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CONSUMER

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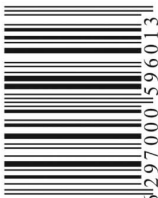
A focus on Scottish market



IT'S HER WORLD

A step ahead of the global 'bringing-more-women-to-workforce' debate, the UAE is making efforts to craft them into decision-makers and to have more of them in boardrooms

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INTERVIEW

Educating women to succeed

Anjum Malik, co-founder and Managing Partner of the Alhambra-US Chamber of Commerce, has dedicated 35 years of her life to the field of education and business. She believes in the power of education and through her work she desires to uplift the stature of the women in the society. **Sunaina Rana** writes

The women's role in giving an impetus to economy leaves much to be desired. Despite comprising 41 percent of the population of the GCC, women reportedly hold 16 percent share in the entire workforce. Boston Consulting Group estimates that women in the MENA region hold up to US\$500 billion, whereas MEED estimates the wealth held by women in the Gulf region is up to US\$385 billion.

Going by these figures one can well imagine what potential the women community holds. If they get more opportunities and their participation increases, it can translate into better revenues and betterment of society at large. However, to make this a reality, the lack of professional training and awareness continues to be two major impediments.

The UAE launched a five-year

plan to develop the role of women and find future women leaders. Other than this, other countries in the Gulf like Qatar and Kuwait have business forums for women, which enable and guide the young entrepreneurs to succeed and contribute to the economy of the respective country. Also, in September 2011, Saudi Arabia issued to put in place an outline for generating more employment opportunities for women in education.

One such recently-held forum 'Women In Leadership' primarily focused on advancing women's participation in the workforce and motivating them to increase their business opportunities and, thus, playing their part in boosting the economy.

During the forum, **Emirates Business** talks to one of the key speakers, Anjum Malik, Co-founder and Managing Partner of



Women's participation in legislatures, corporate boards, and peace negotiations can affect policy choices and make institutions more representative and inclusive

the Alhambra-US Chamber of Commerce that facilitates international exchange and commerce in the spheres of education and business. She is also the Co-founder and Vice-President of House of Tutors Learning Centers, US (an international education solution institute).

Having a global professional experience of over 35 years, Malik is in the fields of international education, educational consulting, business development, entrepreneurial management and conference planning, both in the US and globally.

Malik's belief in the power of education to improve society is evident in all aspects of her professional life. The organisations she has created and managed have enhanced the global competence of more than 150,000 students and hundreds of professionals.

**EXCERPTS FROM
THE INTERVIEW:**

What are the challenges you have witnessed women facing globally?

One of the biggest challenges for women of the region is also a challenge for women globally — maintaining balance between work and personal life. The country's economic and cultural boom has created opportunities.

With opportunities, there has been a cultural shift and we have seen willingness to accept the best candidate for a position independent of gender. The number of women in the workplace has increased along with the sectors that are open to including them.

However, as woman's presence in the workplace is finding greater acceptance, she is still called upon to shoulder the vast majority of domestic duties. This challenge combines with the other important impediments faced by women of the region: unequal pay, limited maternity leave, few quality part time jobs and the lack of upward mobility.

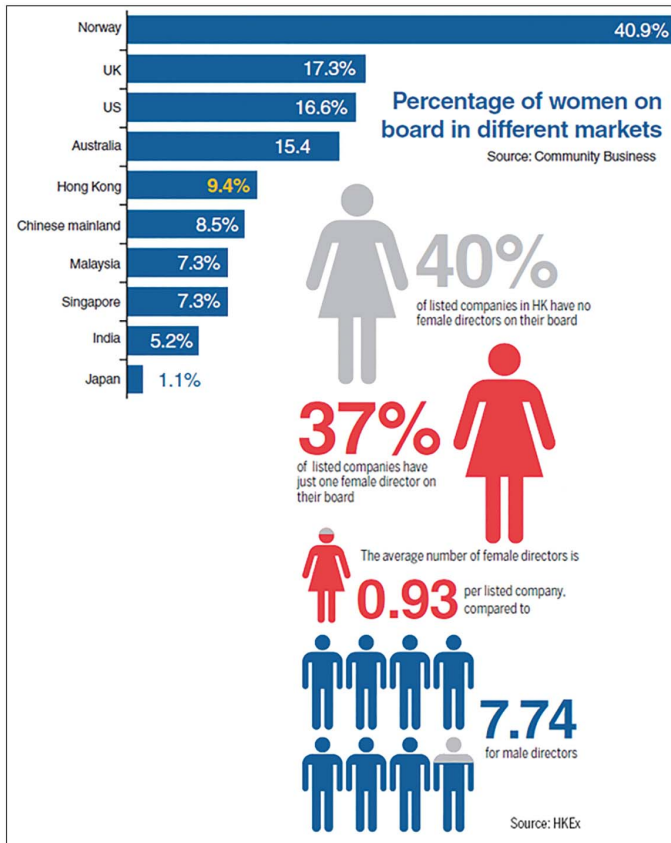
This matrix of inequality may take shape uniquely in each country due to specific cultural and economic realities of the local environment but it is common to women everywhere. All of these factors work together to limit the contribution women can make; the very real and significant loss caused by that limitation is hurting the global community.

