

REGIONALPROGRAMM

GOLF-STAATEN

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Female Entrepreneurs needed

WORKSHOP „FEMALES AS ENTREPRENEURS“ TARGETS FUTURE FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

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„The chances for a young woman to work have always been better in United Arab Emirates (UAE) than in any other Arab State,” stated Emirati State Minister Dr. Maitha Al Shamsi, in her opening remarks to the workshop „Females as Entrepreneurs – How to overcome the obstacles.“ The workshop, which took place on Oct. 6th, 2011 in Abu Dhabi, was jointly organized by KAS Regional Program Gulf-States, the GIZ as well as the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development. Young women from all parts of the Emirate came to learn about the initial steps to enter entrepreneurship. They were given a first insight into the possibilities to realize their own business ideas and visions. The workshop was the successful continuation of KAS’ event series „Females as Entrepreneurs“.

In her opening speech in front of 70 university students from Al Ain and Abu Dhabi, as well as additional guests from politics, economics and academics, State Minister Dr. Maitha Al Shamsi stressed the importance of supporting young women on their way to economic independence.

She pointed out that education opportunities for women are significantly better in the UAE than in other Arab countries, which shows in a very low illiteracy rate and a wide access to university education.

However, even though the UAE government actively promotes women in the workplace, women are still strongly underrepresented in all sectors of the private economy. “We

need to set ourselves ambitious goals to be successful in the future,” stated Dr. Al Shamsi.

However, it is important to maintain a healthy work-family balance. Dr. Al Shamsi believed that „only who successfully runs a family can also be successful as an entrepreneur.“ She advised the participants to find the balance between work and family by redefining their priorities every day anew. She encouraged them to seize every opportunity that presents itself for a start into the working world.

The audience agreed on the importance of introducing young local women more and more to the idea of entrepreneurship. However, it became clear during the workshop that structural as well as cultural barriers prevail that keep young Emirati women from founding their own businesses.

Therefore, it was the declared goal of the workshop to provide practical advice to the young women that would facilitate their way into entrepreneurship. Experienced lecturers from economics, academics and government institutions answered the students’ questions such as: How to write a business plan? How to overcome bureaucratic obstacles? What are my personal strength and where can I take on social responsibility?

To present the ambitious students with a positive example, the Regional Program Gulf-States had invited the successful start-up entrepreneur Azza Al Qubaisi. The charismatic artist and jewellery designer is also vice-president of the Abu Dhabi Business Women Council. She described her career

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development with all its ups and downs. „Ambition and clear goals are the key prerequisites for successful entrepreneurship. If you have those you have everything you need to succeed!“

The Regional Program Gulf-States had invited another „superwoman“: Aysha Al Wahaibi from Oman. The young Omani (28) trains and advises female candidates in the currently ongoing parliamentary elections. In Abu Dhabi Al Wahaibi asked the Emirati students about their understanding of „social empowerment“ and their plans for the future. The responses made clear, that the young women often do not dare to break with old paradigms as they are afraid to fail with their new ideas and embarrass themselves in front of the family. Therefore, many of them decide for already established business models e.g. small bakeries and beauty salons, which do not pose a large entrepreneurial risk. This notion was supported by a study by the DED amongst the attending students.¹ Aysha Al Wahaibi was able to give the students new perspectives. She emphasized that strategic planning, a good education and effective networking are the cornerstones of successfully starting a business career. But she also reminded the young Emiratis to play a meaningful part in society with innovative business ideas.

Azza Al Qubaisi and Aysha Al Wahaibi are living proof for successful business women in the region. However, by far not all women are standing in the limelight with their work. Some of the attending students came from rural areas of the UAE where work opportunities are very limited. To offer these women new perspectives, the Department of Economic in Abu Dhabi has initiated the program „Mubdi'ah“ - Inventor. Jamila Al Moosa presented the program which aims to support women, who often

¹ The Department for Economic Development in Abu Dhabi conducted a survey at the universities prior to the workshop. When asked which business sector (industry, trade or service) the young women prefer to open a business in 57,9% preferred the service sector.

work from home, in their strive to enter the work force.

No matter if the women work in rural areas from their homes or in a business environment in the city, so called „personal skills“ remain indispensable for potential entrepreneurs. Dr. Florian Schloderer from INSEAD Business School Abu Dhabi jointly worked out with the students which personal skills are most important. Not only a good education and participating in workshops are keys to success but networking and the principle „learning by doing“ are equally important. The outcome of this session was a personal „action plan“, which outlined the next steps in developing entrepreneurial skills.

Raed Daoudi, from the Khalifa Fund for Economic Development focused on the various aspects of a sustainable fiscal plan and gave advice to the students on how to apply for financial support. The Khalifa Fund for Economic Development aims to make financial support readily available to young start-up businesses.

The high-level of engagement and active participation of the attending students made the workshop a great success. The interactive hands-on approach of the event shaped the character of the entire day. With additional academic, political and business representatives present during the workshop's opening session allowed for the event to reach out to various important multipliers. Their presence as well as the attendance of State Minister Dr. Maitha Al Shamsi, exemplifies that the work of the Regional program has become highly appreciated within the UAE.

The large number of attending students shows the need for such discussion platforms. Thomas Birringer, KAS - Regional Representative to the Gulf-States stressed the necessity to continue to drive forward such important topics as the advancement of young women in the Emirates. German Ambassador Nikolai von Schoepff, emphasized that Germany and the UAE should learn from each other especially in the field of Education and Advancement of women.

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Accordingly, the event series on „Females as Entrepreneurs“ will be continued.

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