

# **Education is a powerful Learning tool & a Valuable Investment in Women's Empowerment**

**By**

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## **Secretary-General, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

It's a great pleasure to be here at the Commemoration Observance of International Women's Day and I am honored to be part of this distinguished panel. I specifically entitled my talk: "Education is a powerful Learning tool & a valuable Investment in Women's Empowerment" because I do believe that without education, the foundation for developing a better future for girls and women would crumble. As a global woman born in the Middle East, I learned to appreciate quickly the priceless investment in education that my family has bestowed on me. This enabled me to grow and develop and empowered me to achieve my global aspirations. Being here in front of you is a real testimony of that.

I will start by saying few words about my company Shell International, its initiatives and contributions to developing women's capabilities and will end up presenting few examples from the ME Region.

Shell is a global group of energy and petrochemical companies with more than 119,000 employees operating in over 145 countries around the world. It is an organization where people feel involved, respected and connected and where richness of ideas, backgrounds and prospective are harnessed to promote continuous learning and development and to contribute to world's sustainable growth by providing reliable, affordable and clean energy and products while doing it in an environmentally and socially responsible way.

Businesses such as Shell have come a long way by embracing and recognizing the huge benefits of a diverse workforce particularly with a high percentage of women. Development of Women in Shell is not an option but a business imperative. We work together with a wide range of partners that could support and progress the UN Millennium Development Goals primarily in promoting gender equality, in empowering women and in developing a global partnership for development.

In 2003, Shell launched a 3-year program called Women's Career Development (WCD). This program, through efficient and effective learning, help women to

better understand issues affecting women in business, to develop strategies to achieve their career and life goals and to have the chance to maximize their potential while balancing their work and social responsibilities. These programs have already been designed to benefit not only our staff but also our partners, which include our host communities or countries. They are made available for export to the different regions through our network of learning hubs all over the world, thereby ensuring that barriers previously imposed by location and time are no longer an issue. This three-day program has been delivered within Shell in the UK, the Netherlands, US, Asia and Middle East and is currently available to women in Africa.

Employee networks, dual career opportunities and mentoring also play an important part in supporting women in their personal and professional development. We currently have 24 networks worldwide, 15 of which are women's networks and plans are under way to launch more. These women networks continue to shape the future of our company by dispelling the myths around women's performance, celebrating the progress and learning how to promote diversity and inclusiveness together with their male colleagues.

The networks establish mentor program for young women, they offer learning sessions on various topics such as gender culture differences between men and women. They also contribute to the business through involvement in attraction and recruiting activities and through interfacing with senior leadership on what helps and what hinders the advancement of women sharing concerns as well as best practices in their work life balance and community services.

Our talented women employee have made a difference by investing their time not just within the company but also across corporate environments and wider societies acting as mentors, leaders and role models for the young women professionals and exporting their experience and best business practices to a full range of local schools, universities and to the communities at large. For example, in the Education Week conducted yearly to introduce top senior students to the energy industry, I have imposed a minimum of 25% female students participation. In the ME, we have attracted and recruited over 50% female graduates from regional universities. Our activities in schools, colleges and universities include seminars, workshops and student internship projects promoting energy training, Health, Safety and Environmental and Cultural awareness.

I believe that the necessity of having educated skilled and competent women is crucial to help us increase our ability to meet not only the current but also the future needs of the energy industry. Businesses alone cannot provide all the solutions to sustainable development and energy, any more than governments or civil society can succeed alone. What is frequently required is partnership across sectors of society. Let me give just a couple of examples among very many on how can we do that; Intilaaqah and the Emirate Business Women programs.

Intilaaqah is a people's investment program that has and continues to deliver multiple success stories. It is based on Shell's LiveWIRE program, an international initiative launched in 25 countries throughout the world. In the Middle East, It began life in Oman in 1996 and has since been extended to Egypt, Qatar, Libya and Abu Dhabi and is being launched this year in Syria. Thousands of young people including recently mature women have so far taken part in a training program sponsored by Shell to help them develop the skills they need to set up and run their own businesses. The training is government approved and covers all aspects of setting up a business: market research, preparing cash flow and financial forecasts, the importance of finding the right location, learning to use a computer and maintain proper filing systems. At the end of the training, the student has a workable business plan with which to seek funding from banks or government bodies.

Shell and its partners in this program have clear roles to play. For example in Abu Dhabi, UAE, Shell assists in the recruitment of candidates, provides the project management, and sponsors the training workshops. While its partners such as Colleges do the training, the National banks advice on funding, marketing and promotion, Ernst & Young provides development and consultancy services while Chamber of Commerce advice on business, regulations, licenses, and legal issues. For Shell and its partners, this program helps seed the workforce and entrepreneurs of the future, and strengthens relationships with the private and public sectors and with ministries and local communities.

