

Speech by Ms Samar Habayeb, owner Silsal, Jordan
At the ITC cocktail on WOMEN AND YOUTH AT THE CENTRE OF
EXPORT AND JOB CREATION
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Good evening,

It is great to be here.

Thank you for having me.

I would like to talk to you about the Silsal story, how ITC has become an important part of that story, and how we are contributing to the community in which we operate.

Silsal means clay; we are a design house that draws inspiration from Arab heritage and successfully renders them to fit a modern context. Our designs are a ménage of traditional and modern motifs brought together in the form of home accessories, tableware and furniture. We take advantage of mixed media in our creations as we carefully choose whether to use clay, wood, Plexi, fiberglass, bronze, glass, or even gold depending on the product.

Shanghai Tang is an example of what we are trying to create. It originated in Hong Kong has 24 stores all over the world and sells high end products based on Chinese designs, which have found a global following.

We are based in Jordan a country which has its challenges.

You can build a business in America, or even in Saudi Arabia, by creating a product and selling it exclusively in your home market. After achieving significant domestic growth, a U.S. or Saudi company can accumulate the necessary financial and human resources to market its products globally.

Coming from a country with a small economy, population, and minimal natural and energy resources does not afford Silsal the same luxury.

The size of Jordan's economy is roughly a quarter of the market capitalization of McDonalds. In addition to being based in a small market, we import the materials that we use to manufacture our products, and rely on expensive sources of energy in the finishing processes.

Therefore, to succeed, being export-oriented has to be a priority, not an after-thought, and we have to add enough value to our designs and products to justify importing raw materials into Jordan, processing them with high-priced electricity and then re-exporting them. So far, the growth in Silsal's export markets and the genuine value addition, have vindicated our business model.

Isaac Newton, of falling apple fame, once said: if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.

In our efforts to expand abroad, we have achieved huge progress by standing on the shoulders of the ITC, who have been invaluable in our efforts to penetrate the EU and securing blue chip clients, such as the Louvre Museum's gift shop. We owe the ITC, Mr. Torek Farhadi and his team a big thank you for their perseverance in setting up a meeting between potential EU customers and a Jordanian delegation that I was lucky to be a part off.

Like any corporation, Silsal's driving force is profitability, and we achieve this goal by being true to our values: creativity in our work and excellence in our quality and customer service.

Our stated goals at Silsal are not developmental per se; we do not start our days thinking about job creation for the young or empowering women. Yet we have found that in order to grow the business, we need to recruit and invest in hard-working Jordanian youth and give them the training to grow their talents. Our team of 30 people includes artists, architects, calligraphers, craftsmen, graphic designers and painters who take ideas from sketchpads to showrooms. And often times, the most industrious people we find happen to be women. Women empowerment has become a big part of the Silsal story, and this is what makes our developmental impact sustainable. 60% of Silsal's workforce are woman, 45% are below the age of 35, and 23% commute from outside Amman.

I would like to share with you the story of Mrs. Inshirah Shabaan, a dedicated, hardworking production manager at Silsal; a widow and a mother of two who lives in Zarqa, a city north east of Amman. Since the founding of the business, Inshirah would wake up at 5am every morning, prepare breakfast for her children, commute to Amman, spend a full working day at Silsal, then commute back for 2 and a half arriving at her home at 8pm in time to prepare dinner for her children, and spend whatever time or energy she has left for that day learning about her children's experience at school.

Inshirah started with a minimum wage and no experience. Today she earns five times that wage, drives a car to and from work (which cut down her commute from 3 hours to half an hour) and for the first time in her life, Inshirah will be travelling outside of Jordan to represent Silsal at an upcoming exhibition in Abu-Dhabi next month.

With every new market for Silsal, we see a development in our brand, and a step in the right direction. We see the trickle down from export oriented growth on the wellbeing of Silsal's employees, and the opportunities they have allowed us to create in our community; a healthy symbiotic relationship between the personal growth Jordan's youth and our brand's global success. We are grateful to the giants that allowed us to get to where we are today and look forward to growing and contributing to the success of others in turn.

Thank you for your time