

## **Initiatives to advance women in business and management**

Companies and business organizations are realizing the advantages of advancing women in business and management and are supporting women's leadership across all regions. National and multinational companies are recruiting and promoting more women. Some chambers of commerce and employers' organizations are taking policy initiatives and providing advisory services to promote women in business and management. Moreover, businesswomen are organizing themselves to enhance their economic activities, including global trade initiatives. Women managers are networking and sharing experiences on career strategies.

Following are some examples of initiatives, mainly by companies, business membership organizations, women's organizations and academic institutions in developing regions.

### **1. Company initiatives**

Many of the company initiatives given below are those of multinational companies in national settings, as these could be more easily identified than those of national companies. The ILO Company Survey did show, however, that the majority of national companies responding, especially the medium-sized and large companies, had equal opportunity policies as well as measures to support women employees.

In Egypt, companies are participating in the Gender Equality Model Egypt (GEME) initiative launched by the government in partnership with the United Nations and other international organizations. GEME provides private firms with the training to document gender disparities, take corrective action in particular cases, and institutionalize gender equality. Firms self-select into the project, but GEME requires that their human resource departments have sufficient resources so they are able to implement gender equity policies and monitor the results. Ultimately, third-party auditors monitor the firms' human resource practices with an impact evaluation component that determines best practices for use throughout Egypt.

Some companies have special programs to sponsor and promote women's leadership. Networking events are held to provide women-owned business enterprises a competitive edge. The focus is to create an environment for women to meet, share experiences and learn from each other's successes, it encompasses training, mentoring, creating women's networks and raising awareness about diversity-related issues.

Many multinational companies are beginning to take gender issues into account. The initiatives are only just starting, with studies and examination of the application of legal texts prohibiting discrimination. Some job announcements mention that women are encouraged to apply, and some companies have regular training programs to encourage women to take on higher levels of responsibility or to access posts traditionally "reserved" for men. This is not about hiring women just for the sake of hiring women but about achieving a competitive edge by tapping into talent". Not just this but child care, flexible timings and tele-working is also promoted.

Gender Balanced diversity is also taken into account. This would mean a lot of things including an overhaul of policies and programs, a clear roadmap on how to develop and retain women across the organizational pyramid and most importantly bringing in a disproportionate

number of women into the organization and creating a culture where they can thrive and grow. The success to this would be to build a workplace where all employees (men and women) can grow to their full potential and feel equally valued for the unique strengths they bring to the table. For this, the key enablers will be:

- a. Increasing the Supply of Female Talent
- b. Building Leadership Alignment
- c. “Career By Choice” & Flexi Working
- d. Gender Balance Network & Council
- e. Mentoring
- f. Reaching Out (Raising Diversity Credentials)

Following are the Key Elements of Hindustan Unilever Gender Balance programme:

**Job Sharing:** The idea is to identify a pool of ‘flexidised’ jobs which will be shared between two people. Job sharing is not about optics; even if job sharing women works part-time, they bring their full selves into taking the organization closer to the women consumers. We will pilot job shares on some identified positions over the next two years.

**Career by choice program:** A unique re-hire programme that will provide a platform to women looking for ‘real’ opportunities to work flexibly and part-time. The programme would be kicked off in April. We have received 3,000 registrations on the “AreUtheWoman.com” micro site. 27 “Career By Choice” women have joined us. 10 are employee referrals.

**Proactive market mapping:** Extensive talent mapping of women across various industries and roles.

**Alchemy:** The mentoring program for South Asia is titled ‘Alchemy’. Mentoring is a key initiative to develop leaders and to build an inclusive workplace. ‘Alchemy’ connotes transformation. Through the process of mentoring, we transform talented individuals into great leaders. We currently have around 160 mentor-mentee pairs in South Asia. The commitment and excitement we see in our mentors and mentees makes us believe that this initiative would really make a difference in their lives.

**Gender balance page:** There is a need for a lot of communication around the roadmap and elements of the gender balance program. There will be a dedicated gender balance page on the diversity sub site of ‘Inside Unilever’

**Gender balance network:** The year began with the launch of the Gender Balance Network (GEN-NET) and ‘Third Eye’, which was our week long celebration of new perspectives in gender balance. Our next steps are to ensure that the preliminary charter of GENNET is put together. As the year will see a huge influx of women, a key focus of the GEN-NET would be around the assimilation, support and growth of women in the workforce (both new and existing).

