



ARAB INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM
المنتدى العربي الدولي للمرأة

Women as Engines of Economic Growth
in the Arab World - Moving Forward

المرأة كمحرك أساسي للنمو الاقتصادي في العالم العربي
قدماً إلى أمام

Achievements & Perspectives
Review of the 2005 Programme Report & Recommendations

*A Report of the Roundtable Meeting on 25 January 2007
at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, UK, London*

With the Valued Support of



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

With The Participation of
AIWF Programme Partners
and
The League of Arab States
The European Commission



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Chairman's Message

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure to be able to share with our valued partners and supporters the outcomes of a truly inspiring event, the Roundtable on Women as Engines of Economic Growth – Moving Forward.

The Roundtable provided the opportunity to review and discuss the impact, progress and implementation of the AIWF 2005 Programme Report and Recommendations.

AIWF had developed its year-long 2005 programme Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World to specifically examine the current status of women and identify where further action was needed in preparation for the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Agreement. The outcome Report and Recommendations became the AIWF platform to advocate the necessary economic and social reforms. AIWF invited its partners and important institutional stakeholders, who were well positioned to remove barriers, to be engaged with AIWF and committed to helping them make the recommendations a reality.

The findings of the Roundtable are put forward as a compass for the road ahead, and a platform on which to build further reform. Indeed, AIWF has already launched its initiative to put women's entrepreneurship at the forefront of the agenda for growth and stability. We know that globally, and particularly in the MENA region, the promotion of women's entrepreneurship is a major strategy to create jobs, catalyse economic development and foster social cohesion.

A greater ability to participate in the economy benefits not only the women concerned but the whole of society. Hence the importance of education and vocational training - in particular the urgent need to train women to develop business skills. However, progress and prosperity are not gender-specific; therefore one of the keys to gender equality must be the notion and practice of inclusivity within our mission to improve the present and future situation of women in the Arab world.

The fact remains that the Arab region needs to create 100 million jobs by 2020. With 100 million of the 300 million population of the region being between 12- 24 years of age, it has the highest level of youth unemployment in the world. Hence, the necessity to invest in enterprises that create jobs and widen opportunities. Women's participation in the economy and women's initiatives can serve as a significant drive in job creation in the Arab region.

It is my sincere hope that this outcome report of the AIWF Roundtable, which benefited from the valued participation of the guest speakers and the participants who attended, will prove to be a positive contribution to the wider agenda of economic growth and stability within the region and beyond.

Haifa AlKaylani

Haifa Fahoum Al Kaylani
Chairman, Arab International Women's Forum

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The Arab International Women's Forum
would particularly like to thank our Programme Partners,
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK,
for their generous support and close cooperation
for the Roundtable Review.



Foreword

Across the globe women contribute in many ways to make the world safer and more prosperous. Yet despite this, women have not achieved equal opportunity, equal pay or equal representation in political life anywhere across the globe. Improving the status and position of women remains a challenge the world over. We urge the Arab world to meet this challenge.

Encouragingly, the Arab region has witnessed a greater increase in women's share in economic activity than all other regions. According to the 2005 Arab Human Development report, the increase between 1990 and 2003 was 19% compared with 3% for the world as a whole. But this increase has been achieved from a low base, and the report highlighted that much more must be done to drive forward real change. Across the Arab world, less than one-third of women are in the workforce, the level varying country by country. The failure to use human capital, especially highly educated women, curbs economic development and prosperity for all.

The UK recognises the enormous contribution that women can, and do, make across the Arab world. And attaining equal rights for women is an important step on the road towards a society where all citizens have a stake. Our Global Opportunities Fund - Engaging with the Islamic World programme has supported initiatives that aim to increase the participation and voice of women in public life. This includes training young women for political leadership in Jordan; enhancing the role of women in the local community in Yemen; and work with UNIFEM to train Arab women parliamentarians in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and the UAE. We will continue to help drive forward Arab women's empowerment, both by ensuring that women's issues are at the forefront of the international development agenda, and by working with home-grown initiatives in the region.

We believe that women in the Arab world have the potential to contribute more than ever before to peace and prosperity in the region. But they need more opportunities to do so. This is why we very much welcome the excellent work of the Arab International Women's Forum. As 2005 programme partners, we were pleased to host the January Review of Recommendations made in the Arab International Women's Forum Report on Women as Engines of Economic Growth. I am confident that the report is being put to good use and that the Arab International Women's Forum will continue to promote opportunity for women in the Arab world.

