



## Sweden Feminist Foreign Policy in Building Women Entrepreneurship (SHE-Leads Program) in Saudi Arabia 2017-2021

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2017, Sweden built women entrepreneurship (SHE-Leads Program) in Saudi Arabia to foster networks, meetings, and educational opportunities to train Saudi Arabian women as entrepreneurs and innovators. The aim of this study is to elucidate how did Sweden's feminist foreign policy build women's entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia 2017-2021. This study was conducted using interview method by electronic mail with Monika Wirkkala, Director of the Department of Communication and Analysis of Sweden at the Swedish Institute (SI). The data are analyzed using the feminist foreign policy concept proposed by Cheung, Gürsel, Kirchner, & Scheyer, which encompasses five core values of feminist foreign policy. The results were as follows: (1) intersectionality, Sweden applied this policy fairly without any differentiation among participants; (2) empathetic reflectivity, Swedish leaders and stakeholders responded positively to this policy by developing SHE-Pioneer; (3) substantive representation and participation, Sweden actively engaged women from the Swedish Institute (SI) and collaborated with non-state actors in formulating and implementing policies; (4) accountability, the policy incorporates evaluation and monitoring, involving program participants, stakeholders, and partners; (5) commitment to peace, the SHE-Leads Program policy is implemented through collaboration, involving participants from diverse backgrounds, and aims to strengthen relations between Sweden and Saudi Arabia. This study concluded that Sweden feminist foreign policy in building women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia (SHE-Leads Program) has reflected Sweden feminist foreign policy and has implemented the five core values of the feminist foreign policy concept.

**Keywords:** Sweden, Feminist Foreign Policy, Women Entrepreneurship, Saudi Arabia



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## INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is the decisions or strategies used by a nation towards other countries. Foreign policy plays a crucial role in advancing a country's political and economic objectives on the global stage ([Aggestam et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, foreign policy guides a nation in fulfilling its national

interests and attaining a respectable position within the international community (Bojang, 2018). Therefore, foreign policy emerges as a crucial topic of study within the discipline of International Relations, encompassing both the external and internal dimensions of a nation (Beach, 2019). However, over the course of several decades, many foreign policies held by countries have been regarded as 'gender-blind foreign policy'. Although initially appearing commendable, these policies have been deemed by some nations as failing to acknowledge and address existing gender discrimination, inequality, and violence (Zimmerman, 2020). According to the Global Gender Gap (GGP) Report 2017, it was reported that in 2017, the average progress of 144 countries participating in the GGP in addressing global gender gaps reached a score of 0.680. This indicates that an average gap of 32% still needs to be addressed worldwide across the four dimensions of the GGP index in order to achieve universal gender equality. In this regard, the largest gender disparity is found in the political empowerment index, with only 23% of the political empowerment gap being addressed, while the smallest disparity is in the health and survival index, with 96% of the gap being addressed. The following graph illustrates the Global Performance GGP Index for the year 2017 based on the four dimensions of the index (World Economic Forum, 2017):

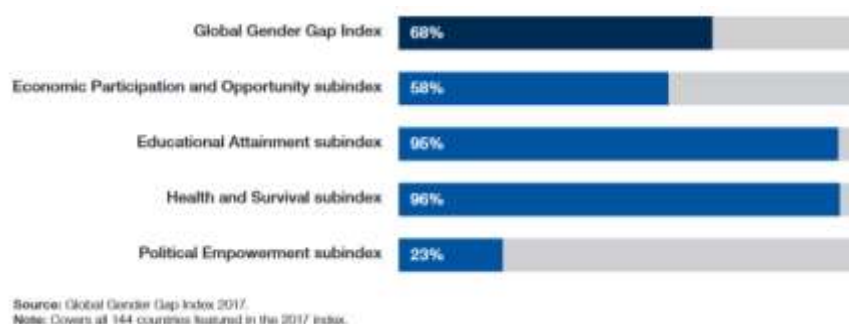


Figure 1. Global Performance GGP 2017

Source: World Economic Forum, 2017

According to the GGP Index over the years, Sweden consistently ranks among the top 5 countries with the best gender equality. Gender equality is a fundamental principle of Swedish society. The objective of Sweden's gender equality policy is to ensure that men and women have equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in their lives (Swedish Institute, 2013). Furthermore, Sweden not only demonstrates support for gender equality within its own borders, but also beyond them. In 2014, Margot Wallstrom, the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, established a feminist foreign policy (FFP) as a means of expressing concern and support for gender equality. Sweden has become the first country in the world to implement a feminist foreign policy in response to the prevalent discrimination against women and girls in everyday life worldwide (Ministry for Foreign Affairs Government Offices of Sweden, 2019). In the context of the Feminist Foreign Policy framework, the Swedish government collaborated with Saudi Arabia in 2017 to establish the women entrepreneurship initiative known as the SHE-Leads Program (Borquist & de Bruin, 2019; Perekrestova, 2022; Thomas & Jose, 2020). This program aims to create networks, facilitate meetings, and provide education to empower Saudi women become entrepreneurs or innovators. Additionally, the program serves as a means to foster national unity and empower women (Danish & Smith, 2012; Khan, 2017).

Saudi Arabia is a country that has not prioritize gender equality yet, as evidenced by its ranking of 138 out of 144 countries in the GGP Index. The issue of gender roles in Saudi Arabian society has been a frequent focus of attention. As an Islamic country, Saudi Arabia has conservative rules and regulations that are influenced by religious considerations, which in turn contribute to the gender inequality prevalent in the country. This inequality is also influenced by cultural factors and has implications for various aspects of societal life ([Alsaleh, 2012](#)). The issue of gender inequality in Saudi Arabian society manifests itself in the realm of employment ([Irsten, 2019](#)).