## 2. Awarding good practice Around the world

There are regional, national and international events, in which awards are given to recognize companies’ achievements in promoting gender diversity, or to recognize the success of outstanding women business leaders. Such awards are a means to motivate companies to strive for better results and obtain public recognition. In attracting media

coverage, they also give visibility to the issue of women in business and management. Awards are given by a variety of organizations – governments, women’s associations, business organizations, industry groups and academic institutions. An example is the Cartier Women’s Initiative Awards. This is an international business plan competition for women created in 2006 by Cartier and the Women’s Forum (international network on women in the economy and society). Each year, six female entrepreneurs, one per continent, are awarded coaching support for a full year, a US\$20,000 grant and a trophy.

Many countries, such as South Africa, have “Businesswoman of the Year” awards that help establish role models for other women. Different categories are often specified for awards.

In Australia, the government Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency gives annual business achievement awards in six different categories. These are chosen from among many relevant areas and examples include: 1. Outstanding equal opportunity initiative or result for the advancement of women 2. Outstanding equal opportunity practice for the advancement of women in a non-traditional area or role 3. Diversity leader for the advancement of women 4. Leading CEO for the advancement of women 5. Leading organization for the advancement of women (fewer than 800 employees)

### **3. Initiatives of national chambers of commerce and employers’ organizations**

Business organizations and chambers provide support to businesswomen and women entrepreneurs through various activities. For example, in Honduras, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry has successfully implemented a project on women-led enterprises since 2007. On three occasions, it has held a Forum for Businesswomen, which helped participating entrepreneurs increase sales, expand to new markets, get new clients and acquire new techniques, technology and production methods.

In Pakistan, the Employers’ Federation of Pakistan (EFP) worked together with the Ministry of Labour and Manpower (MOLM) and the Pakistan Workers’ Federation (PWF), as well as with partners from civil society, on the Women’s Employment Creation (WEC-PK) project in 2009. The objectives of WEC-PK included creating a supportive environment for working women, direct assistance to women in accessing decent employment and promoting gender equality in private sector employment. The EFP collaborated with the ILO to conduct six training programs in major cities of Pakistan, to educate and train women in management, with a focus on management and leadership skills, and advice on how to break the invisible barriers hampering their career development. A report was produced in 2009 – “Taking the lead: Developing Women to Manage the Glass Ceiling at the Work Place.” Together with the ILO, the EFP introduced a policy for private sector organizations on gender equality and equity at the workplace, which was based on the results of an industry-wide survey and study of best practices on gender equality.

### **4. Structures for women and gender equality in business membership organizations**

There are chambers of commerce and employers' organizations in different regions that have women's sections, councils or focal points to support women in business and promote gender equality generally. The effectiveness of such mechanisms is debated. Historically, they have provided a "space" within or alongside business organizations for women to share their experiences, exchange information and ideas and develop programs and activities that focus attention on the challenges they face in the business world, as well as provide practical advice, policy development and support, especially to women entrepreneurs. On the other hand, there is considerable discussion as to whether such special structures marginalize women and "women's issues" as a parallel activity of the chamber of commerce or employers' organizations. It is argued that more women need to be in the "mainstream" of the organization's policy and advisory activities and in their boardroom or management committee, contributing their ideas, expertise and perspectives. Nevertheless, the challenge is how to make this happen without any kind of mechanism, process, person or persons responsible. If an employers' organisation opts for a structure, it is important that the objectives and terms of reference are clearly specified so as to avoid potential isolation. If women/gender structures already exist, their role can also be reviewed to ensure that gender equality concerns are "mainstreamed". Some examples are provided below. A Women's Entrepreneurship Council (WEC) in the framework of the Association of Balkan Chambers of Commerce (ABC) was established in 2010. The national chambers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey are represented on the WEC by three women entrepreneurs each. The objective of the WEC is to enhance the contribution of women entrepreneurs to national and regional economies and to increase intra-regional trade in the Balkans region. The WEC also aims to improve the skills of women entrepreneurs and to represent the "voice of women" in business circles through the ABC in the Balkans region.

##### **5. Women's representation in chambers of commerce and employers' organizations**

The representation of women in decision-making positions in employers' organizations and chambers of commerce is improving, but can be a challenge. Collecting data on this could be useful to track progress and provide a role model for company members.