I would like to wish you every success as you take forward this important work.

Dr Kim Howells

Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK

Arab International Women's Forum

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Executive Summary

Introduction

On Thursday 25 January 2007, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK hosted an Arab International Women's Forum (AIWF) Roundtable entitled '*Women as Engines of Economic Growth – Moving Forward*'. The purpose of the Roundtable was to review the 2005 AIWF Programme Report & Recommendations, '*Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World*', and to:

- Discuss the impact of the Report & Recommendations on stakeholders
- Assess the extent to which recommendations in the Report have been implemented by stakeholders
- Advocate full implementation of the recommendations

Key partners, stakeholders and contributors to the 2005 Programme were invited to participate in the review.

The 2005 AIWF Programme, '*Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World*', involved leading European and Arab organisations. The two conferences which culminated in the 2005 Report & Recommendations were '*Ten Years After Barcelona: Empowering Women as Catalysts for Economic Development*' held at the European Parliament in Brussels and '*Women and Integrated Rural Development*' held at the League of Arab States in Cairo.

The conferences featured plenary sessions which explored challenges, identified best practices and shared experiences around important themes - women and economic development, women's contribution to the economy and women in business. The actionable recommendations that came forward at the conferences represented a significant body of opinion.

Roundtable Review

This report, *Achievements & Perspectives: Review of the 2005 Programme Report & Recommendations*, is an account of the Roundtable proceedings, outlining the progress made since 2005 on implementing the recommendations and identifying areas where action is still required.

Representatives from the European Commission, the World Bank and IBM reported from three distinct perspectives.

European Commission: Actions taken by the European Commission in the Mediterranean Region in the framework of the Barcelona Process

- Plan of Action on women's empowerment agreed by Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Areas covered - political and civil rights, women's economic rights and women's cultural rights.
- Substantial resources earmarked by the Commission to promote gender equality
- Tackling female illiteracy to be priority of the Commission's thematic programme *Investing in People*
- Erasmus, Mundus and Tempus programmes will take into account the need to promote women's empowerment and their access to higher education

World Bank: Women Doing Business in MENA.

The strategy of the World Bank is to increase the economic participation and contribution of women through supporting increased access to assets, more public resources, jobs and pensions. In order to develop a more enabling environment for women:

- Improved literacy has to be matched by job creation
- Collection of statistics can stimulate change and still needs to be improved
- Arab governments need to engage more in agenda for women's entrepreneurship
- Investment climate needs to change making it easier for women to access finance

IBM: External initiatives on diversity and inclusion, and gender diversity in particular.

IBM has put a fund aside especially to promote diversity in the region, and recognises the business benefits of diversity

- National Council of Women, Egypt and Bahrain - Web application focused on development and advancement of women entitled 'Women's Gathering', site operates in both English and Arabic
- Future Generation Foundation - Women Leadership Programme
- Programmes for girls and young women - working in a public/private partnership on the Egypt Education Initiative
- Day care centre places for employees' children

Future Progress

These important presentations and the discussion that followed, confirmed significant progress has been made since 2005 by key stakeholders in the areas identified in 2005 Report and Recommendations but much still remains to be done. The achievements so far are extremely encouraging but the impetus to improve the prospects of women in the region and to facilitate their full integration in the economy has to be maintained.

In 2006 a study by the World Economic Forum showed a close correlation between greater female participation in society and improved economic outcomes. For a developing economy, forwarding gender equality can therefore be regarded as crucial.

‘Women as Engines of Economic Growth – Moving Forward’

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Achievements & Perspectives

The Roundtable which was moderated by Dame Julie Mellor, AIWF Member and Partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, included presentations by the European Commission, the World Bank and IBM. The review also offers the views of the other stakeholders and partners in attendance.

Presentations

The European Commission Actions taken by the European Commission in the Mediterranean Region in the framework of the Barcelona Process

Dominique Dellicour
Head of Unit, Governance, Human Rights, Democracy and Gender
at EuropeAid Cooperation Office of the European Commission

Ms Dellicour described the current and planned actions of the European Commission since the launch of the AIWF 2005 Programme Report and Recommendations in September 2005. She re-affirmed the commitment of the EC to gender equality and highlighted the important role AIWF is playing to help to transform policy into practice.

