



SUCCESS STORY

C I S C O A C K N O W L E D G E S S U C C E S S A N D A C C O M P L I S H M E N T S

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Women Take Up the Challenge to Accelerate Jordan's Economy

The Women of Jordan

Although 48 percent of Jordan's population is female, only 11.9 percent of the women are economically active. Under a partnership between Cisco Systems, Inc., the Cisco Foundation, UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), and the Government of Jordan, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training and employment initiatives will help Jordan's women become significant contributors to the economic growth of the nation

While female illiteracy rates have dropped considerably in the past few decades, most students still gravitate toward studies in the arts and humanities rather than computer and engineering related fields. Jordanian women face both personal and social challenges to entering the technology workforce. Most women indicate family responsibilities and socio-cultural norms as being the primary barriers to entry. Traditionally considered a man's world, women lack mentors and social support to make the transition from financially dependent to independent members of the workforce. Age-old traditions and stereotypes are also to blame for their state of mind. However, hope lies in change and change has been initiated.

"At first, because I am a woman, it was difficult to find encouragement. But when I found out that UNIFEM is sponsoring this program that encourages women to work in the field of technology, my hopes to work in this field were renewed," says Nihad Sagr, an Academy program student at the Wadi Al-Sir College.

A Vision for Jordan's future

His Majesty King Abdullah II said, "The vision of Jordan is to become a regional IT leader and an internationally recognized exporter of IT products and services exploiting its core human capital advantages. The key to success is the central role of the private sector, which spearheads the sustained entry of the sector into international markets." Jordan plans considerable progress in telecommunications with the implementation of state of the art technology, a national digital backbone and international connectivity. The women of Jordan have a significant role to play in shaping and sustaining the future of Jordan as a wired nation.

The Winds of Change

Under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, UNIFEM, Cisco Systems, Cisco Foundation and the Government of Jordan launched *Achieving E-Quality in the ICT Sector*, a project aimed at addressing issues of the digital divide. Working toward enhancing the Jordanian women's skills, knowledge and access to information, the project aims to address the low percentages of women's participation in the ICT sector in Jordan and attempts to mainstream women in the field of technology. "People who think of technology only in terms of machinery may think that computers are in danger of dehumanizing education.





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But information and computer technology can open a world to our students. For them up-to-date information and knowledge are just a click away,” says Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah.

“His Majesty King Abdullah has been very active in introducing new technologies to our schools and universities. We want to encourage educators to reconsider the impact of technology on our ways of knowing about the world, thinking about challenges, and overcoming them,” says Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah

Women in the Majority

Launched in January 2002, the project has established 10 Cisco Networking Academies across the country. More than 600 students have enrolled in the course to date, 66 percent of which are women. These women are now training to achieve the globally recognized Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) certification. The initiative seeks to empower women by imparting technical knowledge with demand-driven networking skills and ensuring a gender sensitive policy environment, giving women a competitive edge in the job market. The program attempts to function as an equalizer by addressing issues of gender inequality in the IT workforce. Graduates of the program will be linked up to the job market with a job placement program established in conjunction with the public and the private sectors in Jordan.

“The program aims to building women’s work skills in order for them to enter and get distinguished jobs in the IT and computer network labor sectors. The female trainees earn a Cisco industry certificate that enables them to enter a mostly male dominated field,” says an instructor at the Umm Hubibah al Shamilah High, a school that started the program with 45 female tenth graders in the year 2001.

Under this program UNIFEM has created a database, which will evaluate the ICT sector in Jordan from a gender perspective. There is gender bias among the ICT strategies and an ICT bias among female-development related policies both of which are disruptive for the economy and the women of Jordan. The database will be used as a tool to monitor and assess policies and practices identified as being a hindrance to the employment of women. The findings of this research were discussed in “E-Quality in the ICT Sector” international forum held on the 15th of October 2002. The doors to a better life and a better future have now been opened for many.

“In a country where women make up almost half the population, they have the power to make a difference, when given the opportunities and the environment. We congratulate all Jordanian women who are now part of the Cisco Networking Academy Program and we are proud to be working with the Government of Jordan and UNIFEM to make the vision of the leaders and the people of Jordan a reality,” says Erin Walsh, Manager, International Strategy and Partnerships, Cisco Worldwide Education. The project also addresses Cisco’s commitment to the Least Developed Countries (LDC) initiative through strategic partnerships, announced at the G-8 Summit in July of 2000.

The Cisco Networking Academy Program

The Cisco Networking Academy Program helps to bridge the digital divide by providing comprehensive e-learning solutions to students, armoring them with Internet Technology skills essential in a global economy. The Academy program integrates face-to-face teaching with a Web-based curriculum, online assessment tools, and hands-on laboratory exercises in this blended learning environment. Geographic, social, economic and racial boundaries are eliminated as the program extends to 149 countries with more than 10,000 Academies across the globe.