

THE ROLE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S VISION 2030 IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

ASMA MOHAMMED ALFADEL*

*Al-imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The research finds the role of Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision to empowering women by identifying the initiatives of business sector to achieve the strategic goals. In order to achieve the objectives of the study; the researcher will use the descriptive and analytical approach. Research population consists of all workers of government and private sector companies in Saudi Arabia, and the study sample included (110) of them. Result: The objectives of 2030 vision significantly leads to empower women. Conclusion: The business must adopt the recommendation to achieve the goals of Saudi Arabia 2030 vision.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision, Education Level, Unemployment and Leadership.

Introduction:

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 gives a significant emphasis to the Saudi woman and her leading role in both social and developmental areas. Women are capable of achieving success and excellence through a range of available opportunities that illustrate their aptitude and value-added accomplishments with their participation in the labor market. Women empowerment is a key part of Saudi Vision 2030. The program's goals include increasing the participation of women in the labor market from 22 to 30 percent, increasing the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises in gross domestic product (GDP) from 20 to 35 percent, and reducing female unemployment from 12.6 to 7 percent.

1. Literature Review

Women Empowerment: "Empowerment" has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. The term has been used more often to advocate for certain types of policies and intervention strategies than to analyze them. (Anju Malhotra, 2012). According to Gill (2011), employee empowerment refers to the meaningful job of employees, their feelings of competence, autonomy, and contribution to the decision making or applications of leadership (p. 233). The employee empowerment concept actually certifies the employees with necessary power to employ plan and judgment in their work,

participate in their work related decision-making, and authorizes them to respond quickly to the needs and concerns of the customers (Durai 2010: 432). Blanchard et al. argues (in Ongori 2009) that empowerment refers not only to have power or authority to make decision and act, but also to have higher level of responsibility and accountability. Demirci and Erbas (2010) calls employee empowerment a unique style of management where managers confer about various work related issues and activities with the employees of the organization. Saudi Arabia is facing many labor market challenges today. Even though employment rate grew by 3.2% in 2014, the unemployment rate of nationals remained high at 11.7%.The female unemployment rate is almost 33% at the end of 2014, and the youth unemployment rate stands at 40%. Given that 35% of the population is under 19 years old, and in few years, this segment will enter the labor market, the pressure on the private sector to hire and retain nationals is mounting. Global issues confronting women have been and continue to be important in academic and organizational literature. This article reviews the current literature on many challenges women face as they approach senior management positions in the corporate hierarchy in the global context. Important theories and practices are beginning to emerge in the literatures that clarify a broader perspective on the barriers that hinder women towards their advancement to executive positions. Limitations on women's progressions on the corporate ladder have come to be known by the cliché "glass ceiling." The literature on women issues also offers specific suggestions and directions demonstrating the value that having more women in higher management positions can potentially bring to a management team as well as increase global competitiveness (Grant Thornton - IBR, 2013).

There are several factors preventing women from reaching the highest levels of organizations regardless of their accomplishments and merits (Grant Thornton - IBR, 2012; Lansing & Ready, 1988). The lack of women in senior leadership and management positions can partly be explained by strain in balancing work and family. Women tend to have more domestic responsibilities. As a result, women are not able to pitch in long working hours in the office like men. Unfortunately, many organizations are not flexible enough to accommodate women in top management positions because of these challenges (Altman & Shortland,2001). Cultural and social norms for women, practices and role responsibilities may also inhibit women from acquiring education that will lead to career progress in society. This calls for affirmative action in the recruitment and selection process (Coleman, 2010; Ellison, 2011; Altman & Shortland, 2008).

