

# THE WOMEN'S PAVILION AT EXPO 2020 DUBAI

## Summary of Key Learnings & Policy Recommendations

APRIL 2022



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UAE has a pioneering role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. It leads the Arab world in closing any existing economic and political gender gaps and in some aspects also outshines the rest of the world. This drive for gender equality and women's empowerment is strongly rooted in the thinking and teaching of the late Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan, who always upheld the principle of women and men as equal partners in building the nation.
- The UAE has set a unique example for the world to pay attention to and learn from. Considering this longstanding commitment of the UAE to gender equality and women's empowerment, it was only fitting that Expo 2020 Dubai dedicated a space to address the advancement of women both from a local and a global lens. The Women's Pavilion has been a critical component of this vision.
- Throughout the six months of Expo programming, the Women's Pavilion attracted over 330,000 visitors, with its *Majlis* hosting nearly 500 world leaders, field experts, and inspirational speakers from across different geographies, from a wide variety of backgrounds and spanning different generations. It hosted around 170 events, while its Instagram handle kept around 21,5k followers engaged. The key learnings from all those interactions can be summarized as follows:
  - **FOR REAL CHANGE, MAKE IT LAW AND BREAK NEGATIVE NORMS:** *We should always keep in mind that for gender equality and women's empowerment to succeed, social norms and legislation must advance on an equal footing.*
  - **TAKE A SEAT AT EVERY DECISION-MAKING TABLE:** *We need to ensure a gender equality and women's empowerment lens at every level of decision-making, to avoid a tokenistic top, a hollow middle and a crowded starting point.*
  - **EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP CAN BE SILVER BULLETS!** *While education can really be the silver bullet, we need to put more effort in rethinking ways out of bias and stereotypes, in both informal and formal education.*
  - **FOR AN UNBIASED FUTURE: FIX DATA AND SHOWCASE EVIDENCE:** *We have to be very careful not to feed AI algorithms the gender biased data sets we hold today, as if we do, we will be hard-wiring inequality into future decision-making and many other AI-driven applications.*
  - **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IS CRUCIAL FOR SUCCESS:** *We should not regard gender equality and women empowerment as agenda items separated from others, as "women's issues" are indeed "society's issues" and gender-mainstreaming will benefit all of society.*
- This report lists key policy recommendations for the UAE that follow from these key learnings.

## WHAT LEGACY FOR EXPO'S WOMEN'S PAVILION?

### ESTABLISHING A MEASA WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE HUB.

The Middle East, Africa & South Asia (MEASA) Women's Knowledge Hub builds new narratives, unleashes new energies and educates new generations. As a vibrant hub for knowledge sharing and policy research on gender equality and women's empowerment, it will host a dedicated library, social gatherings, and events. The cultural significance of its collection and activities in and for the MEASA region will create a well-known and well-regarded social institution for women and men, in the UAE and far beyond.

# ABOUT THE WOMEN'S PAVILION AT EXPO 2020 DUBAI

*When Women Thrive, All of Humanity Thrives.*

## THE UAE HAS A PIONEERING ROLE IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, REGIONALLY AND GLOBALLY

The UAE has made tremendous progress on the topic of gender equality and women's empowerment. It jumped 48 ranks in 2021 on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report and is a clear leader in the Arab world. Indeed, the UAE's female labor force participation is among the highest in the region - estimated at 52 percent in 2019. Female representation in the Federal National Council stands at 50 percent, a feat most legislative bodies around the world have yet to achieve.

The UAE's drive for gender equality and women's empowerment is strongly rooted in the thinking and teaching of the late Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan, who always upheld the principle of women and men as equal partners in building the nation. As a result, the UAE embarked on a path of legislative adaptation and cultural transformation. Women enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles, access to education, the right to practice professions and the right to inherit property as men.

As such, the UAE has moved beyond the rhetoric of empowered Muslim women and moved into a reality where women have direct impact on all sectors and all aspects of life, from education, to the economy and political offices, from agriculture, to sports and the space. The UAE has set a unique example for the world to pay attention to and learn from.

## THE WOMEN'S PAVILION AT EXPO 2020 DUBAI

Throughout Expo 2020 Dubai, the UAE has ensured that issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment were centrally addressed.

Considering the longstanding commitment of the UAE to gender equality and women's empowerment, it was only fitting that Expo 2020 Dubai would dedicate a pavilion to address the advancement of women through a local and a global lens.