To date in Oman 5331 were trained since it was launched of which 37% have started their businesses. In Egypt, 1368 graduated from the program of which 178 established and started their business. In Libya, 100 graduated of which 14 established and started their business. In Qatar, 97 graduated of which 8 established and started their business. And In Abu Dhabi, 700 UAE nationals graduated from the program and a week-long version of the Intilaaqah program was delivered to the General Women's Union in Arabic.

As well as being self-employed, many of these young entrepreneurs are providing employment to other countrymen and women. I quote the story of this program graduate; Nashua Mohamed Fouad, the creator and owner of 'Funoon and Funoon' magazine in Egypt. Nashua's magazine teaches children to paint and draw, as well as educates them about social and environmental issues. The magazine features two characters, Funoon, a girl, and Funoon, a boy, who have different adventures in every issue. It is a back-to-back Arabic and English magazine with Funoon's adventures portrayed in Arabic and Funoon's adventures in English. The magazine now has a staff of 35 people working in writing and design, administration, sales and marketing. To date, four editions of the magazine have been produced and sales have risen to 10,000 copies a month in Egypt, with 35,000 copies going overseas to other Arab countries, mostly in the Gulf.

Shell also introduced the idea of Emirates Business Women Award (EBWA) to the UAE community and partnered with Dubai Quality Group to handle and organize it. EBWA was launched in 2002 under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Ahmad bin Saeed Al Maktoum; President of Dubai Civil Aviation, Chairman of Emirates Group, and patron of Dubai Quality Group. This award recognizes and honors the contribution of business and professional women in the UAE; whilst inspiring the future generations of women to achieve their full potential and maximize their contribution to UAE economy. Award categories included business owners and professionals and are selected based on several criteria including Leadership, Future Goals and Financial Performance, Business, Professional and Career Achievements, Community Contribution and Participation and Innovation.

In 2007, 88 applications were received (17 Business owners and 71 Professionals). Awards were presented to professional and prominent women in various sectors of the community that included Eng. Lama Farsakh – Partner and Managing Director of ECG, Maryam Al Bannai – GM, Corporate Support Service of Dubai World Trade Center, Al Yaziyah Bin Khrideh – Manager of Al Lissily Women Association, Dina Al Jafra – CEO of International Humanitarian City, Kate Dickens – Head of Service Quality of ADCB and Dr. Zainab Shalhoub – Professor at the American University of Sharjah

Learning and development of women and girls is similar to a challenge that the late Martin Luther King once gave. He said:

“ we must turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones “ .

I believe together, investing in women’s and girls’ learning and development not only would accelerate building these stepping-stones on a strong foundation but also would unleash the potential of women and provide a pool of talents that the world is desperately in need for prosperity and peace.

Thank you United Nations and specially Ms. Mayanja, special adviser on gender issues and advancement of women for inviting me to this high panel discussion and good luck in all your endeavors and effective partnerships with private sector, governments and communities to place women on the global leadership agenda.

## **INTILAAQAH – NASHWA’S SUCCESS STORY**

Nashwa Mohamed Fouad is the creator and owner of ‘Funoon and Funoon’ magazine, which teaches children to paint and draw, as well as educating them about social and environmental issues. The magazine features two characters, Funoon, a girl, and Funoon, a boy, who have different adventures in every issue. It is a back-to-back Arabic and English magazine with Funoon’s adventures portrayed in Arabic and Funoon’s adventures in English. In 2007 Nashwa won the top prize at the Intilaaqah Awards Ceremony in Egypt for the development of the magazine.

Nashwa graduated from the University of Fine Arts in Alexandria in 2002 and says, “In 2006 I approached the FGF [Future Generation Foundation], a partner with Shell in its Intilaaqah programme for young entrepreneurs. At the FGF I underwent training for three months to obtain a BBSA [Basic Business Skills Acquisition], designed to provide students with the skills required to start out in the business world.”

Following her graduation with a BBSA Nashwa was offered the opportunity to join the Intilaaqah programme. “It provided me with the necessary training to start my own business. The best part of the course was undoubtedly the training on marketing and I have used this knowledge to grow my business. Another important lesson was to learn about copyright registration to protect the intellectual rights to my magazine and to get it registered with an ISBN number,” she says.

In 2007 she started her business with a series of children’s books called ‘Dream Time’, for young children aged five to 14. She then developed her ‘Funoon’ magazine, to teach children to paint, draw and trace, to get them to understand the use of colour and to deliver messages about the world in which they live.

“So far we have produced four editions of the magazine and sales have risen to 10,000 copies a month in Egypt, with 35,000 copies going overseas to other Arab countries, mostly in the Gulf. The magazine now has a staff of 35 people working in writing and design, administration, sales and marketing.

“So I thank Shell and the Intilaaqah team for making my business a success,” concludes Nashwa.