Saudi women and Education:

During the academic year 2013/2014, Saudi Arabia had altogether 31,000 schools of which 53.6 percent (16,600 schools) were schools for girls (SAMA, 2015). This shows how significant women’s education is to the Saudi government. In addition, there were 1.5 million students enrolled in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia during the academic year 2013/2014 and 448.1 thousand of them were newly enrolled students of whom 45.6 percent were female students. This was an increase from the 2012/2013 academic year during which 44.5 percent of the newly enrolled students were females (SAMA, 2014). Saudi females are now majoring in disciplines that were reserved for Saudi males in the past. Disciplines such as engineering, architecture, media, law and business are now opened to Saudi women. “The MoHE has sought to give Saudi female students the freedom to choose majors that fit with their individual wishes and tendencies, and to achieve their ambitions to effectively and actively participate in the development of the country” (MoHE, 2013, P. 20). Twent three fields of study were available to Saudi women in 2013. The top ten undergraduate majors for female students in 2012 are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. FEMALE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN UDERGRADUATE MAJORS (2012)

#	Field of study	Number of Student
1.	Humanities	120,956
2.	Islamic Studies	77,516
3.	Social and Behavioral Sciences	46,456
4.	Commerce and Business	40,735
5.	Teacher Training	35,752
6.	Physical Sciences	29,371
7.	Health	26,471
8.	Mathematics and Statistics	18,950
9.	Informatics	18,818
10.	Life Sciences	16,033

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2013

Increasingly higher number of Saudi Women have been enrolling in and graduating from colleges and Universities, especially at the undergraduate level. The number of female students who graduated from colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia in 2012 with various degrees such as associate diploma, bachelor degree, master degree, postgraduate certificate, doctorate and fellowships was 69,066 compared to 47,964 male students (MoHE, 2013). The total number of enrolled female students in Saudi public Universities at the undergraduate level rose from 412,893 students in 2009 to 511,593 students in 2012, a 23.9 percent increase

(MoHE, 2013). About 52.7 percent of Saudi Women were enrolled in undergraduate studies in 2012 compared to 47.3 percent of Saudi men as shown in Table 2

TABLE 2. MALE AND FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SAUDI ARABIA (2012)

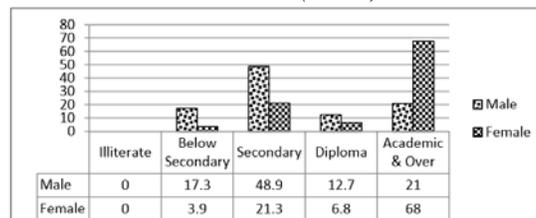
Uni	M	F	Total Student	Ration of Male Student	Ratio of Female Student
Public	455,576	511,593	967,169	52.9%	47.1%
Private	27,803	26,589	54,392	48.8%	51.2%
Total	483,379	538,182	1,021,561	52.7%	47.3%

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2013. MoHE F: Female, M: Male, Uni: university

CURRENT STATE OF SAUDI WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT :

Saudi females represented 59 percent of all graduates in the Kingdom in 2012 (MoHE, 2013). However, most of them had trouble finding a job after graduation. The gap between Saudi females’ participation in education and their participation in the economy is substantial. In fact, 68 percent of unemployed Saudi females had a bachelor degree or higher in 2015 compared to 21 percent of unemployed males as shown in Figure 1

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYED SAUDIS BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND GENDER (2015)



Source: Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2015

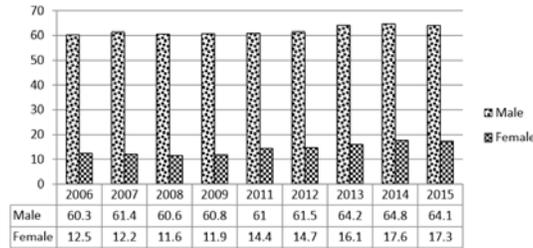
Saudi females still lag behind men in all fields of occupation except for education; human health & social work activities and professional, technical, and humanitarian; even though they have higher literacy rate than their male counterparts. In the occupation field of education Saudi females held 69.96 percent of jobs in 2015 compared to 15.27 percent occupied by Saudi males and the rest by expatriates (CDSI, 2015). In professional, technical, and humanitarian fields, Saudi women represented 64.56 percent of total employment in 2015, while Saudi males took 24.56 percent of jobs (CDSI, 2015). In human health and social work activities, Saudi women occupied 13.9 percent of jobs in 2015 compared to 6.4 percent by men (CDSI, 2015). The Nitaqat program, introduced in 2011 by the MoL to re-enforce the Saudization policy, led to a rise in the number of Saudi nationals employed in the private