The Women's Pavilion, under the exhibition title of "New Perspectives", was curated by Expo 2020 Dubai in collaboration with Cartier. The positive contributions highlighted in the exhibition demonstrate as no other that when women thrive, humanity thrives. The Women's Pavilion has also challenged the misconceptions that women still frequently face, has sought out new perspectives on the impact women bring to our world and explored new approaches to creating a more equal world.

The Women's Pavilion has highlighted that the only way to peace, prosperity and sustainability is through the full and equal participation of women. To unlock that massive potential, we need to collectively identify new perspectives, change deep-rooted perceptions and adjust mindsets.



*Women's equality and empowerment is not a choice. But it is a necessity. To me, it has always been clear that policies, practices and outcomes are better when the female perspective is present and embedded. The UAE has recognized this since its own inception and the Women's Pavilion at Expo is a tribute to that perspective, while also being a call for action that our collective futures can only be prosperous when women are an equal part of it."*

*HE Reem al Hashimy*

# 5 KEY LEARNINGS

Throughout the six months of Expo, the Women's Pavilion attracted over 330,000 visitors, with its Majlis hosting nearly 500 world leaders, field experts, and inspirational speakers from across different geographies, a wide variety of backgrounds and spanning different generations. It hosted around 170 events while its Instagram handle kept around 21,5k followers engaged. The key learnings from all those interactions can be summarized as follows:

## 1. FOR REAL CHANGE, MAKE IT LAW AND BREAK NEGATIVE NORMS

*For gender equality and women's empowerment to succeed, social norms and legislation must advance on an equal footing.*

## 2. TAKE A SEAT AT EVERY DECISION-MAKING TABLE

*Ensure a gender equality and women's empowerment lens at every level to avoid a tokenistic top, a hollow middle and a crowded starting point.*

## 3. EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP CAN BE SILVER BULLETS!

*We need to put more efforts in rethinking ways out of bias and stereotypes, in both informal and formal education.*

## 4. FOR AN UNBIASED FUTURE: FIX DATA AND SHOWCASE EVIDENCE

*Do not feed AI algorithms the gender biased data sets we hold today, as inequality will be hard-wired into future decisionmaking.*

## 5. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IS CRUCIAL FOR SUCCESS

*Gender equality and women empowerment should not be separate agenda items, as "women's issues" are indeed "society's issues".*



# 1. FOR REAL CHANGE, MAKE IT LAW AND BREAK NEGATIVE NORMS

*For gender equality and women's empowerment to succeed, social norms and legislation must advance on an equal footing.*

## WHERE WE STAND

With Sustainable Development Goal 5, the world committed to “achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The first target set to reach this goal is to “end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. The measurement attached to this target is whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

Indeed, to close the persisting gender gap, enshrining in law the equal rights of women and men is fundamental. There has been considerable progress on this target, and changing the institutionalized normative frameworks in place can probably be counted as the biggest successes in gender equality and women empowerment over the decades. The UAE itself has been a regional role model in this area, making adjustments in its legal stipulations to ensure the empowerment of women in both economic, social and political aspects of life.

And yet, across the globe, there is still a lot of work to be done. According to the World Bank, looking at a broad set of legal rights, the average woman today is afforded only three-quarters of the rights the average man enjoys. The reality might also be less uplifting than on paper. Indeed, if a good law sits next to negative norms, it remains useless and will simply not be implemented as intended. The real game-changer will lie at the heart of families and societies and the life lessons they give to their children, boys and girls.

## EXPO INSIGHTS

- **Law needs to go hand in hand with societal change.** Legal change is vulnerable without social norms moving in tandem. Stark illustrations of this necessity include the reversion of the position of women during Covid lockdowns, the “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence during these times as well as the backlash of women and girls’ rights in Afghanistan in the past year.
- **Top-down guidance is imperative.** We need to keep seizing the opportunity to engineer change by law. We need men and women in leadership roles to support concrete laws and policies to promote leadership, equal access to opportunities and ban harmful practices.
- **Economic ownership rights are crucial.** Power balances are often set by property rights. From land ownership, to ownership of financial assets and a bank account, to legal inheritance rights, ensuring equality in economic rights is an important step towards gender equality.
- **Legislation needs to be actively communicated.** We need to communicate these laws and engage communities in actively understanding the legal space they create in order to stimulate best practices to guide society onto the path of intentional progress.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UAE

