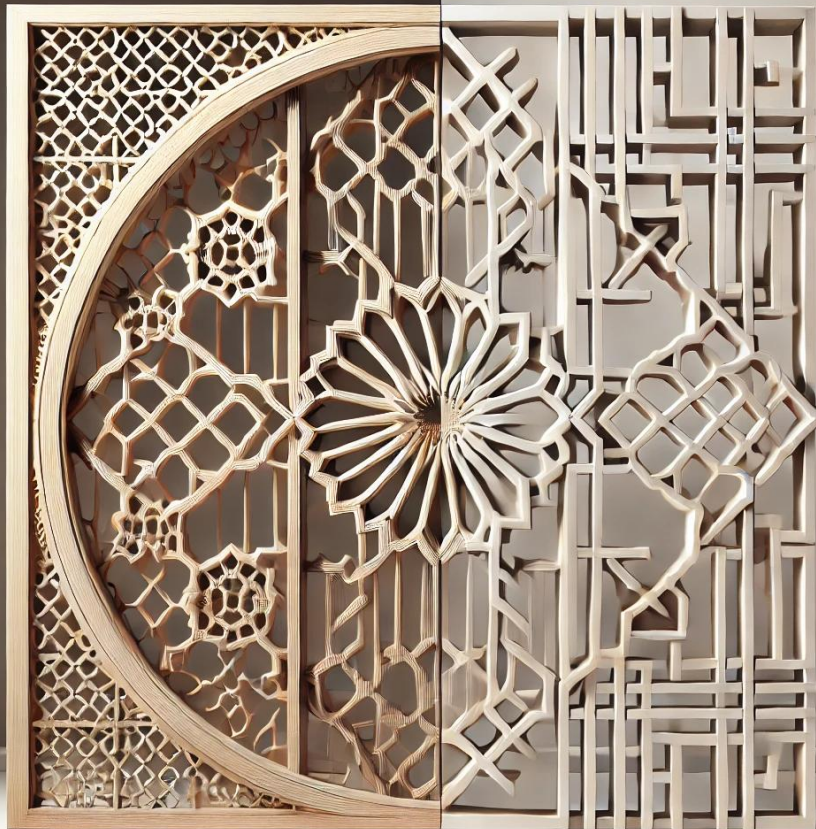


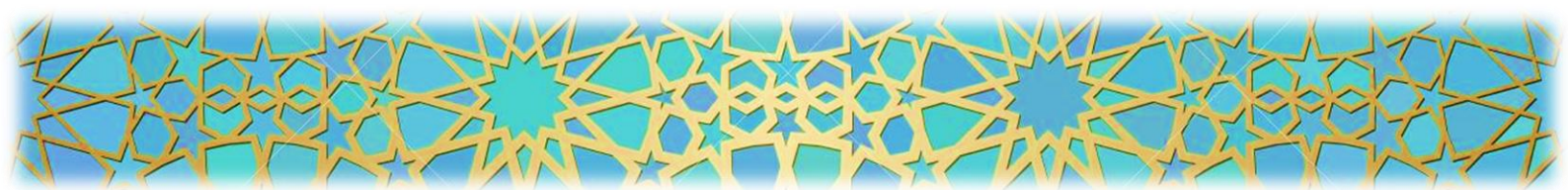


Women's Influence

“Honoring Tradition and Driving Transformation”



Empowering women as influencers in family, society, and economy — the authentic path to Vision 2030





Executive Summary

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has set in motion profound paradigm shifts across society, economy, and governance. Among the most vital of these is the **empowerment of women** — not only as participants in the workforce but as **influencers** who shape culture, families, organizations, and national transformation.

While global narratives often emphasize *women's leadership*, in the Saudi context the term *women's influence* better reflects both tradition and transformation. **Influence is not lesser than leadership; it is, in fact, broader and more enduring.** Women influence as mothers, sisters, and wives — nurturing values and stability within the social fabric — while also influencing organizations, markets, and innovation as entrepreneurs, professionals, and decision-shapers.

By framing women's role as **influencers**, empowerment aligns naturally with Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage while also advancing its strategic economic ambitions. Women's influence strengthens families, enhances education, fuels entrepreneurship, and accelerates diversification in finance, technology, tourism, and beyond.

Vision 2030 recognizes that **unlocking the full potential of women is an economic necessity**, not a social accessory. The participation and influence of women across systems will create ripple effects that:

- Increase non-oil GDP contributions.
- Expand the entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- Build resilience in the workforce.
- Enhance Saudi Arabia's global competitiveness.



