

Women's participation in global computer literacy programs rises to 35 per cent in KSA

Government supporting enhanced ICT competency & greater socioeconomic contributions of Saudi women

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The number of women participating in ICDL training programs across the Kingdom rose from 10 per cent in 2006 to 35 per cent by end of 2009 and is expected to grow to around 50 per cent within a few years, according to ICDL Saudi Arabia, the governing body and certification authority of the ICDL program in KSA. This trend complements government efforts to enhance the IT competency of Saudi women, expand their employment opportunities, and increase their overall participation in socioeconomic development.

ICDL Saudi Arabia has been closely coordinating with women-only educational institutions such as Princess Noura Bint Abdulrahman University, the Kingdom's first university for girls, on the greater adoption of ICDL training into their academic programs.

Other prominent academic institutions such as King Saud University, Taibah University and Al Baha University already have several of their female students enrolled in the ICDL program.

"The appointment of KSA's first female vice minister last year shows the growing confidence in women's ability to become productive members of Saudi society. Women have especially strong potential in ICT, which has emerged as one of the Kingdom's key growth sectors. So far there has been a very positive response among women to ICDL's various initiatives which will intensify further through government assistance," said Dr. Sulaiman Al-Dhalaan, Consultant, ICDL Saudi Arabia.

ICDL Saudi Arabia has been engaging in various agreements with private organizations and key government departments such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology to broaden the reach of the ICDL program.

It has also been cooperating with the country's 32 local universities on the inclusion of ICDL modules in their curricula. Through ICDL Saudi Arabia's efforts, more women are now using their ICT skills to work from home as freelance writers, translators or designers and collaborate with clients and partners.

The International Exhibition for Higher Education held in Riyadh in late January 2010 highlighted the broader role being played by women in Saudi Arabia's education sector. The event showed how girl's access to education has increased while the gender gap in this field has significantly declined throughout the Kingdom. Many of the domestic and international higher education issues addressed by the exhibition focused on female concerns.

The International Computer Driving Licence is the world's largest vendor-neutral end-user computer skills certification. Its worldwide regional and country branches certify enrollees on fundamental IT skills, use of basic computer applications, and internet use. ICDL is endorsed by education ministries, universities and government organizations in more than 168 countries. Its local arm, ICDL Saudi Arabia, has been imparting essential ICT skills to Saudi women to increase their productivity without compromising their cultural and religious principles.