Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan and serves as an enabling platform, driving community projects and bringing ambitious women together. Consisting of over 150 members from the UAE's largest and most influential organisations, MorEquity members meet regularly for networking events, workshops and collaborate on community projects to drive change. This year, MorEquity will also support 20 for 2020 a new programme which will develop and place 20 women on UAE boards in 2020. This project has been co-created -developed together by MorEquity members and UAE leading companies including Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

- **Sougha:** Sougha's main objective is to shape the future of Emirati artisans, develop and market their products locally and globally by establishing an authentic Emirati brand and revitalizing the art of weaving across the UAE. Sougha initiative aims at enabling artisans of all ages and help them practice Emirati heritage crafts and improve their skills and qualifications through specialized programs geared towards giving them the required expertise to enter the work market and to engage in handicraft activities that generate income, improve their living conditions and open new markets and outlets to accommodate these products. <https://sougha.ae/explore-sougha>
- **Al Ghadeer:** Al Ghadeer UAE Crafts is the most comprehensive organization in the UAE to empower underprivileged women through sustainable crafts. In 2006, Her Highness Sheikha Shamsa bint Hamdan Al Nahyan, the Emirates Red Crescent President's Assistant for Women's Affairs, set out to provide women with the training, designs, raw materials, and marketing services to create culturally-inspired products to assist them in earning a dignified living and sustain traditional crafts. Boasting more than 200 craftswomen, from different nationalities and ages, Al Ghadeer UAE Crafts has multiple product lines such as corporate gifts, stationery, home accessories, and fashion. <https://www.alghadeeruaecrafts.ae/en/about.aspx>
- **Dubai Gender Balance Council:** Established in 2015, the UAE Gender Balance Council is a federal entity responsible for developing and implementing the gender balance agenda in the United Arab Emirates. The Council's objectives are to reduce the gender gap across all government sectors, enhance the UAE's ranking in global competitiveness reports on gender equality and achieve gender balance in decision-making positions, as well as promote the UAE's status as a benchmark for gender balance legislation. It also launches pioneering initiatives and projects to enhance gender balance throughout the country and contribute to achieving the Council's vision of positioning the UAE as a world model for gender balance. <http://www.gbc.gov.ae/>
- **UN Women/ NAMA Flagship Programme Initiative (FPI) "Stimulating Equal Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs":** The programme is funded by NAMA Women Advancement Establishment in Sharjah and aims to create both a demand for goods and services supplied by women-owned businesses by fostering gender-responsive public and private procurement, and a robust supply by addressing the gender gap in access to entrepreneurial skills and finance. Conscious and subconscious gender bias, access to information and access to markets are all issues the FPI addresses. <https://namawomen.ae/>
- **10,000 Women:** Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women is a global initiative that fosters economic growth by providing women entrepreneurs around the world with a business and management education, mentoring and networking, and access to capital. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/citizenship/10000women/index.html>

- **The Women on Boards Observatory:** Led by the American University in Cairo, The Women on Boards Observatory aims to improve the gender balance of corporate boards in Egypt and the MENA region by sensitizing male board members to gender issues, qualifying women from different sectors to be appointed to corporate boards, and advocating for policy and legislative changes that institutionalize gender diversity on corporate board. Their annual report provides updates data on women representation on boards. This model is now sponsored by the 30% Club MENA to emulate across the MENA region in 2020.
<https://business.aucegypt.edu/outreach/corporate-governance/women-boards-observatory> <https://business.aucegypt.edu/outreach/corporate-governance/women-boards-observatory2020>
- **The Women Empowerment Committee:** The Women Empowerment Committee of the French Business Group aims to provide a platform for accomplished Emirati and French women to network, learn from and inspire each other and to promote the effective and influential role of women as business leaders, successful entrepreneurs, and vital partners in economic development. The groups has an Operational Approach to Women Empowerment:

 1. By leading Workshops on critical subskills like Negotiations, Pitch, Networking
 2. So they gain confidence in order to build up their network and navigate to the top. By organizing Conferences / Exchanges with successful women and men in the society (Leading by example)
 3. By coordinating with other active Women Groups (WEPs, Family Development Foundation and other internal corporate networks) ideas and actions.
- **The Alpha Group:** Peer to peer executive board education process to help aspiring entrepreneurs and business leaders acquire the skills to grow their businesses. <https://changeosity.com/what-we-do/> and <https://the-alpha-group.biz/about/>
- **Womana:** Womana® promotes inclusion through its media platform which facilitates connectivity between entrepreneurs and industry while advancing the equal representation of women in media. Through its accelerator Womomentum, womana® connects female founders to markets, mentors, and investors. It has also created an online database called The Entrepreneur Resource Guide; Please find link below.
<https://womana.com/entrepreneur-resources>
- **Abu Dhabi Business Women Council (ADBWC)'s:** Integrated and Innovative Business Incubator. In line with the ADBWC's care for promoting a culture of creativity and innovation in women's entrepreneurship, the Council has adopted the establishment of an Innovative Entrepreneurship Club.
<https://www.adbusinesswomen.ae/>

- **Ellevate:** is a global network of female professionals dedicated to helping women take the next step in their career through networking and education resources. The Dubai chapter of Ellevate is highly active and meets 2x per month to support entrepreneurs and female corporate professionals alike. It is a membership based organization, and all information can be found here: ellevatenetwork.com.

- **WiSER: Abu Dhabi's WiSER** is a Masdar-led impact-focused platform dedicated to inspiring women and girls to play an active role in addressing global sustainability challenges. <https://masdar.ae/en/strategic-platforms/wiser>. Led by Abu Dhabi's future energy company Masdar, the Women in Sustainability, Environment and Renewable Energy (WiSER) platform is an impact-focused platform dedicated to inspiring women and girls to play an active role in addressing global sustainability challenges. WiSER convenes decision makers, experts, opinion formers and youth role models from across the sustainability sector to promote new thinking, viable solutions and lasting collaboration to empower present and future generations of female sustainability leaders. WiSER strives to position women and girls of all nationalities as drivers of change and innovation, while ensuring that their voices are heard across the sustainability debate – whether on issues of policy, technology or business. It further publishes annual thought leadership on the actionable steps required to advance the participation of women in the renewables and sustainable technology sectors. WiSER is founded on the three core pillars of education, engagement and empowerment. <https://masdar.ae/en/strategic-platforms/wiser>

- **Social Media:** Some of the participants highlighted that social media are a very widely used tool to advance gender equality. Key examples include:
 - The Ladies Forum - Abu Dhabi
 - Ladies in Business UAE
 - UAE Exclusive Ladies Club
 - Ladies Abu Dhabi Working Moms
 - Women in Business Arabia
 - Women Helping Women Entrepreneurs
 - Women Entrepreneur
 - Abu Dhabi Women's Group

3. Structural issues affecting Gender Equality in entrepreneurship

Gender equality is of paramount importance in the UAE, and the Constitution of the UAE guarantees equal rights for both men and women. Under the Constitution, women are ensured the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education, the right to practice professions as men. Women are also guaranteed the same access to employment, health and family welfare facilities.

However, work-life balance remains a considerable challenge for many parents and workers with caring responsibilities, in particular because of the increasing prevalence of extended working hours and changing work schedules. A major factor contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the labor market is the difficulty in balancing work and family obligations. Women with children are likely to work fewer hours in paid employment and spend more time fulfilling unpaid caring responsibilities.

Discussion points

- **Promoting the participation of women in the labor market:** Work-life balance policies should contribute to the achievement of gender equality by promoting the participation of women in the labor market, the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, and the regulatory incentives aimed at closing the gender gap.
- **Imbalances and stereotypes:** The imbalance in the design of work-life balance policies between women and men reinforces gender stereotypes. Policies on equal treatment should aim to address the issue of stereotypes in occupations and roles for both genders. Social partners for change should be and social partners are encouraged to perform a key role in raising their awareness of both workers and employers in tackling Gender discrimination.
- **Promoting technology platforms:** Technology platforms tend to facilitate access to markets, capital and talent for SMEs and should be further developed to support business communities across the UAE. Examples include the development of crowdfunding platforms as an alternative to venture capital, and business loans to facilitate access to capital for entrepreneurs.
- Measures aimed at improving the ease of doing business for SMEs and entrepreneurs with a particular focus on addressing the specific gender related challenges include:
 - **She is Arab:** She is Arab acts as an advisor to corporates, governments and foundations as a knowledge partner on gender balance and women's related issues. They support women's professional development in the several fields, work on building a network for women supporting women to open opportunities for mentorship and networking. <https://sheisarab.com/>