- **Continue playing a role model of equal rights for men and women, by emphasizing the UAE's success story and actively communicating legal changes within communities.**
- **Set up an internationally-oriented knowledge hub raising awareness of positive effects of legal and societal changes towards gender equality and women empowerment.**
- **Go beyond mainstreaming in development cooperation by including incentives for lasting gender equality and women's empowerment, e.g. with microfinance aimed at maintaining women as important economic actors post-conflict.**

## 2. TAKE A SEAT AT EVERY DECISION-MAKING TABLE

*Ensure a gender equality and women's empowerment lens at every level to avoid a tokenistic top, a hollow middle and a crowded starting point.*

### WHERE WE STAND

Women are increasingly recognized as the dynamic leaders of change they are. But when it comes to leadership and decision-making roles, women remain greatly underrepresented, whether in parliaments, in government positions or in corporate boardrooms.

Progress is slow. The declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, indicated women in power and decision-making as one critical area of concern and called for positive measures and potentially quotas to ensure parity in power structures and decision-making. These, it suggested, should be combined with steps to increase women's abilities, for example through leadership training, courses in public speaking and campaigning skills.

Since then, a positive trend has been established. At the political level, the Interparliamentary Union reported in 2021 a "historic high" in the proportion of women parliamentarians worldwide: slightly more than 25 percent. The UAE, which has a gender parity law for its Federal National Council in place, stands out as a global frontrunner, with 50 percent female parliamentarians. The 2022 Women in Diplomacy Index of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, which was presented as part of Expo's Women's Pavilion's program, shows that female ambassadors across the world constitute just 21.6 percent. And looking at Fortune's Global 500 companies, only 4.6 percent were run by female CEOs in 2021 - "an all-time high". We are still nowhere near gender parity.

### EXPO INSIGHTS

- **Organizations' architecture and mindset need to change.** To ensure an equal number of women at all the decision-making tables, we have to consider our entire ecosystem and go beyond discussions around maternity leave and flexible work hours. Women are held back by more than motherhood.
- **Boost creativity with a diversity of perspectives.** A diversity of perspectives will lead to better decision-making for all, to innovation and creative solutions, as those involved bring a range of knowledge about the issues and are uniquely invested in the outcomes.
- **Quotas as the solution?** Yes, no and maybe. But the majority seemed to be in favor. Public and private sector leaders agreed that, while not ideal, quotas seem a necessary instrument to accelerate the pace of change. Of course, there is a risk of push-back, less recognition and an element of discrimination towards men.
- **Capitalize on women's ability to set aside egos.** In negotiation settings, make use of the idea that women tend to be better able to set aside their egos. Because while egos are appreciated, letting go of them at the right moments is highly important for building trust, for teamwork and constructive cooperation.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UAE

- *While representation at the top is important, ensure that women are also equal decision-makers in lower and middle-management settings, with appropriate leadership, talent and management programmes targeting all different levels.*
- *Consider instituting a pool of women negotiators and mediators across relevant UAE ministries and large UAE companies to settle political, economic and military disputes at the international level.*
- *Consider quotas in an increasing number of areas in which the pace towards gender equality is considered too slow, which can include not only corporate boards, but can also include university professors and ambassadors.*

### 3. EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP CAN BE SILVER BULLETS!

*We need to put more efforts in rethinking ways out of bias and stereotypes in both informal and formal education.*

#### WHERE WE STAND

Investing in girls' education is investing in economic growth, a healthy workforce, lasting peace and a sustainable future for our planet. But according to the most recent estimates by UNESCO, 129 million girls are out of school globally, including 32 million of primary school age, and 97 million of secondary school age. Not only twice as many girls as boys will never start school, but women make up for the vast majority of illiterate adults.

Various factors underpin this situation, ranging from poverty, early marriage and pregnancy and parental and educators' attitudes and expectations, to the content of curricula and inadequate school infrastructure. Improving education for girls is not just about access to school. Girls and women need to feel safe in learning environments and be supported in the subjects and careers they choose to pursue – including those in which they are often underrepresented.

Education is important at every level. With the current pace of digitalization, remote learning, and later in life remote work, can facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment. But women also continue to have less access than men to digital technologies limiting their capacity to meet the challenges posed by automation for the future of work. This, while by 2030 an estimated 40 million to 160 million women will need to transition across occupations, often into jobs requiring new and improved skills.