A historic Euro-Mediterranean conference entitled *Strengthening the Role of Women in Society* took place in Istanbul in November 2006 at ministerial level between the 35 Members of the Barcelona Process: the 25 Member States of the European Union, Magreb and Mashrek countries. This was the first conference since the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership focusing specifically on women and gender equality.

A number of important steps were taken in preparation for the conference, including research studies conducted by three networks of research institutes on three main themes: *Women as full actors of the Euro Mediterranean Community of Democratic States* (EUROMESCO); *Women and economic development in the Mediterranean* (FEMISE); and *Culture and communication: key factors for changing mentalities and societies* (Anna Lindh Foundation).

The findings of these studies, alongside other recent publications such as the UNDP Human Development Reports for the Arab region, were debated during a two-day preparatory conference held in Rabat in May 2006, attended by representatives of governments, parliaments and civil society for all countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. A representative of AIWF participated in the meeting and had the opportunity to highlight important recommendations of the AIWF report.

The results and recommendations of Rabat were largely used to prepare the ministerial meeting, which in turn adopted a declaration and Action Plan to strengthen the role of women in society. The Euro-Mediterranean partners have now agreed to turn their commitment to women empowerment into a firm Plan of Action. All Euro-Mediterranean partners will now work to achieve gender equality,

prevention of all forms of discrimination against women, and the full protection of women's rights as human rights. A monitoring and reporting mechanism will be put in place to review annually progress, which will be endorsed at ministerial level.

The three priority areas of the Plan of Action are very much in line with the recommendations formulated by AIWF in 2005, and are considered tremendously important to the European Commission's quest to achieve greater gender equality:

- Political and civil rights – the ministerial conclusions propose a number of actions to promote women's greater participation in all political institutions, legislative bodies and unions, and guarantee their equal participation in elections, which is absolutely crucial for the advancement of gender equality. There is an awareness that there has been very slow progress in much of the region against the Millennium Development Goals' indicator on women's equal representation in national parliaments.

Commitments have also been made towards the full and effective implementation of all shared international, regional and national commitments on women's civil rights with a special emphasis on ratification of CEDAW protocols and their translation into national legislation. This also requires law enforcement authorities to do their part to enforce women's rights legislation, and for women and men to be guaranteed equal access to judicial processes. The protection when their fundamental rights are violated must be guaranteed.

- Women's 'economic rights'. The Commission is convinced that as an essential pre-requisite for sustainable development, it is crucial that women's contribution to the economy is better understood and enhanced. In much of the region, women's participation in the paid labour force exhibits some of the lowest rates in the world, and women are often concentrated in lower level jobs with few reaching decision making positions in either the public or private sectors.

The ministerial conclusions contain a number of commitments in this field: Euro-Mediterranean partners will work to achieve an increase in the number of women in paid employment, stronger social inclusion, and a reduction in disparities between rural and urban women. The measures identified in the Plan of Action will help create more equal opportunities and remove obstacles for women to work (notably through providing child care services and transport facilities). They will ensure that women receive equal treatment in social security systems and health services, and that they can enjoy greater access to education and vocational training. Preventing discrimination between girls and boys in education and ensuring their equal access to science and technology in schools is also a crucial part of this process.

- Women's 'cultural rights'. The ministerial conclusions refer in particular to the portrayal of women in educational and communication channels, including the mass media. Traditional gender stereotypes underlie many of the obstacles to women's advancement that exist in legislation and its application. By working with families, schools, community and religious groups and the media, the Plan of Action encourages a more balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women.

The cooperation and dialogue between government and non-governmental actors was extremely important in accomplishing what has been achieved so far. This is a process that needs everyone to continue to play their part.

The Commission will continue to call parliamentarians to work closely with the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. It will also continue to call on civil society organisations, women's associations, professional associations and others to cooperate at local, regional and national level with their respective administrations.

In this context, AIWF can play an important role through its efficient network within the Arab region. It is essential that the higher levels of society (both public and business) connect with grassroots organisations, development actors and the media to promote internal changes that are owned by each country, enabling them to seize the right opportunities for these changes to occur.

The Commission will continue to ensure in its bilateral cooperation and its policy dialogue with Mediterranean countries, that the issue of women's greater participation in economic and political life is duly taken into account.