- **The INSEAD Gender Initiative (IGI):** aims at creating and disseminating knowledge that advances women leaders and optimises their contributions within and beyond their organisations. IGI strives to engage both men and women in this effort, inspiring all to take action. <https://www.insead.edu/centres/gender-initiative>
- **Reach mentoring (www.reachmentoring.org):** set up in 2013 in DIFC, Reach mentoring is a structured mentoring program for professional women to help them advance their career. C level mentors provide guidance for a year to help achieve pre-set objectives. Reach has so far mentored over 400 female professionals and has now been launched in Bahrain and Lebanon.
- **womena®:** aims to increase the representation of women entrepreneurs and investors. It's accelerator Womomentum increases the pipeline of women entrepreneurs; the womena®Boss ladies network provides women with access to capital, networks of support, exposure and access to deal-flow via its online social platform.
- **Ma'an:** Ma'an was established in February 2019 by the Department of Community Development in Abu Dhabi with the aim of bringing together the government, the private sector and civil society to support a culture of social contribution and participation. The authority will deliver solutions for social challenges with five main pillars of work – a Social Investment Fund, a Social Incubator Program, Community Engagement Programs and the introduction of a new type of public contracting, Social Impact Bonds, Outreach and partnerships.
The social sector can be a tool to support women's empowerment in a range of powerful ways. Whether it as a source of funding for women's rights; as a means to deliver training or employment opportunities for women; as a way to create economic empowerment for women through entrepreneurship; or to provide affordable products and services for women.
At Ma'an, we aim to be truly representative of the Abu Dhabi communities. Encouraging social inclusion regardless of race, religion, gender, age, disability, language or social and economic status is one of the Department of Community Development's policy priorities so it is expected Ma'an will roll out more projects and programs in the future that aim to solve this.
- **The Private Sector Advisory Council on SDGs (PSAC):** is the UAE National Committee on SDGs' advisory arm on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, the 12+ companies prioritized gender equality and, following a focus group discussion of over 70 representatives from public and private sectors, raised over 10 recommendations to the UAE's Gender Balance Council* for the council's review and endorsement. The Gender Balance Council is the member of the National Committee on SDGs that is responsible of the implementation of SDG 5 with support from stakeholders in the public and private sector. <http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302715626>

- **100WF:** is a global organization of 15,000 members – women and men – across 24 official locations. It operates under a global 30x40 Vision in which women will perform 30% of investment teams and finance industry executive roles by 2040. Its mission is to empower women working in the finance industry to achieve their professional potential at each career stage through Education, Peer Engagement and Impact.
- **Accenture:** is supporting a variety of programs both internally and externally aimed at implementing and promoting Gender equality. More information is available under <http://www.accenture.com/gettingtoequal>. Accenture is a renowned thought leader on the topic of Inclusion & Diversity with publications that provide innovative insights. Accenture Ranked No. 1 on Thomson Reuters Index of World's Most Diverse and Inclusive Companies in 2019.. Accenture calculates that global gross domestic product would increase by up to US\$8 trillion by 2028 if the innovation mindset in all countries was raised by 10%. Diversity increases employee innovation and unlocking trapped value in the workplace. Accenture believes that we can achieve a faster rate of progress by adopting powerful equalizers that support the women in business agenda, and we should emphasize actions that equip women with the necessary skillsets to thrive from the onset of their education journey. Accenture also believes that navigating current challenges and drawing a concrete roadmap to equality is critical to creating a more inclusive future.
- **BNP Paribas:** is committed to advancing gender equality internally by better balancing male and female representation in roles. It supports a series of national and international efforts aimed at recognizing and promoting women contribution in society in general and to entrepreneurship in particular. The group supports several initiatives including, the United Nations Women for women entrepreneurs in Africa, the Women In Finance Charter (330 signatory firms committing financial firms to implement accountability, targets, transparency and right incentives to promote gender equality at the work place), the [Dress For Success association](#), #JamaisSansElles movement, Diversity and Inclusion Week, the [Women's Forum Global Meeting](#), the [Women & Climate Daring Circle](#). The group also sponsors artistic and creative initiatives. Last but not least, BNP Paribas supports female entrepreneurship with a new 2-billion-euro tranche of investment credits and a 10% of equity-financed investments to promote female entrepreneurship projects, publishes a report on expectations and difficulties encountered by female entrepreneurs in France.

