Women's Economic Empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa

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Jane Kinninmont

Fantastic, well I think I will bring in any questions or comments from the floor and we do have roving mikes if we could bring one to the lady in the middle at the back. And we'll take questions one at a time.

Question 1

Hi, thank you so much, it was fascinating to hear more about the programme. I was working recently in Bangladesh with female entrepreneurs but in a very rural community and their women's freedom and movement is incredibly limited so just leaving the house on a daily basis within the community, let alone travelling to the nearest city, sort of five kilometres away, was a real issue for those women. So, in terms of accessing something like your programme as it’s rolling out, are you thinking more about how to target women who do have less freedom and movement and perhaps less access to these programmes, City Life?

Jane Kinninmont

Thank you. Could I ask you to briefly introduce yourself?

Question 1

Yeah sure, so my name is Vix Anderton, I work as a freelance women’s rights consultant I guess.

Dina Habib Powell

Great, thank you for the question. Yes, we definitely have thought about feeders to 10,000 Women and so we’ve done a number of investments with women who have had microfinance, access to microfinance and are trying to grow their businesses to become to scale, to enter 10,000 Women. We’ve done that in Peru, in a partnership with the IDB, Louise Moreno, the president of IDB. Their work with the microfinance institution, Unibanco, and women who had accessed small loans and were showing a path to actually growing their businesses, got special training that fed into becoming a 10,000 Women participant ultimately.

There we’ve done about 700 women in Peru. Similarly, in India, we work with a wonderful organization, Saiwa, which is a self-help organization that has co-ops of thousands and thousands of women who are more at the level where they’re just barely learning entrepreneurship and starting to bring income home. And that has become a major feeder for the 10,000 Women programme in India. So where we can support at any level, we’ve really been trying to do that.

Jane Kinninmont

Thank you.
Dina Habib Powell
Oh sorry.

Jane Kinninmont
No I'm sorry.

Dina Habib Powell
No you're in charge.

Jane Kinninmont
With this gentleman here at the front and then we'll move over here.

Question 2
Thank you very much for a very impressive presentation, a lot of programmes about which I didn't know much until I came here. I am the media attaché of the Embassy of the Sudan and I hope that when this programme is enlarged, it will include our country too.

My comment is, we have seen women from North Africa and the Middle East carrying their babies, being swallowed in the Mediterranean, hoping to reach the prosperity of the developed world. So women can’t be divorced from the rest of the society in the world and maybe a larger impact could be with looking at the whole international financial system and the way it can help poorer countries. But thank you very much for this initiative and I hope it will succeed and expand, thank you.

Dina Habib Powell
Thank you. Thank you. Well I do think that we're at a tipping point moment where this issue, even in 20 years, has gone from a few people caring about it and recognizing it and even it's gone from being only a justice issue or human rights issue, which it very much is, to suddenly becoming smart economics.

And I think when the debate changes to that issue, you really can’t argue with it, because then suddenly as an integrated world, we have to care about the impact of women having resources and becoming economically independent and I think that we’re starting to see more and more of that. And we actually, I'm hopeful, we're looking at Sudan now, some local banks have actually applied for the facility and so there may be a way for us to develop a new programme there with this new partnership. Thank you for your question.

Jane Kinninmont
Over here please. Perfect. Oh just in front of you. Sorry, we'll come back to you straight afterwards.
Question 3

Thank you. Mina Al-Oraibi, Asharq Alawsat Newspaper. I had two questions for you. The first was, when you choose the women, is it mainly through local partners? How is it actually done? And what it, so to speak, you know that this is going to be a success story or is it something you’re struggling that you think if we just give them that push. So, just the criteria of choosing the women?

I guess the second point is related to Middle East and North Africa, is that you’re Goldman Sachs so people are very suspicious sometimes of financial big names and so forth, and say, ‘Okay, well where’s the axe that they want to grind?’ especially if you’re looking at the Arab world. So, how do you deal with that?

Dina Habib Powell

Thanks Mina, it’s nice to see you. Well I think on the first question is, in every country you really have the local education partner lead on the recruitment and we do a number of things. In Rwanda we mainly advertise on the radio. In Egypt, newspaper and on TV. So we really try to get a very large pool of applicants and then we see if they even meet the basic criteria for interview. And then every single woman is interviewed by a selection panel made up of the academic institution, usually someone from Goldman Sachs and then local business people so that they feel a vested interest in the future success of this individual, this business owner.