In this white paper, we explore how women's influence can be harnessed systemically to drive Vision 2030, the challenges that must be addressed, and the KPIs needed to measure sustainable progress.

Key Takeaways - Executive Summary

Women's empowerment reframed as influence, not just leadership.

Influence is broader and culturally authentic within Saudi society.

Women influence family, organizations, markets, and innovation.

Vision 2030 sees women's role as an economic necessity, not a social accessory.

Harnessing women's influence accelerates diversification and global competitiveness.

Introduction: Women's Influence as a Paradigm Shift in Vision 2030

In our earlier whitepapers, *The Industrial Renaissance: Leveraging Fourth Industrial Revolution Technologies in KSA* and *Navigating Change Management in a Rapidly Transforming Economy*, we explored two central themes: the technological paradigm shifts redefining Saudi Arabia's industries, and the systemic approaches required to manage transformation. ([Download this whitepaper](#))

This whitepaper extends that dialogue to a third and equally vital dimension: the **role of women as influencers in shaping Saudi Arabia's economic diversification and societal transformation**.

Vision 2030 frames women's empowerment not as an isolated reform, but as a **paradigm shift embedded in the national transformation journey**. Just as technology enables industrial innovation, and change management ensures transformation succeeds, **women's influence multiplies the impact of both** by shaping culture, driving education, and inspiring organizational renewal.

It is important to stress that this empowerment is **not about imposing a leadership model borrowed from other contexts**, but about recognizing women's unique role as **influencers in the fabric of Saudi society** — as mothers, wives, sisters, professionals, and entrepreneurs. Influence is neither secondary nor symbolic; it is a strategic driver of economic resilience, cultural authenticity, and sustainable growth.



By reframing women's role in terms of influence, we find a path that is both **culturally grounded** and **strategically aligned** with Saudi Arabia's bold aspirations to become a diversified, knowledge-based economy.

Key Takeaways - Introduction

This whitepaper builds on earlier themes of technology and change management.

Women's influence is positioned as the third paradigm shift of Vision 2030.

Empowerment reframed as influence, not leadership, aligns with cultural authenticity.

Women's influence multiplies the impact of technology and systemic change.

Influence is a strategic driver of resilience, education, and societal renewal.





The Current Landscape of Women's Empowerment in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has undergone a profound transformation in women's participation over the past decade, driven by the reform momentum of **Vision 2030**. Women are increasingly visible in workplaces, public life, and entrepreneurship — not as symbolic figures, but as **influencers shaping systems and outcomes**.



1. Policy and Legal Reforms

- Removal of restrictions under the guardianship system has expanded women's ability to work, travel, and participate in public life.
- The historic decision to grant women the right to drive in 2018 marked both a symbolic and practical step towards mobility and independence.
- Labor reforms have broadened women's access to sectors previously dominated by men, including finance, retail, tourism, and defense.

2. Workforce Participation Growth

- Female labor force participation increased from **19% in 2016** to over **37% by 2023**, surpassing Vision 2030's initial target of 30%.
- Women are increasingly entering **STEM-related fields**, contributing to digital transformation and AI adoption across the Kingdom.



- Flexible work models, supported by digital platforms, have expanded opportunities for women to balance family and professional influence.

3. Women in Entrepreneurship and Business

- Women now own **over 40% of small and medium enterprises (SMEs)** in certain sectors, particularly in e-commerce, food services, and fashion.
- Access to financing has improved through government-backed initiatives and programs such as **Monsha'at** and the **Saudi Venture Capital Company**.
- Women entrepreneurs are not only job creators but also **influencers of consumer behavior and market trends**.

4. Education and Skill Development

- Women make up more than **55% of university graduates**, with increasing representation in law, engineering, and computer science.
- Scholarship programs have enabled women to pursue higher education abroad, strengthening their influence in knowledge transfer and global networking.
- Specialized training initiatives are preparing women for roles in **banking, governance, entrepreneurship, and leadership development**.

5. Cultural and Social Visibility

- Women are playing stronger roles in **sports, arts, and cultural diplomacy**, aligning with Saudi Arabia's growing tourism and entertainment industries.
- Female participation in national events and global forums underscores a shift from representation to **influence in shaping narratives** about the Kingdom.

STEM stands for **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics** — the fields that drive innovation, digital transformation, and the industries of the future.

