

Obstacles:

The Saudi Arabian government has committed to ambitious targets to enhance the economic activity of women and the opportunity for women to play a more prominent role in the Saudi economy has never been greater, with a comprehensive policy addressing women's participation in the entrepreneurship sector pending.

However current obstacles in business licensing regulations still include:

- **Restricted access to government services:** Recently established Ladies Sections within government offices are perceived as ineffective, women entrepreneurs often prefer to rely on a male relative to help them. Also, women continue to encounter a *wakeel* (legal male representative) requirement when starting their businesses, as the enforcement of its removal is not consistent.
- **Requirement for a *mudher* (male manager) for public-facing business:** Despite its official repeal many women are often still being required to appoint a male manager.
- **Restricted licensing options:** A number of business activities that are popular among women, for example home business, are not currently available in the official licensing categories.

Lack of support services: More support is needed for the growing needs of working women in infrastructure and support services, such as transport and childcare.

Recommendations

The researchers make a number of recommendations to help overcome some of the barriers and allow women to play their part in driving positive change:

- **Review and reform women's education** to increase their economic participation. Ensure greater focus on fostering entrepreneurship competencies, skills and qualities.
- **Create opportunities for women entrepreneurs** to support each other through networking events, workshops and change programmes.
- **Address gender-specific challenges in the regulatory environment** to improve women's access to government business licensing services e.g. create a home-business licence, and ensure enforcement of positive women-targeted policies.
- **Improve women-targeted entrepreneurship initiatives and funding sources.** Establish a central information and advisory service, and provide training support.
- **Invest in support services and infrastructure**, such as public-funded transportation services for women and subsidised childcare.

Promote awareness of the positive economic role and contribution of Saudi businesswomen.