Whilst much has been achieved, the challenge will be to turn words into action and close the gap between policy and practice, and to ensure that commitments made at the ministerial conference can become cornerstones for progress in women's equal rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

For its part, the Commission has decided under the impetus of Commissioner Benita Ferrero Waldner to translate political commitments into concrete actions and has earmarked substantial resources for the years to come to promote gender equality in the Mediterranean region.

A regional programme of 5 million euros is currently ongoing and is specially targeted to the enhancement of women's participation in the economic life. A consortia of seven NGOs is currently implementing projects covering a wide range of activities such as increasing women's access to credit and business development services, supporting women in the start up of micro and small enterprises, increasing job opportunities for unemployed women through vocational skills development, setting up a Mediterranean centre to promote home-based working women, promoting women's participation in the policy debate on economic participation, building national, regional and international business women's networks and supporting the recognition of women's economic contribution in the media. The other components of this current programme aim at building knowledge and networks on policies and legislations related to enhancing women's economic participation and empowerment.

In addition, a new regional programme worth 5 million euros is in preparation and will be approved in 2007 to assist the Mediterranean countries in different critical areas in particular civil and political rights of women, education and vocational training, labour market formal and informal and fight against stereotypes. EC funding will aim at promoting across the region studies and research to analyse policies and practices. Funding will also aim at developing the capacities of different actors to collect relevant quantitative and qualitative data, to identify discrimination factors and to advocate for adequate corrective measures and to monitor progress. Exchange of information and sharing of best practices will be supported among Mediterranean partners and between the North and South. Partnerships and networks to promote reforms and changes will be stimulated. Awareness-raising activities and information based on the transnational character of gender equality will be undertaken. The programme will establish and fund a technical group of experts that will be responsible for monitoring progress in implementing the overall plan of action agreed in Istanbul.

The Commission is also preparing, through its thematic programme *Investing in People*, a number of concrete projects promoting gender equality initiated at national or regional level by civil society organisations through grants worth a total of 7 million euros in 2007. Priority will be given to the fight against female illiteracy. The fellowships programmes of the EC (Erasmus, Mundus and Tempus) will take into account the need to promote women's empowerment and their access to higher education.

Clearly, the European Commission is highly committed to the issue of gender equality in the Mediterranean region. However, this commitment will not bring results if it is not entrenched in a movement and reform process led by the Mediterranean countries themselves: some countries such as Morocco or Jordan have recently taken important steps towards women empowerment both in the civil, political and economic spheres. It is in this field that an organisation such as the AIWF can play a very critical role. The AIWF has a voice and the credibility. As already mentioned, the AIWF can reach the highest political level and it has partners that have channels of communication at grassroots level. Only if all levels of society are mobilised can progress be made and be reflected in the life and well being of the millions of women living in the Mediterranean region.

The World Bank: Women Doing Business in MENA

Nadereh Chamlou
Senior Advisor, Middle East and North Africa Social
and Economic Development, World Bank Group

Mrs Chamlou highlighted the World Bank's perspective and reasons why more than ever women's contribution to and participation in Arab business is an economic necessity in the region.

Women's capacity to become successful businesswomen and entrepreneurs can be highlighted against a backdrop of economic, social and demographic changes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries and the real need to create and supply jobs for a young and well-educated workforce. Today, two-thirds of the population in the MENA countries are below the age of thirty, creating a 'youth bulge' that will have benefited from the large social sector investment in education and training. However, the huge strides in educational attainment in the region – declining illiteracy, progress into higher education – are matched by the urgency to create jobs during a period when the whole region is trying to re-steer its economic direction.

Indeed, the challenge for the MENA region is to create job opportunities for men and women. But in order to meet the economic challenges ahead, the region needs to realign its economic orientation to focus on private sector development and gender equality. Women are increasingly recognised as important economic resources with a significant role to play in the vibrant and growing private sector. The focus now is on a national investment climate that is supportive of women's entrepreneurship and economic participation, which should positively benefit the entire economy. In fact, economic reforms in the MENA countries are moving much faster than cultural reforms, so it is the ideal time to introduce gender-friendly 'legislation'.