- **Science** → Biology, chemistry, physics, life sciences.
- **Technology** → AI, computer science, data analytics, IT.
- **Engineering** → Civil, mechanical, electrical, robotics, biotech.
- **Mathematics** → Pure/applied math, statistics, modeling, forecasting.

Women's Empowerment in Saudi Arabia - Current Landscape

Policy Reforms: Driving rights, labor mobility, guardianship reforms.

Workforce: Female participation grew from 19% (2016) to 37%+ (2023).

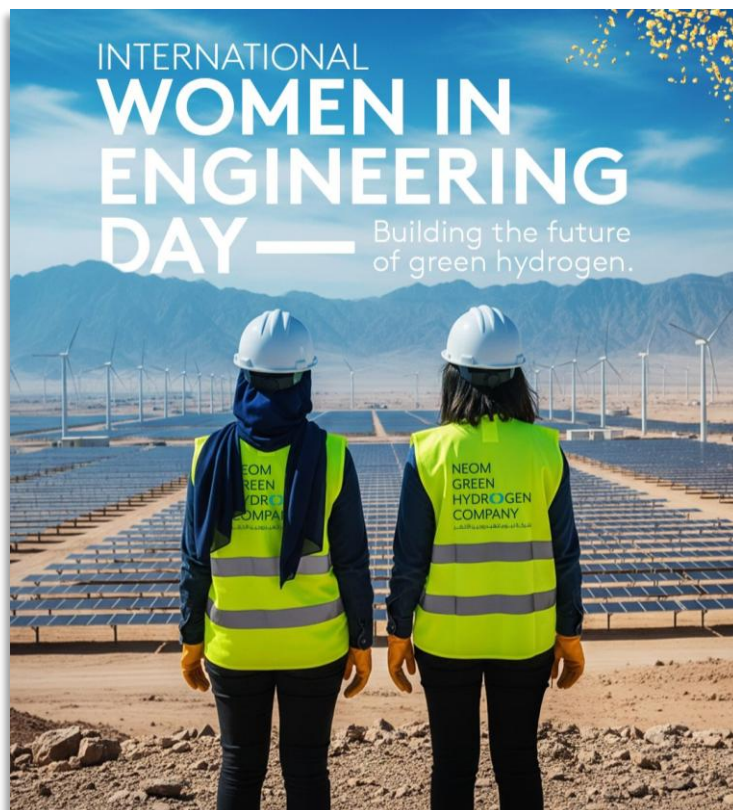
Entrepreneurship: Women own 40% of SMEs in some sectors.

Education: 55% of university graduates are women, rising in STEM.

Culture & Sports: Growing visibility in arts, tourism, and diplomacy.

Why STEM Matters in Women's Empowerment (Saudi Context)

- STEM fields are **drivers of Vision 2030 diversification**, especially in energy, AI, digital transformation, and healthcare.
- Women's participation in STEM ensures they are not confined to traditional sectors (education, health, social services), but instead **active influencers in future industries**.





- Increasing women in STEM helps close the **skills gap**, boosts innovation, and positions Saudi Arabia as a **global knowledge economy**.

Global Benchmarks & Local Differentiation

Women's empowerment is a global priority, and many nations have advanced policies and frameworks to support female participation in economies and governance. However, Saudi Arabia's journey is distinct — it must not simply **imitate global models** but rather **innovate within its own cultural and strategic context**.

Global Benchmarks

- **Nordic countries** (Sweden, Norway, Finland) often lead in global gender equality rankings, emphasizing equal parental leave, flexible work, and high representation of women in politics.
- **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has advanced quickly in women's participation in government, with women holding 50% of Federal National Council seats.
- **United States** and **Europe** showcase women's influence in entrepreneurship and technology leadership, though gender gaps remain in pay and representation.





Saudi Arabia's Differentiation

- Saudi Arabia's path is **systemic rather than symbolic**: women's empowerment is embedded in **Vision 2030's core strategies** of economic diversification and human capital development.
- Unlike many nations, the Saudi model emphasizes **cultural authenticity** — balancing women's roles in the family and society with growing influence in business and governance.
- Saudi Arabia's reforms are **top-down (policy-driven)** but also designed to create **bottom-up influence** through women's participation in education, SMEs, and social innovation.

The Paradigm Shift

The benchmark for Saudi Arabia is not to copy global models but to **set its own precedent**:

- Influence as the framing, not leadership.
- Family, society, and economy as interconnected systems.
- Empowerment as a **strategic necessity** for resilience and competitiveness.