So, it’s very rigorous and the idea behind it isn’t necessarily to help a woman start a business or give a struggling woman a boost, it’s really focused on those women who certainly need a boost but can create more jobs and growth, who can actually impact the society even more substantially. And it’s interesting because we have this programme in Afghanistan, in China, in Brazil, a very diverse set of countries, and we have I think a very good selection method now. Many of whom are extremely under-served, it doesn’t mean they’re not under-served but it’s a real business model, the woman has passion, she has a desire for growth, not every business person has a desire to grow. This is a programme meant for growth.

And to your second question, which I get a lot, why is Goldman Sachs making this investment? I guess, first I’ll quote my boss, our CEO, who often says that, ‘The most important asset we have are our people’. And people now, you hear this all the time I’m sure as you hear people talk about the millennial generation, really in order to recruit and retain the best people, companies have to have these kinds of initiatives which you hope your day job, in our case is growing global markets, but we also are using our resources to the fullest extent possible to really drive and impact.

We have hundreds of people on a waiting list right now to be mentors to the 10,000 women and we have a US and UK version, which I should probably mention, called 10,000 Small Businesses, and there people really want to get involved, they want to help these entrepreneurs reach their goals especially some of the social enterprises that are in our programme.
The other thing I would just say is, we went through a tough period these last few years, and there was never a view that we should pat ourselves on the back, you know ‘Oh we’re helping people, we’re helping women.’ We just wanted the results to speak for themselves and that took time. 10,000 was a big number but when we suddenly started to have hundreds of women and a few hundred in each country, and they could really speak for themselves and say, ‘This programme transformed my business. Here’s how many jobs I created.’ That was the best messaging because we think results and execution are critical so you never see someone from Goldman Sachs talking about it, it’s really the ambassadors for the programme are the graduates themselves.

Jane Kinninmont

Thank you. Gentleman behind you.

Question 4

Thank you. I’m a member of Chatham House. I’m also involved in a number of financial institutions in the Middle East including in Saudi Arabia. I was quite curious to hear if you’ve had any experience with Saudi Arabia and how you crack that nut there which is very difficult but also hugely important. You see of course education amongst women is rising significantly in the recent years but women involved in business and in the world of finance in particular is still at a very low level?

Dina Habib Powell

Very much. I will say we have a wonderful partner in Dar Al-Hekma College, a women’s college in Jeddah, run by an extraordinary educator, Dr Abidin. And we’ve had a long partnership there, and in fact a couple of years ago our CEO went and spoke at that college and his takeaway from these students was every one of them could work at Goldman Sachs. I mean they were grilling him on derivatives and the cost of capital and he came away so impressed. And in fact a number of our leaders in the Middle East are female leaders in our business.

I think that’s an untold story. I know many – Mina’s nodding – you know there’s an untold story of just the force that women are in finance in the region, in business. It’s not enough numbers yet, we certainly have to have more but I do think that’s an untold story of the region. Look at Lubna Olayan, Hutham Olayan, they’re really models for so many business leaders, men and women around the world, given their success.

Jane Kinninmont

Thank you. Over here please, in the middle. Heba.

Question 5

Hi, thank you Dina for this presentation. My name is Heba, I’m from Chatham House. I have many questions for you but I’ll just ask two.
Dina Habib Powell
Where you from originally?

Question 5
I'm from Jordan originally. I want to ask how many businesses or these women went to the formal sector or like stayed in the informal sector and what type of businesses were the majority out of these? Thank you.

Dina Habib Powell
Sure. We actually have a report from Babson, some of you picked up, which features some of the women. I would say most in the formal sector because we do require a certain number of employees and a certain level of revenue, which is different based on country economy size but we do have some requirements. And I would say that it’s unbelievably diverse: technology companies, catering companies, publishing companies, commercial cleaning companies.

The one really interesting surprise that we found, we worried that if in one cohort, because these are cohorts of 30 and 40 business women, we thought they might compete with each other if they were in the same industry and we weren’t quite sure how to solve for that. And we found the exact opposite happened. Now our graduates are reporting that 75 per cent of them work with each other, give each other business. So it’s even created a global marketplace because they have an affinity for each other, they know they’ve gone through the programme.

