**Bridging the Digital Gender Divide**

In order to answer the questions raised by the CWG-Internet consultation , it would be essential to provide a background relevant to this topic.

**Background**

There are important facts related to the gender equality in KSA that should be highlighted to put the answers in the right perspective; key examples on the current statues of women, in various fields are given as follow:

1. **University Education:** At present, over “50 %” of the university graduates in the country are females; and “KSA Vision 2030” states that the country “will continue to develop their talent and invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future, and contribute to the development of the society and the economy”.
2. **Workforce:** The following highlights the women contribution as one of the essential element of the national workforce.
   1. In the medical sector “40 %” of Saudi doctors are females.
   2. The current women’s employment in “civil service” is around “40%”; and the “National Transformation Program (NTP)” of KSA vision is targeting “42%” by the year 2020.
3. **Business & Investment:** The following summarizes the role of women in business and investment.
   1. Saudi business women own “20 thousand Small to Medium Enterprises (SME)”.
   2. The invested capital by Saudi women in investment funds represents “20%” of the total investment in these funds.
4. **Political Influence & Key Positions:** This is summarized in the following.
   1. Regarding the political influence of woman in the country, “20%” of the members of the Saudi “Consultative Assembly (Shura Council)” are woman. This proportion is equivalent to that of the US Senate and of the US house of representative.
   2. NTP of KSA vision is working toward increasing the number of women in key civil service leadership positions in the country.
5. **Use of the “Information and Communication Technology (ICT):** A recent survey by the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) and King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) indicates that among the Saudi population aged between 12 and 65 years, the following have been revealed:
   1. “96 % of females and 88 % of males use the Internet”.
   2. “99 % of males, and of females use mobile voice”.
   3. “78 % of females and “72 % of males use the mobile Internet services”;
   4. “99 % of males, and of females use online social networks.”
   5. “15 % of females and 13 % of males spend over 8 hours per day using the Internet”.
   6. Those spending “4 to 8 hours per day using the Internet are 45 % females and 25 % males”.

The answers given below to the consultation will consider the facts of the background.

**Question (1)**

**What approaches, and examples of good practices are available to increase Internet access and digital literacy of women and girls, including in decision-making processes on Internet public policy?**

**Answer to Question (1)**

KSA followed successful approaches and practices that enabled its achievement of the following:

* The Internet access of women in KSA exceeds that of men (Paragraph E, Part: 1 of the background).
* Digital literacy among women in KSA is high and this is reflected by their ICT access and use (Paragraph E), and by their university education (Paragraph A).
* Decision making processes on Internet public policy have led to the current ICT use (Paragraph E).
* The NTP direction toward having more women in key civil service position; together with their political influence (Paragraphs: D & E) will further enhance women empowerment in the country, in general, and in ICT in particular.

**Question (2)**

**What approaches, and examples of good practices are available to promote the access and use of ICTs by SMEs in developing and least-developed countries, particularly those owned/managed by women, to achieve greater participation in the digital economy?**

**Answer to Question (2)**

KSA followed successful approaches and practices that enabled the achievement of the following:

* Women own “20 thousand” SMEs (Paragraph C, Part 1 of the background).
* Women access and use of ICT exceeds that of men (Paragraph E).
* Therefore, women in KSA provide substantial contribution to: SMEs, use of ICT, and consequently participation in the digital economy.

**Question (3)**

**Q3: Which are the available sources and mechanisms for measuring women's participation in the digital economy with focus on SME's and micro-enterprises.**

**Answer to Question (3)**

The government of KSA has a department concerned with statistics, known as the “General Authority of Statistics”, which works with the various other specialized government departments on collecting statistical information concerned with development. This is an important source of “quantitative” measures concerned with the various Saudi facts and activities, including women participation in the digital economy, and contribution to business, including SMEs. Various facts presented in the background are based on this source. Another important source of measures is survey studies like the one done by CITC and KFUPM emphasizing ICT use by females and males, and providing useful “qualitative measures” of development (Paragraph E of the background).

**Question (4)**

**Q4: What measures/policies could be envisioned in order to foster the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs, specifically in developing and least-developed countries?**

**Answer to Question (4)**

KSA has periodic national and international economic meetings held in the various parts of the country. Economic leaders and experts contribute to these meetings, which are usually attended by a wide spectrum of business women and men, and by the public, including of course women and men. Examples of these meeting are “Riyadh Economic Forum (REF)” and “Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF)”, which are held annually. These meetings involve knowledge sharing on various business issues, encouraging business activities, including supporting the role of women as entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs. At present KSA has “20 thousand SMEs” owned by women (Paragraph: C; Part: 1).

**Question (5)**

**Q5: What are the gaps in addressing these challenges? How can they be addressed and what is the role of governments?**

The above background and answers to the first four given questions have explored the current distinguished women participation and contribution to ICT use and to economic activities in KSA. In addition, KSA vision 2030 and its NTP are carrying this further toward an even more active role in this regard. Having explored this potential, and continuing to do so, the country now enjoys great experience from which other countries can benefit.

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