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News

The sky is the limit: Supporting women in education key to long-term GDP growth, guests hear at Emirates LitFest Expo 2020 Dubai event

DUBAI, 13 February 2022 – Keeping women in college is key to companies growing their bottom line and countries growing their economies, according to ‘Good Feminism and Global Leadership’, an Emirates Festival of Literature event held at Expo 2020’s Dubai Millennium Amphitheatre on Sunday (13 February).

Moderator **Ahlam Bolooki**, Director of the Emirates Festival of Literature, opened the talk by asking panellists **Her Excellency Reem Al Hashimy**, UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation and Director General, Expo 2020 Dubai, and **Indra Nooyi**, former CEO and Chairman of PepsiCo, about the moments in their youth that planted the seeds for their achievement. Both credited their families and teachers for providing strong support and encouragement.

Nooyi said: “I was lucky to be born into an educated family and my father and grandfather insisted the girls received the same education and opportunities as the boys. I went to school, I joined a rock band, I played cricket – I was really able to test the limits of what women could do in India.”

HE Al Hashimy agreed, having graduated from high school at 16 before starting college. “It’s really important to be surrounded by people who believe in you. I was a bookworm and very into academia growing up and I benefitted from great mentors, both as a student as well as when I started working in government.”

A key area of support, according to Nooyi, is to make sure girls and women have “the power of the purse.”

“My family told me they were educating me so I never had to put my hand out and ask for anything – from my husband, my in-laws, anybody. My education was my most valuable dowry,” she said.

Quoting US statistics, Nooyi was optimistic about what women can achieve, noting that 70 per cent of high school graduates are girls, 50 per cent of college degrees are awarded to women and, in institutions that focus on STEM subjects, women score one point higher on their GPA.

“Therefore, to make companies and countries economically competitive, the talent pool of women needs to be tapped and they need to be retained in the workforce, but with the right support. From there, the sky is the limit,” she said.

HE Al Hashimy said: “Women are too integral to society for us to marginalise them. A big part of an advocacy role isn’t just about women supporting women, men need to support women. When you add the economic argument to

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supporting women, societies will thrive and economies will thrive, then I really think we will start to push the needle.”

-ENDS-

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