So, it’s an extraordinarily diverse set of businesses and it’s creating something that didn’t exist before, which is a girls’ club. Many of us are familiar with the boys’ club. There wasn’t a girls’ club within these countries or certainly working together outside the countries as well.

Jane Kinninmont
And on the informal versus formal sector choice, I mean are you able to reach out to women that are working in unregistered businesses, doing things that are below the radar, because I know somewhere like Egypt that’s just a huge, huge part of the economy?

Dina Habib Powell
Interestingly, a number of our businesses employ those women that are in the informal sector. So, in Egypt we have a woman named Rasha, who works with a number of actually Sudanese who are in Egypt and helps train them to make handicrafts. And so she’s helping them get trained, many of them start tiny micro-enterprises after that. In India we have a very robust programme which our graduates again are training women in Afghanistan. So the informal is reached through the leadership of these female graduates of the programme.
Jane Kinninmont

Fantastic. We have another question just here.

**Question 6**

Hi, my name’s Gillian from UCL. I was wondering you’ve mentioned, you talked about the Middle East, and then you’ve mentioned China, India, Afghanistan. How do you prioritize where to go in the world? There’s so much need out there.

Dina Habib Powell

There is and again we’re one institution and originally, with our first investment in 10,000 Women, which was the largest ever at the time, it was $100 million over five years to build the capacity of these institutions to teach entrepreneurship and make the links to capital and technical assistance, and then also to actually provide the scholarships for 10,000 women.

And what we did was, we had a business plan that showed that 80 per cent of our investment would be, in what we call, the BRICs and next 11 countries because obviously where there are Goldman Sachs’ offices, the people of that office can be very involved in mentoring. And then we made sure that 20 per cent were in countries where an incremental amount of investment, Afghanistan, Rwanda, would make a transformative difference and we’ve certainly seen that.

We work very closely, for example, with President Sirleaf Johnson in Liberia. Monrovia was not necessarily a place where we thought we would be able to invest initially and we have found that was an enormously impactful programme. One, because OPIC had actually made an investment to have a $30 million facility focused on female entrepreneurs and yet they had no pipeline of women that actually had the capacity and the training to even access that capital. So again another example of a public-private partnership, and she was very involved because, of course, she knew that she had to drive the economy by having female entrepreneurs.

**Question 7**

I’m Mohammed Almojel, member of Chatham House, senior advisor at Atlantic Pacific Capital and founder of Tamouh. My organization focuses on achievers in the Gulf and we have, without trying, 42 per cent of our members are women and I’m talking about the top one per cent of the one per cent. It was mind-boggling to see that, for me to realize that even though we put the minimum floor for women and we didn’t even need that.

My issue though is, what I’ve seen there, is a big gap in the middle. Definitely there’s a huge gap in the middle. However a big part of the gap, I don’t think cultural is a big factor hugely, I think it’s overblown but I think regulatory is always a major factor, regulatory restrictions in whatever country in the MENA region. And there is usually a lot of that is to be extracted there, such as from, you might have known them actually, Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid, the lobbying body in Saudi which has done fantastically in Saudi. Do you
everywhere the lobby is [indiscernible] or do you just screen countries by their regulatory environment and avoid them? How do you manage that?

**Dina Habib Powell**

Well, we are the private sector, we respect that role. We’re not a government, we’re not an advocacy organization. I think we only come to countries where we’re invited obviously to work and I think because of our approach, which is very much a partnership with the government, with the local academic institutions, with the local banks, it’s well received.

What I think speaks for itself is, if a country doesn’t invite us and doesn’t value this proposition, they’re really missing a lot and so we have seen countries that initially we weren’t invested in seek us out and say, ‘Okay we really would like you to have a 10,000 Women programme here, what can we do to incentivize you to come?’ And that’s where I think we’re a change agent because then it really does focus on female entrepreneurs in that country.

One of our greatest partners in a very challenging country is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Nigeria, who’s the finance minister there, and she was a very senior official of the World Bank for many years. She’s actually taken the platform of 10,000 Women and made it the foundation of a major government programme to spur entrepreneurship for men and women throughout the country. So it’s also... we’re very happy when people want to snag our model and scale it themselves and turn it into a government programme because we obviously think, we have no pride of authorship, we think that’s the best thing that can happen.

