



#ChooseToChallenge

International Women's Day

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Leading the way

Over the years, the UAE has become a leader in the Arab world in empowering women. Its commitment has sprung inspiration in multinational firms in the country

Nisthula Nagarajan

International Women's Day is a celebration of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women worldwide. The day also shines a light on the need to accelerate gender parity in all fields and areas, from pay to housework. All around the globe, there are initiatives and activities planned to commemorate this day to celebrate women's achievements and rally for gender equality.

In the UAE, women have been the key partner for the development of the country and continue to play a vital role in elevating the capabilities of the country's future generations.

The UAE is ranked as a leading country in gender equality in the region, according to the World Economic Forum's 2020 *Global Gender Gap* report. This achievement comes from the fundamental belief that women and men are equal partners in society. Through a series of public and private sector initiatives, women are playing an increasingly stronger role in business, military and government.

The constitution guarantees equal rights between men and women, which encouraged more women to pursue a higher education thus increasing the local employment pool. Women's involvement in decision making has been acknowledged as a key factor in the country's economic development. The UAE women hold a large percentage in several sectors; 66 per cent of public sectors, 75 per cent of public and health sectors, and 19 per cent of the chamber of industry and commerce. Two-thirds of the country's university graduates are women, of which 77 per cent specialised in computer sciences and 44 per cent in engineering, more

than twice that of the United States.

Women in the UAE participate actively in the private sector in various roles. They have equal rights to economic resources, including guaranteed equal pay, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

Aurion Business Consultants recognised that women in their firm align well with their motto of trust, excellence and delivery, evidenced by the commitment to the jobs they take up, the honesty and integrity they uphold, and their trustworthiness in every walk of life. The firm credited the seamless workflow during the pandemic to the hard work and dedication of their women workforce. They help businesses meet requirements, exceed goals and support their colleagues.

Mariam Omran Alshamsi, Head of Institutional Excellence Section, Directorate of Human Resources, Government of Sharjah; Amna Lootah, Assistant Director General, DAFZA; and Fatma Saqer AlQasimi, Strategic and Competitive Planning Officer, Department of Statistics and Community Development, Government of Sharjah are prominent Emirati women placed in high positions in the public sector who are wholeheartedly in support of the country and of Aurion's efforts to be inclusive of women in the workforce.

Leena Parwani, Founder CEO, LPH Financial Services, has made a conscious effort to make space for women at her company. As a woman in the financial advisory sphere, she feels empowered helping women clients achieve long-term financial stability. To her, the most important thing for a woman is financial independence — the ability to live life on their own terms.

UAE Vision 2021 recognises both science as well as gender equality as important to the country's overall progress. It encourages many Emirati women to foray into medicine, computer science, engineering, and space research. The alteration to the UAE citizenship law will also play a crucial role in the attraction and retention of the brightest talents, which includes women, who can play a pronounced role in helping the country transform into a knowledge-based economy.

In addition, the UAE has contributed \$50 million to the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi), a collaborative partnership among 14 governments, eight multilateral development banks and other public and private sector stakeholders hosted by the World Bank Group. There has been a significant rise in women-owned businesses over the last five years due to this. At least 23,000 local women entrepreneurs are currently running projects worth millions of dollars.

Empowering women is nothing but assigning discretionary powers so that

they can exercise the authority bestowed upon them. When the decision making power is assigned to knowledgeable women in their specialised areas, we can see the finest results worthy of taking pride in.

Women empowerment is absolutely essential for the health and well-being of society as a whole. It is a fundamental human right, which is key to achieving peaceful co-existence and prosperity. A well-educated women workforce can build sustainable economies and thereby benefit societies and humanity at large.

Aurion Motto and Women Empowerment

The motto of Aurion is 'Trust, Excellence and Delivery' or 'TED'. Building trust among clients, excellence in day to day performance and delivery of promises, are the cardinal principles for success in any business. "Discretionary powers are given to women staff to take any decision, thereby en-

Decision-making belongs to WOMEN


AURION
 Business Consultants

Aurion takes the lead in empowering its women workforce and placing them in top positions

Women are the source of ultimate strength. International Women's Day is marked with the celebration of womanhood for their intellectual, social and economic achievements. The theme of International Women's Day 2021 is #ChooseToChallenge. By constantly challenging the status quo and those around them in society, women raise the benchmark of societal attitude and behaviour towards them. The commitment to the jobs they take up, the honesty and integrity they uphold, and their trustworthiness in every walk of life, encourage multinational companies to employ them in decision-making positions. The intellectual empowerment of women along with the creation of equal opportunity in society are the greatest ideas to counter gender inequality.

Empowering women is nothing but assigning discretionary powers so that

Discretionary powers are given to women staff to take any decision, thereby entrusting them with the duty and responsibility of doing any job.