Systemic Challenges to Women's Influence in Saudi Arabia

While progress has been significant, systemic challenges remain that must be addressed for women's influence to translate into sustainable empowerment.

1. Cultural and Social Expectations

- Deep-rooted traditions sometimes limit the acceptance of women in new economic and social roles.
- While reforms create opportunities, social mindsets take longer to shift.
- Resistance is not uniform; urban areas adapt faster than rural regions.

2. Workplace Inclusivity Gaps

- Despite progress, women are still underrepresented in executive decision-making and boardrooms.
- Workplace policies such as maternity support, flexible hours, and childcare remain unevenly implemented across industries.



- Some organizations still see women's inclusion as symbolic rather than systemic.

3. Skills Gap in Future-Ready Fields

- Women dominate higher education, but participation in **STEM** and **digital literacy** is still emerging.
- Without targeted upskilling, women risk being clustered in traditional fields rather than shaping future industries.
- This limits their influence on 4IR-driven sectors such as AI, fintech, and clean energy.

4. Change Management Resistance

- As noted in our previous whitepaper, change is often resisted when introduced rapidly.
- Misconceptions about women's empowerment — such as “quick fixes” or “symbolic representation” — can increase social resistance and raise the “cost of change.”
- Careful, systemic strategies are required to sustain acceptance and advocacy.

5. Structural and Policy Challenges

- While Vision 2030 sets bold targets, implementation varies across ministries, sectors, and regions.
- Coordination between education, labor, and private sectors is still evolving.
- Without consistent policies, women's empowerment risks being fragmented rather than systemic.





The Strategic Role of Women in Economic Diversification

Vision 2030 positions women's participation not as an optional reform but as a **strategic necessity** for building a diversified, knowledge-based economy. Women's influence extends beyond representation to shaping industries, markets, and cultural identity. Their systemic participation strengthens resilience and accelerates transformation.

1. Expanding Non-Oil GDP Contributions

- Women are increasingly active in **finance, retail, tourism, healthcare, and technology** — all critical sectors for diversification.
- Female-owned businesses contribute directly to job creation and consumer market expansion.
- As influencers, women also shape consumption patterns, driving demand for services, products, and innovation.

2. Driving Entrepreneurship and SMEs

- Women entrepreneurs play a central role in growing the **SME sector**, one of the pillars of Vision 2030.
- Their ventures, particularly in **e-commerce, creative industries, and tech startups**, create agility in the economy.
- Women's entrepreneurial influence fosters **inclusive innovation ecosystems** that reflect Saudi cultural values while competing globally.

3. Influencing Leadership and Decision-Making

- Instead of focusing narrowly on titles, women's **influence in boardrooms and executive teams** reshapes corporate culture and governance.
- Women are active in **advisory councils, policy dialogues, and regulatory bodies**, ensuring that national reforms reflect diverse perspectives.
- This influence helps balance risk, improve stakeholder trust, and drive organizational adaptability.

4. Enhancing Workforce Resilience

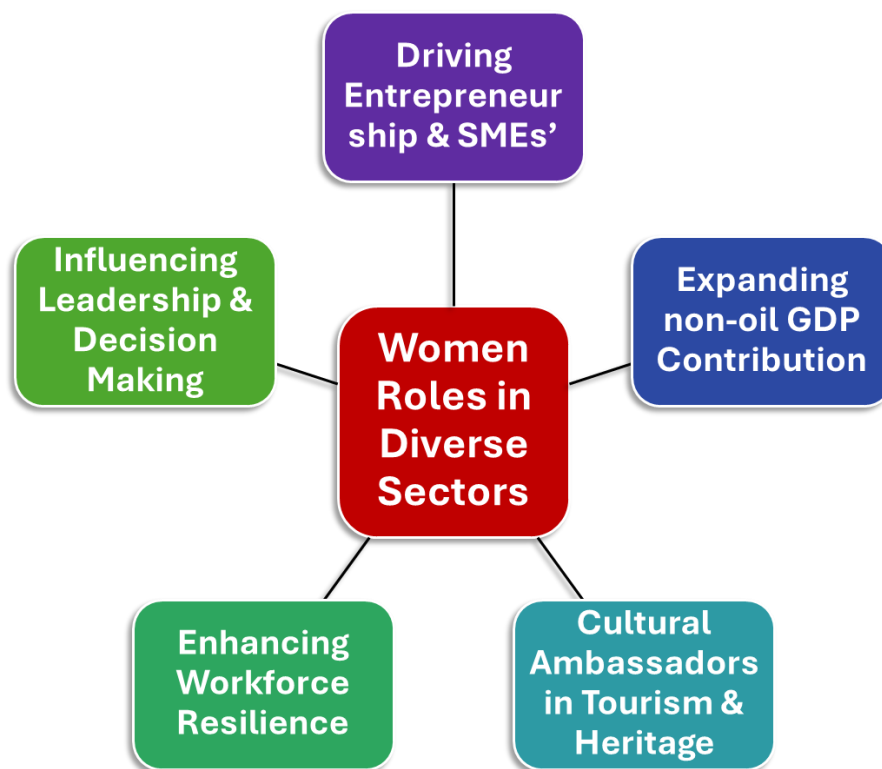
- Women's participation expands the talent pool, addressing skills shortages in critical sectors.