Recent research offers an insight into the unique characteristics of female entrepreneurship in the Arab economy:

1. Whilst the percentage of women-owned businesses is lower than in Latin America and East Asia, 25-30% of the most successful entrepreneurs in the region ('the stars') are women. Moreover, whereas in most of the regions of the world, the highest concentration of female entrepreneurs are in micro and small businesses, in the MENA countries, 14% of the firms owned by women are medium and very large – too sizeable to be ignored. For this reason, they can be better interlocutors with other, male-owned businesses. In fact, in Egypt and Lebanon, women-owned firms are larger than their male counterparts.
2. Women-owned firms are much more concentrated in sectors that are export-focused. This shows the potential for policies to create more export-orientated networks.
3. Women-owned firms are more involved in 'new industries' such as organic agriculture and sectors with higher margins and higher productivity. Their firms are therefore in a better position to attract foreign investment.
4. The proportion of managers in female-owned firms who have higher-level education is higher than in male-owned firms. This shows that potentially, women can make better use of the talent pool.
5. More women-owned firms have websites than male-owned firms (even if men use more e-mails). This shows that women can be resource efficient and more marketing savvy.
6. The employment pattern in female-owned firms tends to be split equally between male and female, thus showing that female firms are not adverse to hiring and working with female employees.

In fact, women owned firms in the region appear to employ a larger percentage of female workers and in some countries the difference is more striking. In the light of these findings, neglecting the role of women entrepreneurs in the MENA region would lead to the loss of productivity and job creation for the entire society.

However, there are still major perceived constraints for women entrepreneurs, including corruption, the need for more economic statistics, a service infrastructure which research shows takes women three more days to secure customer services than men, and an investment climate that still makes it more difficult for women to access finance.

Moving forward, the following measures can be undertaken to develop a more enabling environment for female entrepreneurship in the region:

- Bring more women into events where men are to help them develop confidence and knowledge.
- Collect statistics across the region as these can help stimulate change. Today these are still difficult to access.
- Engage the 'Economic Cabinet' and Ministers in the agenda for women's entrepreneurship.

The strategy of the World Bank is to advance the economic participation and contribution of women through supporting increased access to assets, more public resources, jobs and pensions.

In summary, the policy message from the World Bank is:

1. Women's entrepreneurship in MENA displays a pattern that is quite different than that in other developing regions. Female-owned firms are of a larger size and global nature. They would be in a better position to generate significant employment if a number of gender-based barriers can be removed; and
2. Female entrepreneurship is an important vehicle for addressing female unemployment in particular, given the socio-cultural environment in the MENA region, while promoting investments in knowledge-driven and service/export-orientated industries.

IBM: External; Initiatives on Diversity and Inclusion, and Gender Diversity in Particular

Wendy Papworth

Pan European Diversity, Gender Programme Manager

Ms Papworth described the key external initiatives of IBM to promote gender diversity. There has been a very steady growth in the percentage of women working for IBM; during 2006 alone, the company saw a 100% increase in its female workforce in Egypt. IBM has put a fund aside especially to promote diversity in the region, and recognises the business benefits of diversity.

IBM currently sets 'gender goals' in recognition that the challenges are great and that diversity is a long journey for the company. The company is concerned to develop the 'pipeline' and has therefore sponsored programmes to attract girls and young women to IT before it is too late. Although as a matter of corporate policy, IBM does not actively lobby government, it has developed a number of key external initiatives to promote gender diversity. These are as follows:

National Council of Women – Phase 1 (Egypt)

- IBM has developed a portal, web application focused on the development and advancement of women entitled 'Women's Gathering'. The portal provides information on women's affairs and issues as well as services, such as e-training, marketing, complaints and legislation on family, labour etc. In addition, it serves as a network and gathering point for all civil society organisations

and national constitutional institutions aiming to improve women projects.

- Site operates in both English and Arabic
- Represents a market value investment of \$1.37m
- At an earlier stage of the common project, NCW had focused on equipping women with key IT skills. With the help of IBM, 150 women have already been trained successfully.