I was just in Abu Dhabi. I’ll tell you another story there. And I was very impressed with so many of the women that I met in journalism, in technology companies, in finance, and I really did have a sense that there was great desire to partner and to do what your organization is doing, which is really highlight the role of women in the region.

**Jane Kinninmont**

I wonder if we could come back to you and ask you what do you think is the missing regulations? What are these regulatory issues that are still a barrier?

**Question 7**

Again I don’t want to focus on any specific country in any specific case, but if you look at women in the workplace in Saudi for example, Saudi women employment has quadrupled in the past few years. And that’s because of, partly because of Khadijah Bint Khwaylid, the Lobbying Centre, which actually focused in the government putting their regulation for women to be cashiers, to work outside of the teaching or nursing.

Again, I think it’s just a matter of there’s a lot of blind spots for each government in each country. And I’m not saying they’re doing it. Rarely would you find a government, I mean some, but rarely you’d find a government that would intentionally have something affect their economy negatively because it’s just part of stability. But the issue is there is usually a lot of huge bureaucracies are unable to move and they need someone to point the finger
at the problem and tell them to do this. And in the case of Saudi, was just loosening up the
women work permits, whether [indiscernible] or anything else. In many countries, other
things, and given your model of having local partners, you have the international
perspectives, seeing what worked here. [Indiscernible] I see a fund that invest in a
country and then takes it’s model and invest it with another country and they extract a lot
of value there.

I can’t think of anyone who’s more suited to do that, than you guys because again you see
what worked in Egypt, you think this aspect can help Sudan a lot just by changing the
regulation, and then I’m not saying pushing the country aggressively or being in the
media or acting as if you’re Amnesty International, by just working with the government
to resolve these issues. And I think that’s where you can add a lot more value in addition
to the amazing work you’re doing.

Jane Kinnimont

Thank you. And that centre you mentioned in Saudi does fascinating work, I hope we can
bring their CEO to talk here some time, because that’s one of the very impressive women
from the region. Let’s take another question. Over here please.

Question 8

Hi, I’m Tania, from Oxford. I was just wondering, 10,000 Women means 10,000 very
personal stories and I wonder what the most surprising success story is that you’ve come
across on your work on the programme.

Dina Habib Powell

Ah, there’s so many. I think of a woman in our cohort in Lagos, Nigeria, [indiscernible],
who was in the very first cohort and I met her in her kitchen in her house. Her sister had
encouraged her to start a small catering company because she made amazing moinmoin,
the local very, very famous meal, and she said okay she’ll try. So she started making it for
friends and family and suddenly there was real interest and suddenly she was getting
clients. And she was taking her proceeds and putting it in a shoebox and had no sense of a
financial system. Her sister heard about 10,000 Women on the radio, she said, ‘This is the
programme for you.’ I met her on her first week and saw her and she was very nervous.

Today she owns three restaurants in Lagos, she provides the main school lunch
programme for her region. She’s come to the United States at the invitation of President
Obama and has met Secretary Clinton, just really extraordinary and you see this seed
develop and be an amazing story that she might one day run for office.

To your point, you actually see a lot more happening than just the business growth and
the leader she is. She now has a mentoring programme for 300 women in the informal
sector there. These are stories especially the ones where I’ve met them from the very
beginning and it’s like she’s unrecognizable to me now with the confidence that she has
gained in the programme.
An extraordinary woman in China who had an app, a comic app, that again she had no idea what she had on her hands and had a small business and we even encouraged her to get a patent for it. It’s going to be one of the most significant apps in China this year. All kind of diverse and range but it’s the same spirit and passion and almost the greatest gift I think they get in the programme is that confidence to reach their potential that they didn’t think they had otherwise.

**Question 9**

Hi, my name is Haifa from the Embassy of Bahrain. I just was wondering if you were working at all with any refugee agencies, etc., as there are so many now?

**Dina Habib Powell**

You know a friend of ours, David Miliband, who now runs the International Rescue Commission, we have a very strong programme with him. We’ve been supporters and a number of people from Goldman Sachs have been on the board. Obviously David would tell you that something like 90 per cent of the refugees of the world are women and girls and so, he has developed a number of programmes within the camps to teach entrepreneurship skills that we’ve supported.