- **Hub71:** is a key initiative of the 50-billion-dirham economic accelerator program, Ghadan 21, created to form the optimal environment for transformative tech companies and to further enhance Abu Dhabi's economy. Hub71's mandate is to encourage entrepreneurship by solving challenges entrepreneurs face on their journeys. The Hub71 Incentive Program offers 50% or 100% free housing, office space and healthcare for up to three years to qualified startups, and Hub71's newly-launched Corporate Engagement Program provides mentorship and opportunities for collaboration between corporates and startups.

Hub71's Incentive Program: helps all entrepreneurs to thrive, but it has been particularly popular with female-led startups. In Q4 2019, Hub71 received 348 applications from 47 different countries, 37% of which were female-founded startups; a promising sign of a rise in female entrepreneurship in this region.

One of the many strengths of Hub71 is the opportunity for entrepreneurs to be surrounded by like-minded individuals, founders and investors, enabling them to learn, share and grow. There are plenty of inspirational female role models for aspiring entrepreneurs at Hub71 – Noor Sweid, General Manager of Global Ventures, Ola Douddin, Founder and CEO of BitOasis, Ingi Naguib, CFO and Co-Founder of Furnwish, Laila Akel, Chief Operating Officer of RedCrow Intelligence, and many more. One of the most empowering things about technology is its ability to break down barriers to entry, enabling market access and creating tools that enable companies to scale rapidly. The same is true for women in tech, where our open and collaborative environment at WeWork x Hub71, combined with a budding tech community of women leaders - can propel women leadership roles and be a great environment for women wanting to make their mark in business. Hub71 looks forward to welcoming more female entrepreneurs to its community. <https://www.hub71.com/>

- **HSBC:** supports a variety of programs aimed at supporting Gender Equality in entrepreneurship and in society in general. These programs bring together entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, angel impact investors and business leaders, and cover a range of mentoring, advisory and support activities. HSBC's support includes sponsorship and/or facilitation, and providing the time of senior management to support the programmes. Though not exclusively designed for women (with the exception of Diversity on Board), women account for more than half of participants. HSBC supported programs include:
 - [Diversity on Board](#)
 - [C3 Social Impact Accelerator Programme](#)
 - [Living Business](#)
 - [The Indus Entrepreneur Mentoring Programme \(TiE Dubai\)](#)
 - [Technology Innovation Pioneer Programme \(TIP Envirotech\)](#)
 - [Mindshift Capital](#)
 - [Women's Angel Investor Network \(WAIN\)](#)
 - [Achieving Women Awards by Entrepreneur Middle East](#)

4. Unconscious Gender Bias

The group discussed the prevailing Unconscious Gender Bias in society in general, and in the workplace in particular. It highlighted the need to address this issue through actions aimed at developing awareness and in particular training to be able to identify and address the existence of unconscious patterns.

Discussion points

- **Training:** The speakers agreed that while progress is being made, there is still a lot to do in overcoming the negative consequences of unconscious biases in the workplace. Companies can implement organization-wide initiatives in order to combat biases, such as trainings for both male and female employees, and the use of gender-neutral language in job advertisements and assessments.
- **Fostering better representation of Women in Leadership roles:** Encourage and incentivize more women participation in management roles and board positions. Increasing the representation of women in leadership will benefit corporate policies and impact supply chains.
- **Fostering better representation of women in finance in general and in funding SMEs in particular:** Encouraging more women in the investment fund management business will improve the diversity of fund composition and impact the level of investments into female-led businesses.