Syam P Prabhu
 Founder and Managing Director of Aurion


Team Aurion Frontline Managers


Behind every successful woman is a tribe of other successful women who have her back. On this special day, I would like to wish all the success to an organisation that encourages and promotes women empowerment"

Fatma Saqer AlQasimi
 Strategic and Competitive Planning Officer
 Department of Statistics and Community Development, Government of Sharjah



I wholeheartedly appreciate the courage, calibre and commitment of Team Aurion powered by women professionals"

Mariam Omran Alshamsi
 Head of Institutional Excellence Section
 Directorate of Human Resources
 Government of Sharjah



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai, once said that behind every great community stands great women. As we celebrate International Women's Day, we reflect on the incredible accomplishments achieved by women across society. At DAFZA, we are proud to have a team of successful women that strongly contribute to the growth of the freezone"

Amna Lootah
 Assistant Director General
 DAFZA

trusting them with the duty and responsibility of doing any job," said Syam P Prabhu, Founder and Managing Director of Aurion. It is a natural tendency among the women workforce that when responsibility is assigned with the freedom to take decisions, amazing results are guaranteed. "The dedication and hard work of women professionals at Aurion during the pandemic, ensured seamless workflow without any hindrance," said Shantala Bandihal, Head of ISO Standards Consulting at Aurion. With its women-powered fully equipped branch office at Dubai Airport Freezone (DAFZA), Aurion Business Consultant has set a fantastic example of success stories with women empowerment to the UAE and businesses in the country as well.

More POWER to WOMEN



Leena Parwani, Founder CEO, LPH Financial Services, speaks on her experience as a woman in the financial advisory sector and how the UAE has helped her as a businesswoman

Do you believe that the struggle is still real for women when it comes to business opportunities?

Honestly, the only challenge I see as a woman advisor is building relationships with my client's family. I work with a niche market of high net worth individuals, ultra-rich clients and large corporates, and it is important for me to spend time with clients and build trust with their entire family, it's a slow process. Our work is for generations, therefore I feel quite important to be trusted by an entire family and management team. As a single woman, I have to maintain my lines and succeed with integrity. I maintain a higher standard as a professional. I don't see other challenges that are gender-specific — both in my professional life and in business. I had to go through the routine challenges every professional and entrepreneur goes through.

I haven't seen or felt discrimination against women in the workplace in the UAE. In government departments, I see more women at work than men, and several women in leadership roles. That says a lot about women empowerment in the UAE.

How do you think UAE fares when it comes to equal opportunities for women at work and personal front?

The UAE fares very well when it comes



to providing equal opportunities for women. Barring a few exceptions, women are doing very well in all walks of life in the UAE — both in the public and private sectors, in government offices and in corporate offices. A number of women have been part of the UAE Cabinet and the Mars Hope Probe Mission was led by an Emirati woman.

How do you maintain a work-life balance as a businesswoman?

It requires strict discipline and I have perfected it over the years. It took a while to come to this level, especially

after the formative phase of my business, when I had to dedicate more than 16 hours a day at work to the first three years of my goals. But now I am at the stage where discipline is important. No matter what I do in the evening, I have to work in the morning at set times; similarly, no matter what, I dedicate time to my kids and fitness. We all have one thing in common, 24 hours a day, and if we focus even for six hours a day we can achieve more than working without focus for 12 hours. Organise yourself, that's what I say to my team as well.

Please tell us more about your role in empowering women through LPH Financial Service?

I have developed a transparent system of management where everyone is accountable for their tasks. I have a wonderful team and great collaborations, with both men and women, working towards a common goal. Alone you can go fast but with a team, you can go far. We need a perfect balance of both genders to create a healthy environment. My team is rewarded based on their performance and everyone has an equal opportunity for growth. Being a woman myself, I do not favour women over men; for me attitude matters.

As an advisor myself, I worked with a few women clients who had no idea of how a long-term view on financial stability works. I am fortunate to be the key advisor for women business owners and build their succession chart.

What would you say constitutes women's empowerment?

Financial independence — the ability to live their lives on their own terms. The ability to exercise the freedom to make a choice, to grow on their own, make their own decisions, and to earn and spend money without having to seek approval from anyone.

What are the challenges you face in business?

One of the key challenges is to get transparency from the client. Financial advisory that is linked to the client's overall health and well-being, I am privy to a lot of financial information.

I deal with individuals who buy large life insurance policies to ensure their successors have additional capital when they are incapacitated. They also tend to have less time so they listen less which is challenging as I advocate educating the client and letting them take an informed decision.

What advice would you give to women who aspire to set up their own business?

My advice to anyone who wishes to set up a business or advisory — be persistent, punctual and purposeful in whatever you do. Be ethical if you are looking at positioning yourself long-term in a specific segment.