And we’ve also worked with Women for Women International, which is a great organization. We’ve even done some programmes in the Congo for example with them and tried to see if this was a model that we could replicate in very challenging places.

**Question 10**

Frances Guy. I was previously a representative of UN Women in Iraq. I would like to make a plea that you include Iraq in this because arguably right now they have the lowest percentage of women working outside the home than anywhere in the Middle East region. And what we discovered in trying to encourage entrepreneurship was that women sometimes had access to capital but through the dowries and therefore were very reluctant to touch it.

So I was very pleased to hear you saying that capital was part of it because I came here with a question of the idea that you could create maybe a fund based on dowries, but obviously you’ve gone beyond that, so thank you. And in rolling it forward, will it only be in countries that IFC are working in or would it be possible for somewhere like Iraq to be part of it?

**Dina Habib Powell**

Well Iraq was actually in our first round in a sense that at the very beginning in Egypt we hosted a regional cohort and we had a number of Iraqi business women in it and we just re-launched that actually in a partnership with the State Department where we had a number of Iraqi women come for leadership training. So we completely agree that is a priority country and all of us should do everything we can. And of course, I think it’s a particularly sad case in Iraq given the long history or educated and strong women in the country that, it’s not a country where this should be a difficult thing to do, and yet what’s
happening on the ground makes it so difficult. So I think we'll continue to look for opportunities there.

**Jane Kinninmont**

And to follow on from that, how do you choose which countries you include in this?

**Dina Habib Powell**

Well with 10,000 Women I was telling you that we did the 80 per cent BRICs and next 11 and then the 20 per cent countries that were really challenging, we bring them to our board and we go through either the right academic partners. You have to have strong partners to implement the programme so countries where you just can’t find someone to work with as much as you want to work there, becomes very challenging. But the IFC is certainly open, they happen to be in most countries, but they’re always trying to grow their bank base, the local banks, in order to find new relationships, the banks that are interested in these kind of development investment opportunities, I guess I would call them.

**Question 11**

Lizzie Walker, St Andrews. I think you said that the programme’s been running since 2008 and I was just wondering how you’ve seen the challenges facing female entrepreneurs, how these have changed over a seven-year period?

**Dina Habib Powell**

You know there are daunting challenges facing female entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurs in most of the countries where we're working, even if they’re the primary breadwinner, even if they have a very successful business, can only do all that they need to do for their business once they’ve taken care of their duties at home. So, they’re still in charge of the family, of the children, of the home, and so they’re just extraordinary heroes that they are able to manage all of that and run a business full time and never sleep. And so I think that just getting the support they need at home is a very big challenge.

Capital has been a challenge that you really can’t grow your business ultimately without a level of working and growth capital and we hope we’ve addressed that at least at stage one with this new model.

And then I think employee training and getting the right talent is something that we consistently hear because when you’re a small business you don’t necessarily have a training division and it’s hard to find good talent. And one of the things that we’ve seen with a lot of these entrepreneurs is they become a place that people want to work. So a woman, Divya, that we work with that took over her father’s label printing business, a very good business in Hyderabad and what we saw was that she was the first to provide maternity leave in the entire region to her employees and that made it possible for female employees to work with her and still have children and care for their babies for those initial critical weeks.
And so she suddenly became one of the best places to work and was a model for other businesses. Suddenly her male competitors were saying, ‘Wait a minute, you’re getting really good talent over there, maybe we should change our policies and meet your policies.’ And so, that’s what happens in a marketplace. We all sort of steal each other’s best ideas and best people and that was so smart of her. All the male employees were horrified at it and her father questioned it, and yet it proved to be a really smart business principle.

**Jane Kinninmont**

On this issue about the family, I see that in the Arab world, many women prefer to work in the public sector because you can have manageable hours, you can get home to see your kids whereas if you’re running your own business, maternity leave, flexible hours and so on are all very tricky. How do the women that you’re working with balance this and do you find that some of them are dropping out of business as they have families?

**Dina Habib Powell**

I think that’s a worldwide issue.

**Jane Kinninmont**

It is absolutely, absolutely.

**Dina Habib Powell**

Obviously again, not just in the region, I mean just to give you a clear example of that, even at Goldman Sachs, we lament how few women we have and how few women are in the financial sector and we do all kinds of things to encourage more women to stay but it’s very hard to have a family and have a job.