- Flexible work policies and digital platforms allow women to contribute across industries, even while fulfilling family and social roles.
- Their inclusion ensures organizations are more resilient to shocks, as diverse teams adapt faster to change.

5. Cultural Ambassadors in Tourism and Heritage

- Women play a unique role as **cultural influencers**, supporting the tourism sector by shaping hospitality, arts, and heritage experiences.
- By linking cultural authenticity with economic opportunity, women reinforce Saudi Arabia's identity while contributing to GDP diversification.
- This influence also positions Saudi women as **soft power agents**, enhancing the Kingdom's global reputation.





A Systems Thinking Framework for Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is not achieved by isolated policies or individual achievements. It is a **systemic process** that requires interconnected levers working together. A **systems thinking approach** ensures that reforms are not fragmented, but instead reinforce one another across society, economy, and governance.

1. Policy as an Enabler

- National reforms must continue to remove barriers, incentivize participation, and set measurable targets for women's inclusion.
- Policies should integrate **gender-sensitive regulations** across labor, finance, education, and digital sectors.
- A central coordinating body can ensure coherence, reducing fragmentation across ministries.

2. Organizations as Multipliers

- Businesses and institutions must move beyond symbolic representation to systemic inclusion.
- Inclusive HR practices (flexible hours, maternity support, equal pay) multiply women's participation and influence.
- Organizational culture should evolve to value **influence in decision-making**, not only leadership titles.

3. Education as the Foundation

- Women's majority presence in higher education is a national strength that must be harnessed strategically.

- Curricula should emphasize **STEM, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship**, preparing women for future-ready roles.
- Continuous reskilling ensures that women remain competitive in 4IR-driven industries.