Pakistan has its separate Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCCI), which is solely dedicated to promoting the cause of women in business. The chamber can also be looked upon as an advocacy group for dealing with issues of economic empowerment of women. WCCI is to develop women entrepreneurs by encouraging entrepreneurship as a means of economic empowerment. For potential women entrepreneurs, the chamber aims to provide a one window facility. For established women entrepreneurs, the chamber provides a forum for debate and discussion, opportunity to interact with their local and international counterparts as well as facilities for research and development.

## 6. **Women organizing at regional and international level**

Initiatives by women's organizations have been growing in recent years within and between regions. There are a plethora of conferences, meetings and gatherings to share experiences and knowledge on women in business, as well as leadership award events. National businesswomen's associations are providing support services to women entrepreneurs and executives. Many of the national organizations are members of global networks, such as the World Association of Women Entrepreneurs, the Iberoamerican Federation of Businesswomen, the International Federation of Professional, and Business Women and Vital Voices.

The World Association of Women Entrepreneurs (WAVE) aims to create awareness and reinforce the visibility of women business owners. It lobbies and advocates before public and private institutions, policymakers and governments. It promotes solidarity, friendship, cultural understanding and the exchange of experiences and ideas, facilitates the development of business, partnership and trade, fosters professional growth and business skills perfection, and encourages women to create enterprises.

The **SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneurs Council (SCWEC)** was established in 2001 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to promote women entrepreneurship, and facilitate co-operation and networking among women entrepreneurs in South Asia. The Council helps exchange information on entrepreneurial skills and build trade links among the women of the SAARC region. It organizes workshops, round-table conference, seminars and training programs.

Since 2009, a group of women leaders, company sponsors and partners have gathered annually for the **Women in Leadership Forum Asia**. Awards are given for leading businesswoman of the year, most innovative woman entrepreneur, leading woman in the public sector, male champion of change and most woman-friendly employer.

**The Asia-Business Council for Women Inc. (APBCW)**, established in 1994, facilitates business opportunities for women with an interest in trading in the Asia-Pacific region, for the purpose of promoting trade between the region and South Australia. It assists members in establishing contacts with businesses in the AsiaPacific region.

## 7. **Women organizing at national level**

Many organizations exist at the national level. In some of the countries there appears to be a number of businesswomen's and women entrepreneur organizations and associations, many of which are affiliated to international groups. Many of them need resources and strengthening in order to exert more influence and achieve results. Finding ways to bring these groups together in the form of, for example national forums, would be important for their efforts and objectives to become more visible. National governmental or academic institutions or business groups could play a role in convening and bringing these disparate groups together.

In Pakistan, the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCCI) was first registered as the Pakistan Association of Women Entrepreneurs in 1986. It is an honorary member of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which also has a standing committee on women entrepreneurs. Services include advisory and mentoring programs, training, access to micro-credit, business development programs and access to domestic and international markets. The Punjab Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PWCCI) was established in 2002 to promote and develop women's entrepreneurship in Punjab. It encourages women entrepreneurs to come together to voice their concerns and to seek assistance in research and development. PWCCI provides a forum for debate, the opportunity to interact with local and international counterparts, and a community of support for female entrepreneurs. Within the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), a Women's Resource Center (WRC) has been set up and functions as the secretariat for women's business activities and coordinates with the relevant governmental agencies and departments to facilitate their development and implementation.<sup>326</sup> Also in Pakistan, the aim of Mizlink-Pakistan is to provide complete resources for women entering the business world by strengthening the core areas that make or break a business, consultancy or corporate position.

#### **8. Initiatives of academic institutions**

Business schools and universities throughout the world are increasingly developing study and research programs that address women's entrepreneurship and women in management.

#### **What can employers' organizations (EO) do to promote women in business and management?**

- Awareness raising of EO staff on the business case for gender diversity and equality
- Design and implement an internal policy on gender equality
- Awareness of EO staff on strategies for companies to promote women in management
- Gender balance in EO staff – role model
- Consider mechanisms/structures within the EO to implement gender related activities
- Consider conducting a participatory gender audit within the EO to establish a baseline and the way forward
- Provide guidance to member affiliates and companies on promoting women in management and assistance with self-assessment or audit of the company's needs
- Develop a strengthen links with business-women's associations to know about their experiences and strategies and to provide "voice" to their goals
- Policy advocacy on addressing obstacles to women's entrepreneurship (access to credit, facilities, resources, BDS, training, etc.)

- Policy advocacy on legal frameworks that can promote women's access to decision-making in private-sector
- Partnership with academic institutions for research and with media for advocacy on women in business and Management
- Launch annual awards, exhibitions and fairs, to attract public and media attention