sector including women.¹ The number of Saudi nationals employed in the private sector stood at 1,549,975 persons in 2014. This was a 3.6 percent increase from 2013 (SAMA, 2015). Saudi females represented about 26.6 percent (413,073 women) of Saudi nationals employed in the private sector in 2014. While, the public sector employed a total of 1,168,586 Saudis in 2014, 38.6 percent (450,957 women) of whom were Saudi women (SAMA, 2015).

SAUDI FEMALES' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

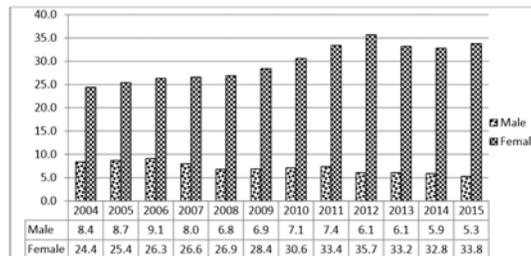
The ministry of Labor (MoL) continues to implement Saudization policies that focus on improving the overall employment of Saudi nationals including women. The development of national manpower and the increase in their employment was the second theme among the five main themes of the ninth DP (2009-2014). This second theme addresses “the issue of raising national labor force (males and females) participation rates, continuously upgrading their skills and capabilities, ensuring access to rewarding job opportunities and increasing their share in the labor market.” (MOEP, 2010, p. 9) The MoL also instituted women-oriented labor policies such as the Council of Ministers’ Resolution No 120 introduced in 2004 to promote female employment. The Nitaqat program also added new labor laws that enhance women’s employment such as restricting some jobs for Saudi women only. Jobs in lingerie and cosmetic stores, for instance, are solely reserved for Saudi women under the Nitaqat system (Al Bawaba, 2011). Women-oriented labor policies have had a positive impact on Saudi women’s economic participation. Labor participation rate for Saudi women increased from 12.5 percent in 2006 to 17.3 percent in 2015 as presented in Figure 2. However, this growth was overshadowed by the growth in females’ unemployment rate during the same time period as shown in Figure 3. Saudi females’ unemployment rate has been hovering above 30 percent since 2010 and is at least 5 times higher than that of their male counterpart.

FIGURE 2. SAUDI MALES' AND FEMALES' LABOR PARTICIPATION RATES, 2006 – 2015 (PERCENTAGE)



Source: Central Department of Statistics and Information, Manpower, 2006 – 2009. No Survey data are available for 2010

FIGURE 3. SAUDI UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER, 2004 – 2015. (PERCENTAGE)



Source: Saudi Arabia Government Statistics, 1999 – 2015

Research Questions and Contributions:

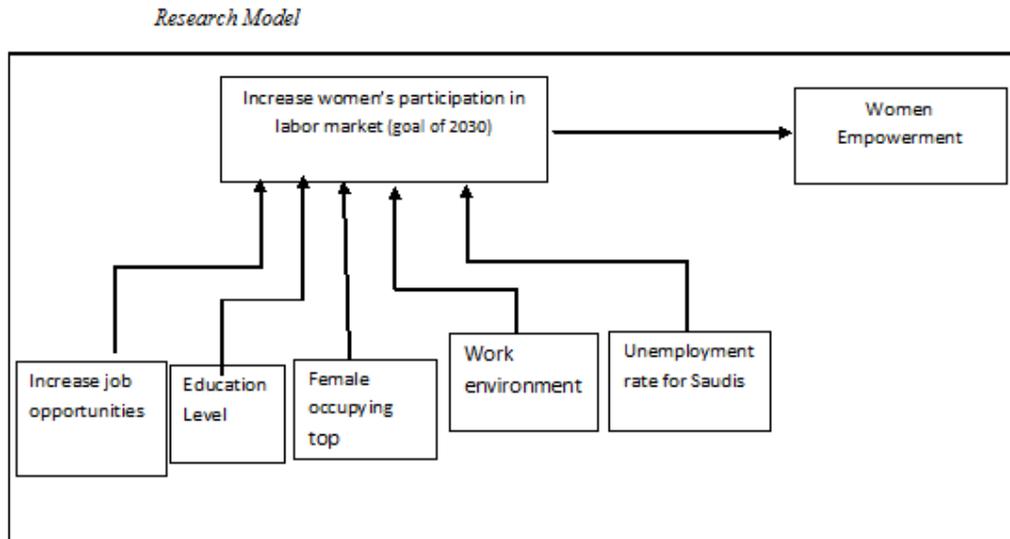
The topic of my research implies a question to which I anticipate the answer: the contribution of research in shaping the future recommendation helps to design programs for business sectors to achieve the objectives of 2030 vision in Empowering women.

This study aimed to defined the initiatives provided by the employers as a response to achieve the objectives of Saudi Arabia’s vision of 2030.

The research help to answer the questions below

- 1- Is there a negative relationship between the unemployment rate and women participating in the labor market in Saudi Arabia?
- 2- Is there a relationship between increasing numbers of women participating in top positions with women empowerment?
- 3- Is there a relationship between women's educational level and the proportion of women who participate in the labor market?

4- Is there a relationship between providing an appropriate work environment and the proportion of women participating in the labor market?



Hypothesis:

H1: There is a relationship between the vision of 2030 of Saudi Arabia and women empowerment.

H1.1: There is a negative relationship between the unemployment rate and women who participate in labor market of Saudi Arabia.

H1.2: Increase the number of women who participate in top position will lead women empowerment.

H1.3: Education level of women play a critical role in increasing the rate of women who participate in labor market

H1.4: Provide a suitable work environment will increase the rate of women who participate in labor market.

2. Research methodology

2.1 Sample and data collection

Data have been collected through a quantitative survey from 110 top managers working in different organizations in government and private sectors in Saudi Arabia. The survey questionnaires have been distributed manually to the target people. In addition to that, e-mail has also been used to disseminate the questionnaires to some of the respondents. Around 150

questionnaires distributed among the managers of 50 different organizations. A total of 145 people of 30 firms returned their answers whereas 110 data were considered usable in which only 36 of them are females, which represent 32.7 % of the total respondents. Approximately two third (58.0%) of the respondents are governmental workers. The leading cluster of respondents falls under the ages ranging from 40 years and older, which represent 48%. The highest education level of clear majority (43.0) of the respondents are undergraduate. 54% of the respondents have more than 10 years' experience. The profile of the respondents has been exhibited in Table

characteristics	Category	frequency	%
sex	Male	74	67.27
	Female	36	32.7
	Total	110	100
Age range	20-30	24	21.81
	31-40	33	30
	More than 40	53	48.18
	Total	110	100
Years of experience	1-5	24	21.82
	6-10	26	23.63
	More than 10	60	54.54
	Total	110	100
Educational level	Diploma	10	9.09
	Undergraduate	59	53.6
	Postgraduate	41	37.27
	Total	110	100
Organization' sector	Government	64	58
	Private	46	32
	Total	110	100

2.2 Measures and instruments

To obtain information about employers' initiatives in women empowerment that could be made by the organization; a short interview was conducted by the researcher with several managers to know about how they will contribute to achieve the goals of Saudi Arabia 2030 Vision to help the researcher develop a new scale for the questionnaire. The

instruments of this study has been divided in two segment; one segment has been devised for collecting demographic information of the respondent and another segment for measuring the perception of independent and dependent variables under investigation. A total of 68 items has been used in this study. In terms of measuring all of these 61 items, a 5-point Likert scale has been used with interval scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.3 Data analysis techniques

