



Bolstering Women's Engagement in Trade in the Middle East and North Africa

Linda Schmid,¹ May 19, 2014

Women owned enterprises in the Middle East and North Africa can more deeply engage in trade with attention to property rights, enhanced institutional practices, and astute business skills.

Q1: Why are property rights important to women's economic engagement?

A1: The absence of equitable property rights either in law or practice can inhibit the ability of business women to use property for collateral to obtain financing. An imbalance of property rights between spouses with regard to common funds, family property, and inheritance can also inhibit access to collateral for business establishment and growth. In some cases, law may be different than institutional practices. Thus women can benefit from legal training focused on national law governing property rights and common funds. Helping women understand their property rights under the law can enable effective deployment of assets for business growth and export.

Q2: How can business registrars move women from the informal to the formal economy?

A2: Creating business licensing and registration procedures that are streamlined, affordable, and friendly to women can shift women from the informal to the formal economy. Business registrars can streamline licensing and registration procedures to reduce the amount of time required to complete the process. Registrars can eliminate capital requirements for business licensing and registration. Many women owned businesses are micro or small enterprises that add value to the economy despite the inability to meet minimum capital requirements some business registrars require. Business licensing and registration facilities can maintain a professional environment welcoming to women that allows them to comfortably participate in licensing and registration procedures without risk to their reputation or dignity.

Q3: What institutional practices contribute to export growth of woman owned enterprises?

A3: Women owned enterprises and associations can maintain a meaningful dialogue with those ministries that have trade related responsibilities. For example, firms or associations can actively engage the customs authority to ensure business women can effectively use customs systems and be aware of authorized tariff waivers and programs for small and medium enterprises. Women owned enterprises that use intellectual property rights, such as IT firms, creative industries, or agricultural producers, can actively engage the ministry responsible for intellectual property to ensure that firms formally file for copyright, trademark, or geographical indication rights. International public and commercial procurements are an important source of new business. Women engineers, architects, and management consultants can work with the trade ministry to

ensure government procurement practices at home and abroad are conducted under the principles of openness, transparency, and nondiscrimination. Active dialogue between exporters and ministries with trade related responsibilities can decidedly expand export growth.

Q4: What business practices can business women adopt to engage in the global economy?

A4: Women owned enterprises can master management skills, establish an online presence, and participate in international business forums to expand exports. Meeting international standards in foreign markets is a primary challenge for successful exporters. Women owned enterprises can adopt quality assurance systems to ensure their products and services can compete in the global marketplace. For example, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)¹ offers instructional materials to raise standards of quality. Exporters recognize that the Internet is the premiere export platform to the global market. Thus an integrated online presence that is friendly to mobile computing and uses social media is a must for successful exporters. Finally successful exporters work closely with their ministry of trade to establish deep international commercial networks. Business women can work with their ministry of trade to ensure that women owned enterprises are included in international trade expositions and meet with foreign business delegations traveling to make commercial contacts. Women owned enterprises can build management capacity, leverage the Internet, and establish international commercial relationships to expand exports.

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¹ http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_9000