

OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum (WBF)

Joint meeting with the Ministry of General Affairs and Governance
of the Kingdom of Morocco

Organised with the support of the Union of Arab Banks

2 December 2013

Rabat, Morocco

Nurturing entrepreneurship: improving women's access to services and finance

– Meeting Summary –

Meeting objectives

The [meeting](#) of the [OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum \(WBF\)](#) was held on 2 December 2013 in Rabat, Morocco. The meeting objectives involved reviewing the 2013 WBF outputs which build on the 2012 WBF publication, [Women in Business – Policies to support women's entrepreneurship development in the MENA region](#), and the conclusions of the [2012 November WBF meeting](#). These included an overview of data on women's employment and entrepreneurship activity in the region, as well as studies to reinforce women entrepreneurs' access to financing and business development services. The meeting was also the occasion to collectively develop priorities for the WBF 2014 work programme, as well as to nominate a new Co-Chair.



*Group photo of participants at the OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum meeting
2 December 2013, Rabat, Morocco*

Participation

The event brought together over 80 participants, representing business, government and civil society from 6 MENA and 6 OECD economies¹. Among the regional and international organisations represented were the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and the Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research.

Opening remarks

Ms. Amina Benjelloun, Advisor to the Chief of Government, Ministry of General Affairs and Governance, Kingdom of Morocco, welcomed participants to the meeting and stressed Morocco's commitment to partnering with the WBF to enhance women's economic empowerment.

H.E. Ambassador Ms. Birgitta Holst Alani, Director of the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt, Co-Chair, OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum, observed that the meeting takes place at a time of unprecedented change in the MENA region that could translate into more economic opportunities for women.

Mr. Marcos Bonturi, Director, Global Relations, OECD, noted that finding policy solutions to promote gender equality is a key priority for the OECD. Mr. Bonturi referred to the OECD Gender Initiative and the ["Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship"](#) which was endorsed by OECD Ministers in May 2013. Further, Mr. Bonturi stated that the WBF has become an important vehicle for women's economic empowerment in the region and is seen as a good example to follow in other [OECD regional programmes](#), such as, in South East Asia and Latin America.

Over the course of the morning, H.E. Mr Mohammed Louafa, Minister Delegate to the Head of the Government in charge of General Affairs and Governance, Kingdom of Morocco, and Co-Chair of the MENA-OECD Investment Programme, joined the meeting. H.E. Mr. Mohammed Louafa reiterated Morocco's commitment to promoting women's economic empowerment and recalled that the conclusions of this meeting will be brought to the attention of the [MENA-OECD Initiative Steering Group meeting](#) taking place on 3 December 2013.

¹ Participants from the following MENA economies attended: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia and the following OECD economies: Canada, France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States and Sweden.

Nomination of the new WBF Co-Chair

Following expressions of appreciation for the leadership and valuable contribution of former Women's Business Forum Co-Chair, H.E. Ambassador Ms. Dina Kawar, a new MENA Co-Chair of the WBF was nominated: Ms. Neveen El Tahri, President and Director of Delta Shield for Investment, Egypt.

Meeting outcomes

In terms of very broad meeting outcomes, participants agreed to the following:

Session 1: Opportunities and challenges for women's economic development in the MENA region

Participants:

- Welcomed the study on *Gender inequality in employment and entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa: a statistical portrait*, which seeks to provide a statistical account of women's economic opportunity based on women's achievements in education, employment and entrepreneurship.
- Noted that the data was insufficient to provide a detailed description of the issues addressed neither at national nor at regional level.
- Highlighted that the data shortcomings were due to the absence of systematic data collection at the national level which in turn makes it difficult for international organisations to develop harmonised datasets.
- Observed that on the basis of the data available, the following picture emerges:
 - There is a large and growing talent pool of educated women who want to work;
 - Since 1992 there has been a significant rise in the labour force participation rate of women;
 - The number of women in actual employment in the region is the lowest in the world; and,
 - Up to 12% of MENA women can be considered as an entrepreneur, which is a relatively high figure, and could be interpreted, in a broad sense, as nearly 1 in 8 women.
- Underlined that there is a relationship between employment and entrepreneurship levels since people with prior work experience generally have a higher chance to succeed as entrepreneurs; there is also a connection between employment,

entrepreneurship and the legal system which can encourage, but also impede, women's economic participation.

- Agreed with the need for more comprehensive datasets on women's education and economic activity in the MENA region and advised that each country should develop a data collection strategy to gather greater information in this area.
- Remarkd that there is a need for harmonised definitions of micro, small and medium sized enterprises, as well as, for a coherent and practical definition of women-owned business.
- Considered that it could be interesting for MENA countries to develop an SME Observatory across the region with the OECD providing expertise on its development.