The primary data have been analyzed employing version 22.00 of SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Science) software for Microsoft. A set of statistical techniques including descriptive analysis, correlation coefficient and factor analysis has been applied to analyze the gathered data. The reliability of measures has been instituted by calculating the values of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Each of the dimensions of this study has produced pretty acceptable alpha value varying between 0.878 and 0.935. Hair et al. (1998) advocates that if the items are articulated for the research context, the alpha value of 0.60 is acceptable. The values of alpha coefficient have been exhibited in Table 2. The scores of mean and standard deviation have also been presented in Table 2.

Dimension	Mean	S. D.	Alpha	n. of items
Women empowerment	3.44	.641	0.878	18
Education level	3.59	0.787	0.886	15
Unemployment rate & job opp.	3.51	0.595	0.898	13
Work environment	3.62	0.569	0.935	10
Occupying top positions	3.22	0.878	0.897	5
overall	3.476	0.694	0.8988	61

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive and reliability analysis

The scores of mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha are summarized in the following table (Table 2). The table also displays the number of items used for measuring the mean, standard deviation and alpha scores of each dimension. According to Table 2, the values of Cronbach's alpha for overall Women empowerment measures are 0.8988 respectively. Cronbach's alpha for education level is 0.886. creating safe and attractive work environment (0.935) has the highest. The statistics in Table 2 further show that the mean

scores of all dimensions are almost in between 3.2 to 3.6. Work environment (Mean: 3.62, SD: 0.56) has the highest mean score among empowerment dimensions. The findings also demonstrate the upper medium level of the role of Saudi Arabia' vision in women empowerment since the mean scores are 3.4.

3.2. Correlations statement

Pearson correlations have been tested in order to determine the typical relationship among variables under investigation. The result of Pearson correlation on each dimensions of the study are displayed in the table below. As shown in Table, Pearson correlations established 61 correlations altogether of which all of them are positive. And all of the correlations values were high as they ranged (0.518** - 0.835**) for the first-dimension Women Empowerment. As for the second-dimension Women Educational Level they ranged (0.147* - 0.850**) as for the third one decrease unemployment rate by creating jobs they ranged (0.720** - 0.770). And for Creating attractive work environment they ranged fourth axis "Creating an attractive and safe work environment" they ranged (0.241* - 0.791**). While for the fifth dimension "Recruit females in top positions" they ranged (0.706* - 0.776**). This indicates the availability of a high degree of internal consistency validity for the questionnaire dimensions' items.

3.3 Result of hypotheses testing

To test the hypothesis 1.1 Is there a negative relationship between the unemployment rate and women participating in the labor market in Saudi Arabia? Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both Unemployment rate and women participation in the labor market were calculated. The results of the analysis were as shown in the following table. Table (4-6) results suggest the presence of a (positive) statistically significant correlation between Unemployment rate and women participation in the labor market in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from the perspective of the sample with a (0.486**) correlation coefficient.

Table (4-6): The results of Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score

Total score for Unemployment rate	Total score for women participation in the labor market	
	correlation coefficient	Statistical significance
	0.486**	.000

* Correlation significant at 0.05 level of significance

To test the second hypothesis Is there a relationship between increasing numbers of women participating in top positions with women empowerment?. To answer this question, Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both the numbers of women participating in top positions and women empowerment, The results of the analysis were as shown in the following table:

Table (4-7): The results of Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both measurement axes

Total score for women participating in top positions	Total score for women empowerment	
	correlation coefficient	Statistical significance
	0.899**	.000

* Correlation significant at 0.05 level of significance.

Table (4-7) results suggest the presence of a (positive) statistically significant correlation between increasing numbers of women participating in top positions with women empowerment from the perspective of the sample with a (0.899**) correlation coefficient.