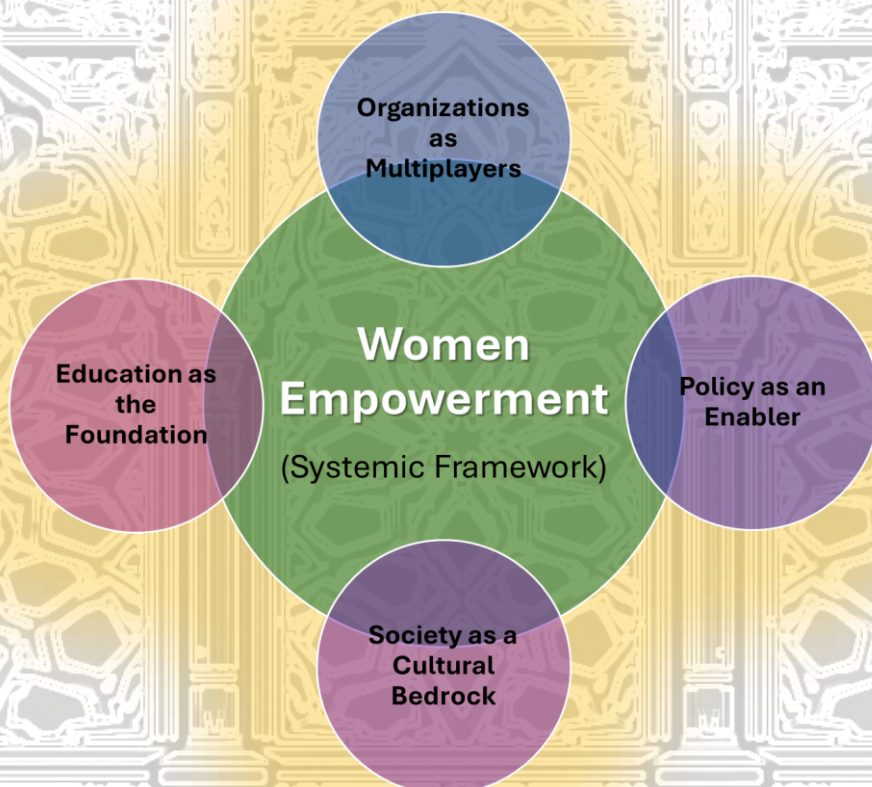
4. Society as the Cultural Bedrock

- Social acceptance is critical. Without cultural alignment, reforms risk resistance and high “change costs.”
- Campaigns, role models, and narratives should highlight women’s **influence** as mothers, sisters, wives, and professionals.
- This framing honors tradition while advancing systemic transformation.

The Interconnected System

Each of these four levers — policy, organizations, education, and society — is interdependent. Policies create opportunities, organizations multiply them, education sustains them, and society legitimizes them.

A **systems thinking framework** therefore shifts empowerment from being a series of disconnected initiatives to becoming a **cohesive national movement** that sustains Vision 2030’s goals.





Case Studies: Women's Influence in Action

Case studies provide practical evidence of how women's influence is reshaping Saudi Arabia's economic and social landscape. These examples highlight the breadth of women's roles — from finance to mega-projects and entrepreneurship — and show how influence, rather than only leadership titles, drives systemic transformation.

1. Women in Banking and Finance

The financial sector has been one of the most dynamic areas for women's empowerment. Female professionals are increasingly present in **corporate banking, governance, risk management, and retail banking**.

- Saudi banks have appointed women to senior positions in compliance, HR, and investment arms.
- Women are shaping corporate culture by influencing **ethics, customer experience, and governance frameworks**.
- Programs with institutions like the **Financial Academy** are equipping women with advanced technical and soft skills to increase systemic impact.





2. Women in Giga-Projects: NEOM and Beyond

Saudi Arabia's giga-projects such as **NEOM**, **The Red Sea Project**, and **Qiddiya** are designed to showcase innovation and sustainability. Women are playing critical roles in these projects as engineers, project managers, and urban planners.



- At NEOM, women contribute to **AI-driven urban planning, renewable energy integration, and cultural design initiatives**.
- Their influence ensures that mega-developments balance **innovation with cultural identity and sustainability**.
- Women in giga-project teams act as **bridges between global expertise and Saudi cultural values**.

3. Women Entrepreneurs and SMEs

Entrepreneurship has become one of the most visible arenas of women's influence. Female entrepreneurs lead ventures in **e-commerce, technology startups, creative industries, and hospitality**.

- Women-owned SMEs contribute to job creation and consumer innovation.
- Initiatives like **Monsha'at** and the **Saudi Venture Capital Company** provide financing and training that amplify women's systemic influence.
- Women entrepreneurs often integrate **cultural authenticity into modern business models**, making their ventures unique contributors to Vision 2030's diversification agenda.



KPIs for Women's Empowerment

As Peter Drucker famously said, “*What gets measured gets managed.*” Women’s empowerment under Vision 2030 must be managed not through symbolic measures but through **clear, systemic performance indicators** that track influence across society, economy, and governance.

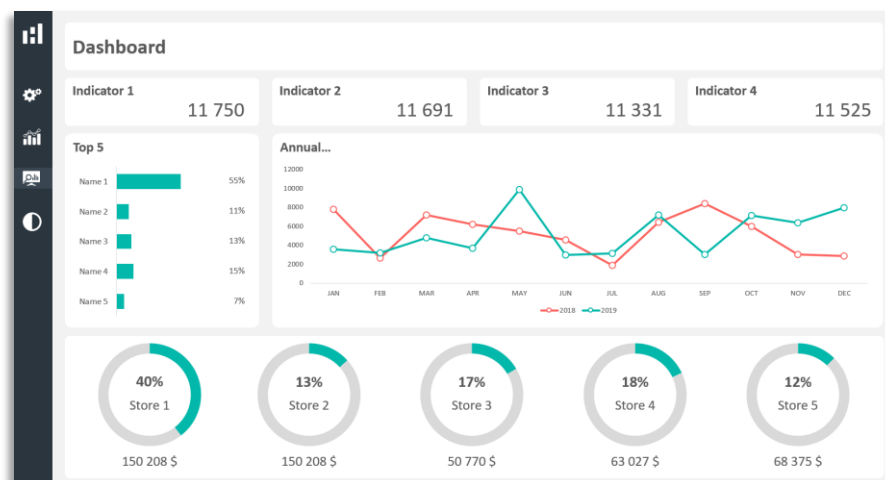
A centralized **Strategy**

Management Office (SMO) or equivalent body can collect, analyze, and report these KPIs, ensuring alignment across ministries, private sector, and civil society. Recognition can be given annually (e.g., Gold-Silver-Bronze awards) to encourage performance and sustain national momentum.