At the leadership level, what has been your contribution to improve the status of women at work places?

The organisations I lead have



Anjum Malik, co-founder and Managing Partner of the Alhambra-US Chamber of Commerce



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Illustrious Career

Malik consults and trains on a wide variety of issues related to international education, such as accreditation, leadership and professional development at universities all across the MENA region, China and India; empowering women through International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education (IECHE) conferences in Riyadh, Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) Conference in Malaysia, franchising and strategic planning at Center of Learning Innovations and Customised Knowledge Solutions (CLICKS) Dubai Conference, Gulf Education Conferences in London, and at various other institutions.

She also developed an innovative approach to pre-departure training for international students, parts of which have been adopted by universities around the US.

helped women strengthen the tools they need to compete and thrive in the workplace. From facilitating English as the second language studies, creating academic opportunities to study in the US, and empowering educational institutions in the MENA region, I have found ways to use my position to increase the ability of both students as well as professional women to claim the status they have earned and deserve. Wherever possible, I have also built relationships with other women as a friend, a partner or a mentor.

What are the major reasons behind gender inequality? Can we attain parity in the coming future?

We have not achieved gender equality. Nowhere in the world have we achieved it. Equality will come from participation. Without participation, change will not occur.

How can women in business improving their future? At a very basic level, what are the changes that are required?

At a grass-root level, the most important thing we can do to help all women in business is to develop strong support networks with other professional, entrepreneurial, and business-minded women. It is especially important for more established and accomplished women to mentor those just entering the professional world.

In the UAE there have been a few regional level seminars, forums and conferences, for example the 'WIL' held in Abu Dhabi. Also, there are a lot of international seminars? How in your opinion are these events helping the budding entrepreneurs?

There are two ways in which these events really make a differ-

ence. First, they act as a forum for sharing best practices and new ideas which can be applied to careers. All of us constantly need inspiration and avenues to learn from the experience of others.

Each WIL has been an inspiration to me, a well-organised and enjoyable gathering where I can learn from and share with others.



Malik with dignitaries at the World Affairs Gala – Washington, 2015

Second, they act as a venue for women to make connections and build their professional networks, especially with other women entrepreneurs.

Initially, I would use conferences and seminars (whether as a speaker or participant) as an opportunity to meet other women and build my network. Over time, while forums such as WIL continue to be a terrific boost to my network, they now have also become an excellent forum for conducting business.

The number of men we see on senior management positions indicate that men are considered better leaders than women. Do you agree?

The qualities required for leadership are not gender specific. Great leaders never forget they, too, are a member of the group they are leading. Respect, inclusion, fairness, courage, and passion are the qualities that I admire and I have found in my mentors.

Each of my mentors has walked along with me as I worked



We have a duty to pass on our wisdom and experience to younger women, in hopes that, by using it, they may have the strength and knowledge they need to succeed

to advance myself personally and professionally. They were able to guide and support me through sharing their experience and knowledge, and by providing me with encouragement and wisdom.

How can women at higher positions help the ones who are willing to break preconception and think beyond the set line and definitions of success?

I believe that mentorship is crucial here. We have a duty to pass on our wisdom and experience to younger women, with a hope that, by using it, they may have the strength and knowledge they need to succeed.

For me, leading others through mentoring has been both a personally rewarding and a professionally effective means to develop myself. I would highly recommend it to everyone.

Are you doing something to contribute to the women community, especially those who are looking for that extra motivation,

to make it big in their careers like you did?

I will continue to mentor the students who come to the US to study English at our institute. They are often at a crucial stage in their lives as they are learning to negotiate between the cultural worlds of their home countries and the US, and at the same time transition from the academic world of their previous studies into the world of their current pursuit.

It is a dynamic period and working with them is exciting, challenging and rewarding. Over the course of my career, I have done all in my power to advance the placement of thousands of students into their next academic program and/or their first position in the workforce.

The mentoring of these students provides me with the personal knowledge and understanding I need to create a unique and positive image of them for my referrals. I know from the feedback received, this image I have conveyed of them to academic administrators or employers both supports their pursuits and motivates them.

We are literally opening doors for our students and empowering them to walk through them with confidence.

Do you think boardroom quota is a wise decision?

Yes, until diversity is established. The change cannot come and experience cannot be acquired without participation.

There are qualified women who continue to be overlooked based on gender bias and their exclusion hurts all of us.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released the 'No Ceilings: The Full Participation Report' this year and their findings (and many others) support my opinion. Board participation is an important pathway to greater inclusion, especially at the decision-making level. Women deserve access, and we have the knowledge and the skills to handle the role. ■