We just piloted a new project called The Returnship Programme which actually invites women back after being out of work for eight to 10 years and it just helps re-integrate them into the firm. Whether or not they may stay permanently but just what’s happened in technology, what’s happened in the latest market trends, what’s it like just to be back at work, and that’s been actually a very successful programme. We were very proud that Christine Lagarde highlighted that programme recently at her IMF Conference around things that the corporate sector could do to encourage the retention of female employees. So, I actually think that’s a challenge that we’re all facing. Sometimes you can learn from the businesswomen what techniques they’ve used.

**Jane Kinninmont**

Do we have further questions from the floor? We come back to Heather.

**Question 12**

Can I ask you what’s next for 10,000 Women initiative? Do you have another milestone that you want to reach?
Dina Habib Powell

Well we need to reach the 100,000, the partnership we’ve just started with the World Bank, and that you know we hope will execute over the next few years. And all the time, we have these different opportunities that we’re very proud of with other co-investments that come our way. I think China, you know there’s such a huge market and such a huge opportunity.

I was referencing the programme, we’ve just decided to do the programme again in the Middle East, it’s an exchange programme actually with the State Department where we’ve, this year we’ve piloted, we brought a woman from every country in the region and it was a really interesting leadership training when you actually had Iraqi women sitting with Lebanese women sitting with Syrian women, Egyptian women, and they are developing a very strong network obviously in the height of an extremely challenging time.

So I think the Middle East is certainly an area of great interest and focus for us and not just because I was born in Cairo. I don’t get to make those decisions myself, but because we see it as an enormous investment opportunity.

Jane Kinninmont

Thank you. We have a question over here.

Question 13

Hi, my name is Raji, I’m from an international development consultancy firm called Coffey. When you’ve got 10,000 women as a target, it’s a huge number, but still a drop in the ocean if you look at it globally. If you’re keen on transformative change, would it better to have that 10,000 focused in a few countries rather than spread it across, thinly across a number of countries?

Dina Habib Powell

Well you know we actually thought a lot about the number and what we wanted to do, because it was in a five-year programme, was a number that was meaningful, that you could really test this theory, but manageable. It’s a very high touch model and I think that’s part of why it worked. But the intention was never to stop at 10,000 and we just can’t rename it 100,000 now, too many people know it as 10,000. And I was giving the China example because Jack Ma actually said, ‘Why not a million women in China?’ And so, I think like all of these models, like microfinance has started in Bangladesh and it was in Bangladesh for many, many years before it went outside of Bangladesh.

I think the opportunity is for firms like ours to be a lab, an innovation lab, to test these kinds of models in different countries. I think if we’d just done it in Brazil and China, people would say, ‘Well those economies were growing anyway, of course it was going to work.’ Or, that particular set of circumstances aided those women, whereas now it’s hard to deny that if it can work in Afghanistan and China and Brazil, that gives you a lot more data that you feel strongly you could scale it, which is why I think the World Bank wanted
to co-invest with us to scale it. And I think we’ll continue to do that, we’ll continue to scale it globally.

**Question 14**

Thank you. My name’s Hugo Marino, I’m a student of political science at UCL.

**Dina Habib Powell**

One of our partners, UCL is, yes.

**Question 14**

Oh really, brilliant. It’s great to hear how much enthusiasm there is in this room for the programme. I was wondering if you have seen the opposite? Have you seen any hostility towards you or some of your women while you’re working?

**Dina Habib Powell**

Hostility? Surprisingly not. I think the only, not hostility, but there was some question why not men? Why not men in the programme? The 10,000 Women programme was very focused on outside of the United States and in more developing countries.

UCL is our partner in a programme we now have in the UK. We took this model of 10,000 Women and built a model called 10,000 Small Businesses which is so far in the United States and the UK. It was extraordinary the data that we saw that 80 per cent of every job created in the last 10 years in the United States was created by a small business owner. And so, any path to growth and job creation, which are much needed in the US and obviously here too, had to come from that sector and so we decided to deploy the same resources.