#### EXPO INSIGHTS

- **Unstereotype curricula, textbooks and narratives.** Unconscious bias sets us up for imbalances of power throughout life. We need to recognize and change the deeply-rooted stereotypes we transmit through school systems, curricula and textbooks. We need history books that speak of the women who have contributed to progress not as the exception.
- **Breaking the generational cycle.** Women who received an education themselves are unlikely to advocate for their daughters to remain uneducated, marry early and stay at home. Breaking the cycle also means educating boys to respect girls from a young age.
- **Promoting gender equality in STEM education.** We need to work on a structural solution to increase instream and retention. STEM needs to be more of a childhood activity and enter schools at an early stage. Women scientists are important role models to provide young girls with the confidence to succeed in STEM professions.
- **Mentoring personal and professional growth.** Access to continuous learning is paramount for women. Mentorship, formal and informal, has proven to be of great importance to ensure women stay involved and grow also at later stages in life and throughout their careers.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UAE

- *Craft a regional alliance around destereotyping wide-spread Arabic-language textbooks and curricula, bringing in regional and other female role models and removing references to "traditional" gender roles where possible.*
- *Design and implement a mentorship programme for rising female public and private sector employees, with women more advanced in their career paths advising their mentorees on what to expect, what choices to make.*
- *Set up a space for conversation between different generations in which frank dialogues can be held about the views on women's education and the challenges each generation has faced.*

## 4. FOR AN UNBIASED FUTURE: FIX DATA AND SHOWCASE EVIDENCE

*Do not feed AI algorithms the gender biased data sets we hold today, as inequality will be hard-wired into future decisionmaking.*

### WHERE WE STAND

Historically, most institutions and decision-making entities have been established and led by men, whether in the legal, political, religious, academic, or economic realm. These organizations will often keep representing and promoting a system in which men have roles of power and women play supporting roles. Institutions might claim gender neutrality, but that neutrality assumes males as the standard. Such non-intentional, more subtle barriers are often entrenched within institutions, and are often invisible for men and women alike.

When the data sets are biased, so will be the outcomes. Our world and world view is shaped by data that have a strong male bias. As a result, norms tend to be male. This can have grave consequences: women die because medical diagnoses are based on symptoms occurring in men, women die because crash test dummies are designed as male bodies. Of course, systems of discrimination or disadvantage are not just based on gender, but also on race, class, religion, or caste, for example leading to stereotypes of “Muslim women” and “black women”.

Technology can equalize and connect the world. Artificial Intelligence (AI), for example, can create new opportunities to empower women and tackle gender bias, in ways we were unable to do before. However, a 2020 World Economic Forum report, found that women make up only 26 percent of data and AI positions in the workforce. As with all previous technological and industrial revolutions, women are in danger of being left out.

### EXPO INSIGHTS

- **Prevent bias to be coded into systems.** With new technologies taking off, there is a risk of undoing the progress made in gender equality, further institutionalizing invisible biases. Much of the current data sets are biased towards male standards, while it is mostly men doing the coding. In this way, gender inequality will be coded into the system.
- **Making evidence visible helps addressing bias.** Facts and figures on gender bias in our world should be easily accessible for all those that want to use them to convince others of the existing biases, stereotypes and consequences of these.
- **Gender-disaggregation opens up markets.** There is a large untapped potential in economic growth with regard to products and services targeting the needs of women and girls. Using gender-disaggregated data diversifies products ranging from health applications (including FemTech) to financial products and investment strategies.
- **Media can help shatter negative stereotypes.** Media, from talk shows to TikTok, can play an important role in opening up space to have important conversations on male standards and societal norms. They often provide evidence, draw men and boys into the conversation and allow for addressing sensitive issues and biases.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UAE

- *Ensure AI algorithms will be gender-sensitive, by scrutinizing the data used for gender bias, ensuring women are equal part of the conversation on desired policy outcomes, and by ensuring the equal presence of female coders.*
- *Advocate internationally for an easily accessible repository of data and evidence exposing gender biases in all policy areas, providing insights needed across the globe to better advance SDG5.*
- *Increase awareness of the need for gender-disaggregation of data in school curricula, government practices and encourage private businesses to take bias into account.*



## 5. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IS CRUCIAL FOR SUCCESS

*Gender equality and women empowerment should not be separate agenda items, as “women’s issues” are indeed “society’s issues”.*

### WHERE WE STAND

Differentiations of needs, living conditions, and circumstances of women and men are often based on unequal access to and control over power, resources, human rights and institutions. By considering the situation of women when designing, implementing, and evaluating policies, programs and projects, gender mainstreaming is a tool that enhances gender equality and women’s empowerment. As an extension, it benefits the whole of society.