NCW – Phase 2 (Bahrain)

- In conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs
- e-learning pilot, on-line courses for women entrepreneurs focusing on soft skills; marketing; technical skills such as website construction etc
- Developed in Egypt, roll out in Bahrain

Future Generation Foundation

- Women Leadership Programme (WLP) in collaboration with the Centre for Creative Leadership
- Benefits IBM women but the company also sponsors the attendance of talented women working for its business partners and customers

Programmes for girls and young women (current focus is Egypt)

- Host sessions for schools at IBM – young women aged 15-17 years - business environment, careers available and not just IT
- Summer training programme for university students, strive for a gender balance in the in-take
- Working in a public/private partnership on the Egypt Education Initiative - announced in 2006 through the World Economic Forum:
 - IBM has a strong focus on closing the **'Skills Gap'** for both students and teachers. Part of the contribution to EEI was through availing IBM educational programs for different educational phases:
 - **Pre-school - KidSmart** Units with educational English/Arabic software K-12 - Try Science: Providing schools' students with access to on-line science and technology centre, through interactive exhibits, multimedia adventures and live camera.
 - **Change Toolkit:** provides **schools' leaders and teachers** with tools, resources, and online collaboration in addition to an access to the skills and expertise of educators around the globe.
 - **University Education - IBM Academic Initiative:** Enable University students and Professors all over Egypt to learn, develop and use IBM SW, Solutions, systems in addition to Open Source SW through IBM Academic Initiative and its wealth of free e-learning training courses.
 - Investment in Human Resources through **'knowledge transfer'** in the area of **eContent Development** with the objective of enriching e-learning in the Education in Egypt.

People with Disabilities – Visually Impaired

- IBM has established the first Authorized Training Centre for the visually impaired in collaboration with Parents Association of people with visual impairments. This will be the first centre to graduate visually impaired instructors specialised in the field of computer and information technology training.
- IBM provided a tailored program for trainers enabling them to become 'IBM Certified Trainers for Visually Impaired'. In cooperation with IBM, the Association has trained seven visually impaired people and four of the association's friends endowed with eyesight to prepare them to become IBM-certified trainers for the visually impaired. The youngest instructor is a 12 years old visually impaired boy Mohamed Ayman.

Work Life

- Day care centre places for employees' children at discounted rates.

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The Arab International Women’s Forum would like to thank the moderator, Dame Julie Mellor, AIWF Member and Partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers; the programme presenters: Dominique Dellicour, Head of Unit, Governance, Human Rights, Democracy and Gender at EuropeAid Cooperation Office of the European Commission; Nadereh Chamloo, Senior Advisor, Middle East and North Africa Social and Economic Development, World Bank Group; Wendy Papworth, Pan European Diversity, Gender Programme Manager, IBM for their valuable contributors to the Review and to congratulate their organisations on their key initiatives that address the 2005 AIWF Programme Recommendations.

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Open Forum

A number of recommendations and interventions to help secure Arab women’s economic security were proposed during the open forum discussion following the formal presentations of the European Commission, the World Bank, and IBM. These were:

1. Continued importance of, and the ability of Arab women to access, IT. There is also the need to address the issue of content as an aspect of IT in the Arab world where this remains an issue.
2. Women should celebrate their successes more, as men do.
3. Women who are less educated need the most help, and steps should be taken to build an enabling educational environment for them, and to reach out to them at a local level.
4. Women need to be brought more into contact with the male sphere – and to have the opportunity to harness the potential of programmes such as the FTSE-100 Cross-Mentoring Programme in the UK to develop female senior managers in the Arab region.
5. Change and the outcome of change should be celebrated, such as the programme started in Saudi Arabia in the last decade to privatise higher education and thereby improve standards.
6. The role of conflict in the region and its impact on women’s economic progress should be explored more deeply.
7. The continued formation of women-only networks to foster business connections needs to be encouraged, but not to the exclusion of other networks. The participation of younger women in these networks should also be encouraged.
8. The importance of the interface between the political, institutional and business spheres should be recognised, as well as the role that the business world can play in grooming future political leaders. In the Arab region, more women are being appointed as Ministers; however, those who last tend to be businesswomen.

Future Progress

To help ensure that the agenda moves forward, AIWF will continue to play a facilitative role, mobilising action at the highest level and on the ground. It will help to influence, through its programme of work and extensive national and international networks, the legislative and civil rights agenda for Arab women. However, there should be a clear evidence base in the form of statistics and economic information to guarantee continued support.

The programme has moved on and now more than ever progress must be monitored and evaluated against clear time frames. The exemplary diversity-led projects of corporations must be applauded, and replicated across the region. And on each and every step of the way to achieving women’s economic integration and security, Arab women should dare to highlight and celebrate success.

