



Pearl Initiative (PI) in collaboration with SABIC recently organized a **session on 'Gender and Anti Corruption: Developed with the B20 Integrity and Compliance Task Force'** for SMEs in Saudi Arabia

The workshop was led by Baker A Sindi, Senior Manager, Compliance Programs MEA at SABIC and Shatha Awdah Al-Shammari, Sr. Manager, New Hire Experience at SABIC and Pearl Initiative. The training looked at specific ways in which women may experience requests for bribes and corruption and how women can be part of the solution. The session was designed to provide women leaders and executives with platforms to discuss and identify tools to empower women to deal with corruption in business and at work.

The training focused on:

- Ways in which women experience corruption?
- Identify different types of compliance challenges
- Integrate gender-sensitive elements of an anti-bribery/corruption (ABC) program
- Techniques to detect, prevent and report corruption

The training session serves as a great resource for companies to train women employees within their company and look at developing policies and processes to support women employees. Participants engaged in discussions, role plays, case studies and shared their personal experiences and responses with the group.

Key Learnings & Insights:

- Women may face disproportionately high levels of corruption in every step of the economic cycle within the business world
- Survey by the United Nations Development Programme stated- 76% of women responded that corruption has prevented their access to public goods and services
- Even though several studies suggest that women tend to be less corrupt and that countries or companies with a greater number of women in decision-making positions perform better in terms of their corruption levels
- In many developing markets, some of the most active and successful entrepreneurs are women

- Women's ability to optimize their business can be hampered by a combination of corruption and discrimination
- Women are an **ever-growing segment of the business world** in every step of the economic cycle and are uniquely placed to have a positive impact.
- Gender equal top-management not only improves opportunities for women but also boosts the financial performance of a company along with increased transparency
- Corruption is just one type of challenge to integrity and ethics. Corruption can bring along reputational risk, legal risk, business and financial risk.
- As of 2021, countries in the MENA region are still struggling to achieve tangible results against corruption.
- Traditional men-favored business relationships and nepotism are some of the key barriers to women's equal participation in the workplace of the Gulf region
- With the growing number of indirect and direct cases of bribery and corruption in the business community, there is a strong need to create a robust anti-bribery program and pave the way for a strong corporate culture of advocacy
- Saudi Arabia has introduced laws that have enabled and empowered women, including launching initiatives to advance female empowerment and increase women's participation in the labor market.
- Empowerment of Saudi Arabian women is at the heart of the Kingdom's 'Vision 2030' reform program, which aims to increase women's overall participation from 22% to 30%. Participation of women in the labor force participation in Saudi Arabia has increased from 25.9% in 2020 to 37% in 2022.

Key Questions that were discussed during the session:

A. How do you put a gender focus on your anti-bribery program?

- A company's anti-bribery program can be enhanced by incorporating a gender-based focus
- Gather gender-based data when conducting risk analysis
- Find out about specific experiences and risks faced by women in your company and supply chain
- Ensure a robust whistleblower program where women feel safe to raise concerns
- Consider establishing an additional option of gender-specific response team in addition to other whistleblowing channels (i.e., women report to women)
- Anonymous reporting tools can be considered to help women feel more comfortable with reporting, especially in countries where retaliation by those accused may take place
- Create drivers of fair and ethical business throughout your organization and incentivize such behavior
- Provide women-only training, especially in countries where cultural norms foster gender segregation

B. How can organizations help other women fight corruption?

- Ensure a good tone of compliance and openness to hearing issues from your employees and colleagues

- Reward good and ethical behavior – thank women for bringing issues to your attention and make them feel appreciated
- Foster women’s networking and discussion groups where women can talk over their experiences
- Engage with local advocacy groups to find out what others are doing and have a greater impact
- Connect with business federations as many will have special sections established for ethics and compliance

C. How can I help other women fight corruption?

- Know what external whistleblowing channels are available to raise concerns by researching local channels at the start of a project
- Let women in your company know that they can always come to you to discuss concerns confidentially if they do not feel comfortable using an official whistleblowing channel
- Support women to draft written statements if necessary
- Work collectively with others to stand up against corruption
- Speak out on social media - #womenagainstcorruption
- Fear of Retaliation or the sense that there is no reward for doing so may stop women from reporting. It is important to have the appropriate internal channels to encourage women to raise concerns confidentially
- You can encourage women to talk to you in a safe, women-only environment
- Show appreciation for their courage to come forward
- Reassure women that they won’t lose their jobs by speaking up

The session provided women leaders from different organization the opportunity to discuss situations and challenges when tackling corruption and share insights on how they handled various situations.