To test the third hypothesis is there a relationship between women's educational level and the proportion of women who participate in the labor market, Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both women's educational level and the proportion of women who participate in the labor market, The results of the analysis were as shown in the following table. Table (4-8) results suggest the presence of a (positive) statistically significant correlation between women's educational level and the proportion of women who participate in the labor market from the perspective of the sample with a (0.698**) correlation coefficient.

Table (4-8): The results of Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both measurement axes

	Total score for the proportion of women who participate in the labor market	
Total score for women's educational level	correlation coefficient	Statistical significance
	0.698**	.000

* Correlation significant at 0.05 level of significance.

The forth hypothesis (Is there a relationship between providing an appropriate work environment and the proportion of women participating in the labor market) has been tested by Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both providing an appropriate work environment and the proportion of women participating in the labor market, The results of the analysis were as shown in the following table:

Table (4-9): The results of Pearson correlation coefficient between the total score for both measurement axes

	Total score for the proportion of women who participate in the labor market	
Total score for providing an appropriate work environment	correlation coefficient	Statistical significance
	0.207**	.038

Table (4-9) results suggest the presence of a (positive) statistically significant correlation between providing an appropriate work environment and the proportion of women participating in the labor market from the perspective of the sample with a (0.207*) correlation coefficient.

4. Discussion

The mean scores of overall study dimensions (Table 2) suggest that the perception level regarding of the role of Saudi Arabia 2030' vision in women empowerment is High, which indicates that the vision have given greater importance to Women Empowerment. For Hypothesis 1, the result of correlation coefficient indicates a positive impact in decreasing the unemployment rate to the number of women who participate in the labor market. The significant level between this two variable is 0.000, which indicates that the relationship between the variables is highly significant. The degree of “decreasing the Unemployment Rate of Saudis by creating job opportunities” was a “high” degree from the perspective of the sample. The item number (8) (My organization hires more short-term female workers) ranked first with a mean reached (4.17) and a standard deviation reached (0.965). Following it, the item number (3) (My organization targets talented female) ranked second with a mean reached

(4.08) and a standard deviation reached (1.012). While the item number (11) (In my organization, we will have a new approach to women workforce planning and talent management) ranked last with a mean reached (3.26) and a standard deviation reached (1.284). The relationship between women who participate in top position and women empowerment is also tested which exposed a (positive) statistically significant correlation between increasing numbers of women participating in top positions with women empowerment from the perspective of the sample with a (0.899**) correlation coefficient. The degree of “the extent of creation of an attractive and safe work environment” was a “high” degree from the perspective of the sample. The item number (3) (My organization provides suitable transportation for women) ranked first with a mean reached (4.59) and a standard deviation reached (0.854). Following it, the item number (8) (My organization provides a flexible work time for all employees) ranked second with a mean reached (3.90) and a standard deviation reached (1.159). While the item number (2) (My organization promotes tele working and encouraging women to work at home) ranked last with a mean reached (2.40).

Recommendations

This report has identified six clusters of interventions that, with the appropriate level of investment, can increase the women empowerment. However, for the investment to bear fruit it must be backed by political commitment and leadership, and the resources and support of many players including governments, development partners, communities and women themselves. The need to ensure that women are well represented in jobs in different sectors. Women should be allowed to hold executive positions or jobs in companies and institutions according to their experience and skills. Institutions and companies must provide leadership opportunities and management of other staff for women. Encouraging women to complete postgraduate studies to gain greater awareness and knowledge of administrative and professional methods and strategies. The need to rehabilitate and re-prepare existing women employees with the skills they need to take leadership.

Conclusion and further study:

This study exam in the role of Saudi Arabia' 2030 vision in women empowerment by testing several hypothesis and been significantly verified. Women empowerment is getting much attention from both the individuals and organizations at present Thus, future research can be conducted in other Saudi professional environments, fields and communities; and

compare their results with the results of the present study. Conduct further studies aimed at identifying the main obstacles to women's professional empowerment in private and government companies in Saudi Arabia and how to overcome them. Future research could consider whether women entrepreneurs have a better work/life balance compared to women in traditional corporate leadership roles in similar-sized organizations.

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