High-Level Strategic KPIs

1. Workforce Participation

- % of women in the labor force (current vs. Vision 2030 target).





- % of women in high-skill and STEM occupations.
- Female representation in new economy sectors (AI, fintech, tourism).

2. Influence in Governance and Decision-Making

- % of women on boards and executive teams.
- Number of women in advisory councils, policy-shaping roles, and regulatory bodies.
- Evidence of policies influenced by women's participation.

3. Entrepreneurship and Business Ownership

- % of SMEs owned or led by women.
- Amount of financing accessed by women entrepreneurs.
- Share of women-led startups in innovation hubs.

4. Education and Skills Development

- Female enrollment in STEM fields and graduate programs.
- Participation in national reskilling/upskilling initiatives.
- Number of women trained in digital literacy, AI, and 4IR skills.

5. Social and Cultural Influence

- Women's participation in cultural, sports, and tourism sectors.
- Visibility of women in global forums and cultural diplomacy.
- Public perception metrics of women's societal influence.

6. International Benchmarking

- Saudi Arabia's ranking in the **WEF Global Gender Gap Report**.
- Improvements in UN Human Development Index (HDI) indicators related to gender.
- Regional leadership in women's economic participation within the GCC.

“Women are catalysts of transformation...”



Financial Compensation as an Indicator of Real Empowerment

One of the most tangible measures of women's empowerment is the question of **financial compensation and pay equity**. While Vision 2030 has created opportunities for women to enter new sectors and roles, the true test of empowerment lies in whether women are **compensated fairly compared to men** for equivalent work.



1. Pay Gap Awareness

- Historically, women in Saudi Arabia — like in many global economies — faced disparities in pay and career progression.
- Vision 2030 reforms explicitly call for greater **labor market equity**, making financial compensation a key performance indicator of systemic change.

2. Equal Pay Regulations

- Saudi Arabia introduced **equal pay regulations** requiring employers to compensate women and men equally when performing the same role with the same qualifications.
- Inspections and compliance measures are gradually being introduced to monitor enforcement in both public and private sectors.

3. Practical Gaps and Challenges

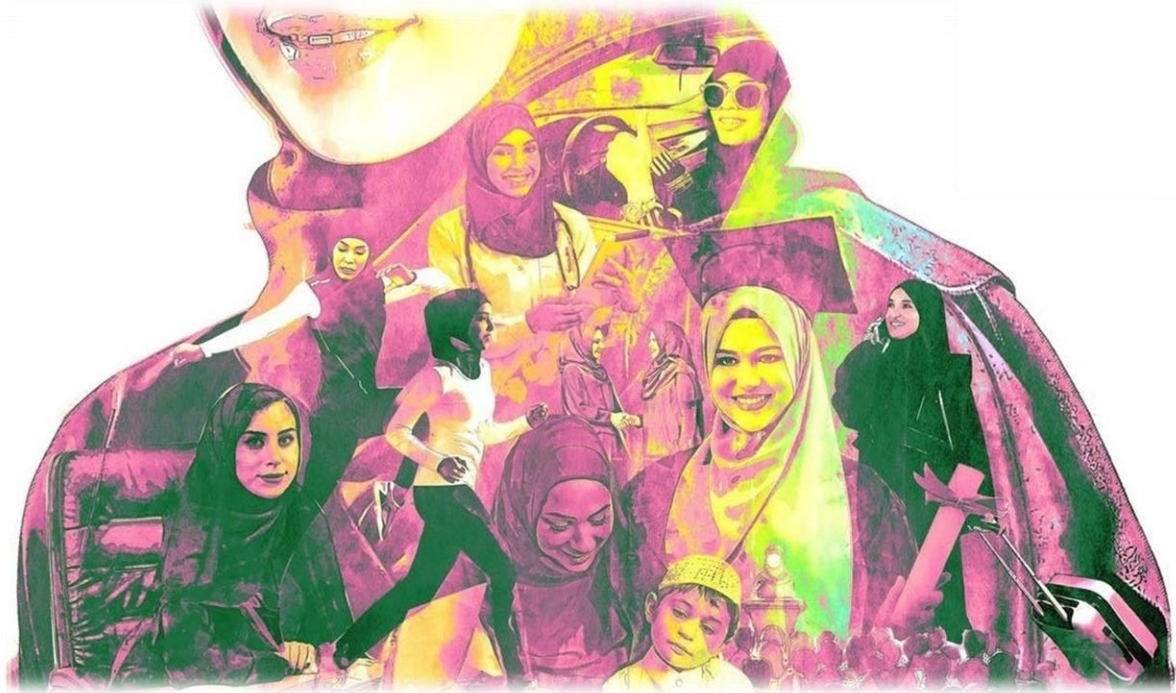
- Despite regulations, differences may still exist due to **limited transparency**, **cultural biases**, or clustering of women in traditionally lower-paying sectors.
- Addressing these gaps requires a **data-driven monitoring system** to ensure equal pay is enforced on a scale.