Here we’ve already worked with a 1,000 entrepreneurs so far, from Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and London. And Charlotte Keenan, who runs all of our work here in the region, is now undergoing a review of how we could scale the programme. I was briefing our management committee earlier today and I said, ‘You know the programme has out-performed in the UK, I’m going to get in trouble in the US.’ But partly because the US has had a focus on this issue, small business, there is a small business administration, etc. It’s such a ripe opportunity here, I think it’s still a bit nascent to start a business, to grow a business, certainly you know you’re gangbusters now but it was still an early investment and it’s exciting to see the focus now here, both by government and by private sector on encouraging a new generation of entrepreneurs.

So, maybe hostility that we weren’t getting to men fast enough, but we’re hoping to now.

**Jane Kinnimont**

And the question in the second row please.
**Question 15**

Pauline Kay, Member of Chatham House. How would you describe your relationship with United Nations proper and its various women’s groups/agencies? Sorry, women’s programmes?

**Dina Habib Powell**

Sure. Well Phumzile, who runs UN Women, is actually one of our top advisers on 10,000 Women, and we’re part of her private sector council. She was very smart. UN Women had never had a private sector council so she asked a number of CEOs, including ours, to join her and to really collectively think about what the private sector can do to advance the cause of women around the world. She’s been a breath of fresh air, you know she’s from South Africa, she’s just done such an incredible job.

We’ve really worked with the UN from the beginning in many different programmes. The UN World Fund Programme is a very important programme of ours as well. So, she’s critical to the work that we do and certainly peace-scale.

**Question 16**

Hi. My name’s Tom Blakesley, I’m from the British Council. You spoke a little bit about how you choose which countries you go into and you mentioned that sometimes there are countries that you’d like to work in but simply as a result of a lack of partners, or lack of access, you simply can’t. I was wondering what these countries are and what you see is the common barrier that stops you going into places that you’d really love to work in, but you just can’t quite get into them?

**Dina Habib Powell**

Yeah. Well you’re not going to get me in trouble. Do you know, actually, it’s maybe initially difficult to go in. So Liberia was an example, we really wanted to work in Liberia. The year that we were evaluating it was just challenging. The president was still building a civil society, was still building even any platform for those companies and countries that wanted to invest.

So, we started, I would say, probably 15 months later than we wanted to, it’s not like we gave up, we initially did a scan. Obviously there were very few women’s empowerment or female entrepreneurship networks there. Remember what a devastating 90 years it was for women in Liberia and thanks to her leadership, there’s finally wonderful girls’ education platforms, women entrepreneurship platforms, but they didn’t exist and so, as much as we wanted to go, we literally didn’t have a platform to work with. And then 15 months later, when OPIC made this investment, when there’s an organization CHF, began actually deploying their resources there and then we did work with the University in Monrovia. And finally we were able to bring together a set of partners so we could implement the programme.

So I can’t really think of... we really try hard until we find our hub developers, partners, but those would be the barriers initially.
**Jane Kinninmont**

Final question from me. One of the reasons I’ve been so happy that we’ve been able to host you here today is that I think this is the most positive story about the Middle East that we’ve been able to discuss for quite some time. Do you still encounter doubts or scepticism back in your headquarters or in the US generally when you’re trying to make a pitch or why should people be investing in women in this part of the world with all the difficulties and conflict afflicting it?

**Dina Habib Powell**

You know, the answers a little bit what I said before, my voice is not as strong as these extraordinary women themselves. And so when we host delegations from Egypt, from Jordan, recently from the Gulf countries, they do all the speaking for us. The people who interact with them come away so impressed, as you are, that they are really one of the only solutions to a more positive future. Women who can take control of their own economic future and economic independence is so critical and so now we’ve proven our case, both with numbers and then extraordinary stories of these women.

I don’t want to sugar-coat that it’s an extraordinarily challenging time, that doesn’t mean we can give up. I think that we have to keep investing in those individuals that are in the midst of it working so hard to make a difference. My mother’s and grandmother’s favourite quote was from a very famous Egyptian poet, Hafez Ibrahim, who said, ‘When you educate a woman, you create a nation.’ And I think that that spirit guides the work that we do and that many others do in the region and we’ll certainly keep doing it.

**Jane Kinninmont**

Thank you so much. I hope we can host some of these women here at Chatham House in the future, we’ll certainly be having further events on the Middle Eastern economies and women in the Middle East but for now, please join me in thanking Dina Powell very much.

**Dina Habib Powell**

Thank you so much.