Session 2: Access to bank and non-bank financing for women-led businesses

Participants:

- Commended the study, *Exploring bank financing for women entrepreneurs in the MENA region: a preliminary analysis of survey data on the financing practices of MENA banks*. This work builds on the conclusions of the 2012 WBF meeting where participants agreed to launch a project to examine bank financing of women entrepreneurs. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for up to 90% of businesses in the MENA region and create more than half the jobs, yet many women business owners report difficulties in accessing formal finance to maintain and grown their enterprises. Subsequently, the WBF partnered with the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) to survey UAB members and other banks to learn more of their financing practices and decision making processes in relation to women-owned businesses. The recommendations in this report were revised in light of the discussion which took place at an expert meeting at the UAB headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon, in November 2013.
- Agreed that there are clear roles for banks, governments and women's business organisations to play in facilitating women entrepreneurs' access to finance.
- Acknowledged that banks are profit-oriented institutions, yet noted that banks need to be sensitised to the particular circumstances of women entrepreneurs.
- Noted that while progress in promoting women's access to finance has been made in some areas with state-sponsored guarantees, such as, the *Ilayki* programme in Morocco, banks don't necessarily follow up.
- Reflected that it may be useful to develop a definition of "bank ready" as specified in the study.

- Approved the recommendations in the report which are principally centred on strengthening data collection, enhancing training options, aligning with international good practices and researching alternative collateral and credit access regimes so that both the supply-side and demand-side of the financing equation can achieve a better fit.
- Welcomed the *Entrepreneur's guide to bank and non-bank financing for women in the MENA region*. This Guide was drafted as a complement to the first study as banks state that there is scope for women to better meet bank expectations in their credit requests.
- Endorsed the suggestion at the expert meeting in Beirut, Lebanon, in November, and recommended that the Guide be simplified as a tool-kit and subsequently adapted by, for instance, business associations to particular segments of the population classified by size of enterprise, geographical location and/or the phase of enterprise development.
- Observed that similar Guides exist in some MENA countries and proposed that the WBF compile these guides on a common platform to facilitate information sharing and to identify best practices addressing different segments of women entrepreneurs.

Session 3: Women entrepreneurs' access to business development services (BDS)

Participants:

- Praised the *Analysis of business development service provision and incubation for women entrepreneurs in the MENA region*. This study builds on 2012 November WBF meeting proposal to engage in a stocktaking of women's access to business development services (BDS) in the MENA region, which could eventually lead to the development of a good practices guidebook. The study is based on a survey of BDS service providers and incubators across 17 MENA economies supported by desk research and fact finding missions in Egypt, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.
- Agreed that BDS and incubators can effectively support the development and growth of women-owned businesses. Yet such services are not effectively used by women business owners as there is little awareness on the part of women entrepreneurs of their activities, and little effort on the part of BDS providers and incubators to reach out to women-owned businesses. This last factor partly stems from the lack of data on enterprises run by women in region.
- Stressed that both "mainstreaming" and "side-streaming" efforts be reinforced, while also noting that BDS providers and incubators cannot do it all. Mainstreaming refers to women business owners being included in mainstream service providers,

while side-streaming refers to the existence of targeted services for women entrepreneurs.

- Proposed that the report include a reference to the various types of support required for enterprises over the course of their life cycle, as well as the linkages with the overall business ecosystem.
- Endorsed the recommendations included in the report; in particular, fostering more awareness of BDS services, making BDS services more accessible to women, strengthening networks to improve information sharing and assisting with linkages to sources of financing.
- Suggested that a glossary of key terms related to BDS providers and incubators be included in the report, as well as a compilation of good practices of such service providers, taking into account examples raised by participants during the meeting.
- Suggested that the WBF could facilitate the creation of a network of incubators and BDS service providers as a means of promoting the exchange of experiences, networking and good practices.

Session 4: WBF forward work programme and 2014 priorities

Participants:

- Discussed the two projects presented during the final session: 1) women's representation in the public and private spheres; and 2) the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in supporting women's entrepreneurship.
- Considered that there may be merit in examining these two issues in further depth over the course of 2014.

Conclusions

Participants:

- Agreed to the conclusions of the meeting and the proposal that they be presented to the Steering Group meeting of the MENA-OECD Investment Programme on 3 December in Rabat, Morocco.



MENA-OECD INVESTMENT PROGRAMME



ROYAUME DU MAROC
CHEF DU GOUVERNEMENT
Ministère Délégué auprès du Chef du Gouvernement
Chargé des Affaires Générales et de la Gouvernance



Forum des Femmes Entrepreneurs OCDE-MENA (FFE)

OECD-MENA Women's Business Forum (WBF)

Liste de participants / Participant list

2 décembre 2013

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