Throughout history, spaces, policies and solutions to needs have been predominantly designed by men, for men. For example, according to the World Bank, 90 percent of urban design studies are occupied by men, leading to a significant bias in design. Women often experience cities differently. For example, this manifests itself in feelings of safety. Surveys from Europe to Asia, from Latin America to the Arab region all indicate that women are more anxious about (sexual) harassment while navigating a city.

The idea of gender mainstreaming has been around for decades as an approach to policymaking that considers both women's and men's interests and concerns equally. But it is often not yet the standard. To illustrate, the measures taken to fight the COVID-19 pandemic were mostly designed without any gender lens. According to UNDP, women were greatly underrepresented in government task forces dealing with the pandemic while 12 percent of all task forces were composed only by men.

### EXPO INSIGHTS

- **Gender-differentiated data should be standard.** Using gender-disaggregated data should be made part of a strong culture of effective evidence-based policy-making. While new research is necessary to uncover gendered data, we also need to better use the large amount of studies and evidence already existing.
- **Women can benefit much more from trade and investment deals.** Female perspectives are still too often disregarded in trade policies and wider foreign policies. Women-led businesses are also often excluded from start-up or angel investments.
- **Habitats can often be improved for women.** Ensuring easily accessible education and care services to residential areas can reduce the burden of unpaid care work. Simple measures to design safer and more comfortable public spaces include more walkable streets, open gathering spaces, well-lit and CCTV covered pathways, public spaces and bus routes.
- **Gender-mainstreaming needs serious attention.** We need to accelerate our efforts but also acknowledge that, when done in a serious manner, gender-mainstreaming will often demand the (re)organization, improvement and evaluation of a large number of policy processes.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UAE

- *Implement a gender-mainstreaming strategy across government policies, from health to education, from development cooperation to trade and defence.*
- *Establish a task force to evaluate the gender-sensitivity of current policy practices and gather existing evidence on best practices from all over the world.*
- *Consider gender-sensitive budgeting as an approach to mainstream the gender dimension into all stages of the budget cycle - conceiving, planning, approving, executing, monitoring, analyzing and auditing budgets in a gender-sensitive way.*

# SUGGESTED LEGACY FOR THE WOMEN'S PAVILION

*Having the Spirit of Expo 2020 Dubai Live On*

## Establishing a MEASA Women's Knowledge Hub

### RATIONALE

With the Women's Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, we further institutionalize the principle of women as equal partners. The Women's Pavilion should become a lasting fixture through which we will continue the arduous quest for gender equality and women's empowerment. Working together with global and local partners, we would like to see the Pavilion to continue advancing what is an important lifeline for any nation and for humanity as a whole to flourish.

If we are serious about achieving sustainable development, we need to bring in the women and girls: in full force and without conditionality. The MEASA Women's Knowledge Hub will do exactly that, while also building new narratives, unleashing new energies and educating new generations. It will take forward the spirit and the quest of changing mindsets so central to Expo's programming.

The space will become a vibrant hub of knowledge, with a policy research function, a social space function and a dedicated library function. It will stand out not just because of size or prestige, but because of the cultural significance of its collection and its activities in and for the MEASA region, where its key focus will lie.

Embracing the idea of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the MEASA region, thereby holding on to strong cultural roots, will make this a well-known and well-regarded social institution for women and men, in Dubai and elsewhere.

***It will be a living reminder that When Women Thrive, All of Humanity Thrives.***

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

#### A Policy Research and Knowledge Hub

- A study and discussion space dedicated to advancing gender balance in the MEASA region, providing best practice studies, organizing public events and outreach (e.g. debates, podcasts, online learning).
- Active in activities related to gender-mainstreaming policies across areas, from health to education and curricula, from advanced and emerging technologies to development cooperation, trade policies and even defence-related policies.
- Work with (inter)national public and private entities to advance gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide through advocacy, building networks and policy advice.

#### A Library Function:

- A reference library with books, magazines & audiovisual collections that promote factual knowledge, develop literary appreciation and informed judgments.

#### A Social Space:

- A popular place of gathering for the wider (female) public, featuring a cozy café, and social activities such as movie and documentary screenings, book clubs and other social clubs.



This report has been produced by MacroScope Strategies (M2S),  
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