4. Compensation as a Trust Indicator

- Equal compensation signals to women that their influence is valued not only socially but also **economically**.
- When financial equity is achieved, it builds trust, motivates participation, and strengthens retention of women in high-skill sectors.

5. Benchmark for Real Empowerment

- True empowerment is not only about representation but also about **economic agency**.
- Financial compensation provides one of the clearest benchmarks of whether women's empowerment is **transformational** or merely symbolic.





Conclusion: Women's Influence as a Catalyst for Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's transformation under Vision 2030 is defined by paradigm shifts — technological, systemic, and social. Among these, the empowerment of women stands as one of the most profound. Yet, this empowerment must not be understood merely as the pursuit of *leadership titles*; rather, it is about harnessing women's **influence** across every layer of society and economy.

Influence is broader, deeper, and more sustainable than symbolic leadership. Women influence families as mothers, wives, and sisters; they influence organizations as professionals and decision-shapers; they influence the economy as entrepreneurs and innovators; and they influence the world as cultural ambassadors and diplomats.

A crucial test of empowerment lies in **financial compensation**. Vision 2030 has introduced equal pay regulations to ensure women are rewarded fairly compared to men for equivalent work. Compensation is more than income — it is a **trust indicator** that women's influence is valued equally in the labor market. True empowerment requires closing pay gaps and ensuring women's contributions translate into tangible economic equity.

By reframing empowerment as **influence**, Saudi Arabia honors tradition while enabling transformation. Women's influence strengthens resilience, accelerates diversification, and ensures cultural authenticity remains at the heart of modernization.

To make this influence systemic, progress must be tracked with **strategic KPIs**, supported by **systems thinking frameworks**, and embedded across **policy, organizations, education, and society**. Only then will women's empowerment move from aspiration to impact.

Key Takeaways - Conclusion

Women's empowerment reframed as influence across society and economy.

Influence is broader and more sustainable than symbolic leadership.

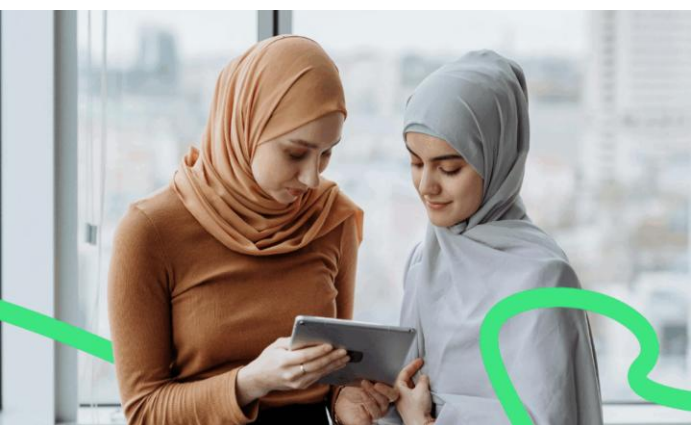
Financial compensation is a key indicator of real empowerment and equity.

Equal pay builds trust, motivates participation, and strengthens retention.

Women as influencers are catalysts of Vision 2030's transformation.



As Vision 2030 unfolds, Saudi women are not just participants in change — they are **catalysts of transformation**, ensuring that the Kingdom's future is innovative, inclusive, and globally competitive.





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