Background to the January 2007 Review

When, in 2001, the Arab International Women's Forum was launched in London by a group of women, all successful in business, the professions and civil society, to provide a link between Arab women and their counterparts in the international community, their aim, encapsulated in the principle 'Building Bridges, Building Business' was simple.

By fostering networks and alliances that cut across industry and international borders, the AIWF has highlighted the achievements of Arab women throughout the world. At the same time, their related success would cast its beam on the potential of the millions of women in the Arab region yet to benefit from opportunity and advantage, be it in the form of greater access to education, health, or increased economic participation.

Recent studies by a range of institutions from the United Nations to the World Economic Forum appear to confirm the view of the Arab woman's intelligence, fortitude and commitment to traditional values as a rich vein that -- if tapped and directed towards the demands of the new century -- can make an overwhelming difference to security, peace and prosperity in the region.

Already globalisation has made an irreversible impact on the economies and the once familiar paradigms and structures within the Arab World. The question is whether the status of Arab women can be elevated during this transition, enabling them to take their rightful, recognised and remunerated place in society and the workforce. The timing for Arab women to make a real and tangible difference has never been more opportune, nor the demand for their contribution greater.

Since its inception as a non-profit organisation, the AIWF has worked continuously with a range of key partners in the UK and across Europe and the Arab region to help provide a voice for, and dissolve stereotypes of, Arab women. It has framed its programmes to enable it to support the agenda of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, specifically the economic and cultural 'baskets' of the Barcelona Process. It has also forged partnerships with global corporations and international and national institutions, stimulating dialogue and acting as both catalyst and platform for addressing the substantive issues affecting Arab women.

The penultimate programme, in an ambitious series leading up to the current AIWF 2007 Programme – Globalisation, Trade and Entrepreneurship was *Women as Engines of Economic Growth in the Arab World* designed and implemented in 2005 to explore two parallel themes.

The first conference, entitled '*Ten Years after the Barcelona Conference: Empowering Women as a Catalyst for Economic Development*' was held 7- 8 April 2005 at the European Parliament in Brussels and focused on the issues affecting women in business, the corporate sector and as entrepreneurs, highlighting their impact on economic and social development. The Foreign and Commonwealth, UK (FCO), a key conference supporter, has since provided further support to the AIWF programme of work through the Global Opportunities Fund (Engaging with the Islamic World programme).

The second conference, '*Women and Integrated Rural Development*' held 12-13 June in Cairo at the League of Arab States, focused on women in rural areas looking more closely at education and training, micro-financing, integration into the business world, rural – urban integration and equality.

The outputs of the twin conferences were summarised in the *AIWF 2005 Programme Report & Recommendations* launched at the FCO in London in September 2005. Priority recommendations for action by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and governments of the Arab World were advocated, documenting a call to action to policy makers and business leaders alike. Recommendations covered the areas of public policy, education and finance, and offered a number of concrete actions to guide the way forward.

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The Arab International Women’s Forum

Building bridges, building business has been the guiding principle of the Arab International Women’s Forum (AIWF) since it was set up in 2001. It is a unique network connecting Arab and international women in key positions in business and professions and in community leadership, public and political life.

AIWF provides a voice for Arab women, promoting cultural diversity and creating greater public awareness of the challenges of bringing more women into the economic life of the region but also the huge advantages of making it happen.

Working at the highest levels, the growing role of AIWF is acknowledged by collaboration with many leading Arab and international organisations – among them the League of Arab States, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, UK, the World Bank, the European Commission and European Parliament, as well as UN agencies, NGOs, academic, economic and trade institutions.

AIWF, as a non profit organisation, has forged valuable partnerships with global companies deeply engaged in the region and having strong diversity policies. The Arab International Women’s Forum greatly appreciates the valued and ongoing support of Shell International, PepsiCo International, DLA Piper, General Motors, IBM, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Merrill Lynch and Jumeirah International.

Recognised for its ability to provide connectivity between governments, corporate and institutional partners and international organisations, AIWF offers initiatives that promote economic development, international understanding, prosperity and peace.

The Arab International Women’s Forum is a membership based organisation. For more information about members’ benefits, the AIWF Programme and a membership organisation, kindly contact our office.



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