A number of organizations are already tackling these issues such as:

- **Hopscotch:** [Hopscotch](#) design and deliver several workshops that aim at empowering women through developing their interpersonal, leadership and career-based skills, examples of workshops they deliver include Subconscious Bias, Personal Branding, Leading above The Lines and others.
- **100 Women in Finance:** Through education, peer engagement and impact, this global organization furthers the progress of women who have chosen finance as a career, and enables their positive influence over pre-career young women. [100WF](#) reaches, inspires, and supports pre-career women who are the finance industry's leadership pipeline by: encouraging female students to look favorably at careers in finance and investments, creating educational opportunities and access points for them to join the industry, and presenting greater visibility of female role models.

- **The 30% Club MENA:** Part of the global voluntary campaign driven by multi-sector business leaders, is working with over 160 member firms, from the region, to increase the participation of women on boards and in C-Level and Executive positions. With a target of achieving a minimum of 30% women representation on boards, the [30% Club MENA](#) has been working with partners to develop and disseminate tools aiding companies in attracting, retaining and promoting women across all levels of the career ladder and helping create a healthy pipeline to feed into senior roles. In addition, it is partnering with the global platform – [The Board List](#)- to provide boards in the region access to women for board placements.
- **C3:** [C3](#) is a UAE & UK-based organization helping enterprises that contribute to the UN-SDGs in the MENAT region, unlock their growth potential and maximize their positive impact on society. C3 assisted 350+ entrepreneurs from eight countries in the MENAT region through a network of 2000+ experts and its flagship program ([C3 Social Impact Accelerator Program - Powered by HSBC](#)). C3 also helps other prominent organizations, manage their own programs and measure their impact. For more information, contact info@wegrowwithc3.com.
- **Govern:** [Govern](#) is an international centre specialising in economic and corporate governance in the Middle East and emerging markets. Govern is setting up an initiative for *Women on Boards*, where C level female professionals are trained to join corporate boards.
- **INSEAD:** INSEAD launched "iW50" in 2017. The research reflects INSEAD's ambition to achieve a gender-balanced business world, [the INSEAD Gender Initiative](#). It will hold [INSEAD Middle East Campus](#) at ADGM Square in Abu Dhabi on 31 March 2020. IGI also provides [programmes](#) for executives to progress gender balance in the workplace and to enable women to reach their full potential.
- **Changeosity:** The Build Your Leadership Brand programme offered by [Changeosity](#) is for women who hold senior leadership positions or aspire to reach the C-suite. It is a powerful two-day brand leadership program for female leaders who want to break free of things that hold them back and get them into the boardroom with confidence. It combines all of the tools and confidence building techniques rolled into an intensive, supportive, collaborative two days. Plus, the alumni program provides an ongoing forum for collaboration.
- **CFA Institute:** [Mutamahin](#), CFA Society Bahrain's mentorship program for both young women and men bridges the gap between fresh graduates and employers. This successful program provides graduates with a one-of-a-kind opportunity to gain the experience and skills needed for a successful career. [CFA Society Emirates](#) hosts events focused on women leadership in the finance and investment industry and provide insights into the leadership tools that can help women advance in their careers.

5. Call for Action

Participants agree to use their growth strategies as instruments for facilitating an integrated approach that makes use of all tools, individually and collectively, to boost gender equality. This process will allow us to go one-step further in terms of the coordination effort and also showcase the spillovers from structural reforms, highlighting the benefits from coordinated action.

As a result, the group calls for the formation of a working group consisting of public and private, local and international organizations that will identify and facilitate the development of women entrepreneurs through the sharing of best practices and encouraging collaborations on the key issues identified during the roundtable. There are many other challenges facing women in science, law, corporates and other areas. Whilst these are not expressly addressed in this white paper, they will be tackled through other initiatives.

*
* *