



Pearl Initiative Brings Together Women Tech Founders to Reframe Investor Readiness Through Governance Beyond the Undercapitalised Ecosystem

- Pearl Initiative, in partnership with Sheraa, convened a governance-focused session with startups and investment leaders, centred on the experience of women tech founders.
- The women-only event spotlighted the role of early-stage governance in enhancing investment readiness and building resilient ventures.
- Women founders shared firsthand experiences navigating structural barriers, scaling challenges, and strategic decision-making.
- Discussions addressed the 1.2% venture capital funding gap in MENA region and explored governance as a proactive solution to investor bias and operational uncertainty.

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In the MENA region, where women-led startups receive only 1.2% of venture capital, Pearl Initiative's [Governance in Tech Programme](#) hosted a dynamic session, titled "Governance & Investor Readiness For Women-Led Tech Startups", aimed at equipping women founders with the tools to build resilient, investment-ready ventures. The event highlighted how early-stage governance can drive sustainable growth and help women entrepreneurs compete more effectively within the region's evolving tech landscape.

Held in partnership with The Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa), the event brought together participants from the region's startup and investment communities, including a curated group of women tech entrepreneurs for a private roundtable. The session explored the intersection of gender, governance, and growth, drawing attention to the structural barriers and implicit biases shaping the entrepreneurial landscape.

Abeer AlAmiri, Director of Ecosystem Development at Sheraa, stated: *"At Sheraa, building a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem means breaking barriers and equipping founders with the tools to succeed. This partnership with the Pearl Initiative celebrates the talent and resilience of women tech founders, while tackling the structural challenges they face. Today, 51% of the entrepreneurs we support are women, a reflection of their strength and potential. Women-led startups deliver strong results yet receive only a fraction of funding. By putting governance at the heart of the journey from day one, we affirm it as the cornerstone of credibility, investor confidence, and lasting success. Sheraa is proud to stand with women entrepreneurs in building ventures rooted in trust, resilience, and impact."*

The event was facilitated by members of Pearl Initiative team, with key sessions moderated by both internal experts and guest moderator Stephanie Richards, Founding Partner of BrightView Global, who brought investor-side insights and expertise in navigating access barriers for women founders.



Despite clear evidence of performance, women founders remain significantly underrepresented in the regional investment pipeline. Global studies have shown that startups with at least one female founder deliver better returns per dollar invested, and that female-led tech firms report up to 35% higher ROI compared to their male-led peers. Evidence from the MENA region points to similar outcomes, particularly in sectors such as HealthTech, EdTech, and FemTech. However, this performance often fails to translate into access or visibility. In April 2025 alone, startups led exclusively by women in the region raised less than \$500,000, while male-led teams secured 97% of total capital.

Ralph Choueiri, CEO of Pearl Initiative stated: *“We often talk about investment and visibility, but governance is the quiet infrastructure that makes growth possible. At Pearl Initiative, we aspire to provide businesses across the region with access to frameworks that support scale, trust, and sustainability. And for early-stage founders, it is a powerful source of stability. Hearing women founders’ stories and seeing their leadership this week clearly showed how critical it is to support these voices with real tools, not just encouragement”*.

Pearl Initiative’s event provided a collaborative space for women tech founders to share firsthand experiences of fundraising, scaling, and governance decisions that shaped their growth journeys. The session also examined how early-stage governance can act as a catalyst for credibility, clarity, and capital access, particularly for women-led startups. Discussions highlighted governance as a strategic tool, emphasising the importance of founder agreements, role clarity, and internal controls in building investor confidence and operational resilience.

The “Governance & Investor Readiness For Women-Led Tech Startups” convening reflects Pearl Initiative’s broader commitment to building inclusive business ecosystems where governance is recognised as a strategic enabler of growth tool rather than a barrier.

As the region’s startup ecosystem continues to mature, the message was clear: governance is not a post-growth luxury but a prerequisite for sustainable success. For women founders, it remains one of the few strategic tools fully within their control.

About Pearl Initiative

The Pearl Initiative is the Gulf region’s leading independent, non-profit organisation working to promote the business case for a corporate culture of accountability and transparency. Established in 2010 by regional business leaders in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Partnerships, the Pearl Initiative is the only private, non-profit Gulf business network to receive special consultative status from the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The Pearl Initiative runs a series of corporate governance related programmes, including Anti-Corruption Best Practices, Diversity in Business Leadership, Governance in MSMEs, Governance in Family Firms, Governance in Tech, and Governance in Philanthropy. The organisation also conducts locally relevant research, hosts workshops and executive education training sessions, and convenes business leaders, policymakers, students, and non-profit executives to encourage a proactive approach to implementing best practices in the workplace across the Gulf region.

For more information, please visit www.pearlinitiative.org.