According to the GGP Index 2017, Saudi Arabia ranked 138 out of 144 countries, with a ranking of 142 in terms of economic opportunity and participation in both 2016 and 2017 (World Economic Forum, 2017). This is due to the prevailing patriarchal views in society, which perceive women's roles primarily as being confined to household and childcare responsibilities, while men continue to dominate positions of power, education, finance, and various other aspects. However, as time progresses and the influence of globalization grows, starting in 2017, Saudi Arabia has begun to adapt by implementing new policies regarding women's freedom. These policies include allowing women to drive, attend football matches in stadiums, travel without a guardian's permission, stay alone in hotels, and wear brighter-colored clothing ([Syed et al., 2018](#)). The dynamics of gender issues in Saudi Arabia have prompted the emergence of collaboration between Sweden and Saudi Arabia in the development of women entrepreneurship in the country ([Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018](#); [Dutta, 2020](#); [Panta & Thapa, 2018](#)).

To date, there has been research that focuses on discussing Sweden feminist foreign policy (SHE-Leads Program) on building women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia yet ([Chaker & Zouaoui, 2023](#); [Raman et al., 2022](#)). This study is different from previous studies which only focused on the feminist foreign policy, both in Sweden and in other countries that have implemented feminist foreign policies. Rather, this study focuses on how Sweden feminist foreign policy has built women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia 2017-2021 using the five core values of foreign policy concept. The chosen timeframe of 2017-2021 corresponds to the implementation of the policy in 2017 and the final year of Prime Minister Stefan Lofven's leadership in 2021. This study holds significant importance as it can serve as a valuable reference or source of recommendations for policy makers in the formulation of gender-based or feminist policies. Additionally, it has the potential to contribute to the advancement of international relations, particularly in the context of feminist foreign policy, and can serve as a valuable resource for future research.

Several studies have discussed on feminist foreign policy, for instance, a study conducted by ([Kuovo, 2019](#)) demonstrates that Sweden feminist foreign policy has increased awareness and built knowledge about women rights and gender equality within the government, as well as ensuring that these issues are systematically integrated into various foreign policies. Another study by ([Zhukova et al., 2021](#)) reveals that the narrative systems of Sweden and Mexico prioritize social policies, while France and Canada emphasize the role of the market in addressing gender inequality. The study conducted by ([Robinson, 2019](#)) highlights the potential and necessity for feminist foreign policies to be ethical. However, this can only be achieved if ethics are not understood as a rigid and absolute set of principles based on Western liberal notions of human rights or justice. Therefore, this study focuses on how did Sweden's feminist foreign policy build women's entrepreneurship (SHE-Leads Program) in Saudi Arabia 2017-2021.

## Feminist Foreign Policy

The feminist foreign policy is a policy direction that extends beyond national borders, guided by a commitment to gender equality and aimed at addressing issues of male dominance and gender inequality resulting from traditional gender stereotypes ([Alwan & Weldon, 2017](#)). ([Thompson & Clement, 2019](#)) assert that feminist foreign policy is a state policy that defines its interactions with other states or movements by prioritizing gender equality and upholding the rights of women and traditionally marginalized groups. This policy involves allocating significant resources to achieve this vision and striving to reduce patriarchal power structures and male dominance in various areas such as aid, trade, defense, and diplomacy, informed by feminist activists, groups, and movements.

Contrast with others, Jessica Cheung, Dilek Gürsel, Marie Jelenka Kirchner, and Victoria Scheyer (2021) conceptualize foreign policy broadly as cooperation, interaction, and relations among states, international and regional institutions, as well as transnational organizations and civil society. However, despite this framing, they view foreign policy not as a confined political space, but rather as a collection of everyday actions that impact the lived realities of individuals worldwide. They argue that foreign policy is an everyday practice manifested through discussions of daily decisions and concrete actions taken within foreign ministries, embassies, diplomatic meetings, and policy adoption. Consequently, they construct a feminist foreign policy from a values-based perspective to transform mindsets and enable a feminist approach to foreign policy. The five core values are ([Cheung et al., 2021](#)):

1. Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a feminist concept that examines how does power influence social relationships and individual experiences in everyday life. This concept also recognizes and addresses various forms of discrimination and how do they interact to affect the social and political positions of individuals or groups in domestic and foreign contexts. Intersectionality emphasizes the importance of considering the relationships between factors such as race, gender, sexuality, social class, nationality, ability, ethnicity, and age as interconnected and mutually shaping, rather than separate entities. In the context of feminist foreign policy analysis, intersectionality highlights elements such as policymakers, their backgrounds, strategic partners, and positions of power within the global community that need to be taken into consideration.

2. Empathetic Reflexivity

Empathetic reflexivity is a practice that encourages individuals, states, and organizations to adopt a critical and ethical stance in evaluating their positions within power relations. Empathetic reflexivity entails attention to the impact of actions and historical positions in relation to others, as well as responsiveness to the needs of the surrounding community. In feminist foreign policy analysis, empathetic reflexivity identifies elements such as leaders' responses to societal needs, the role of the state within groups, partnerships, collaborations, and considerations of history such as colonialism and conflict.

3. Substantive Representation and Participation

Representation is the primary focus in the practice of gender equality policy, both at the domestic and international levels. Several aspects can be identified with this value, such as

women's participation in politics or feminist foreign policymaking, the involvement of non-state actors or civil society organizations as representatives, and the structural/political/cultural barriers related to women's participation.

4. Accountability

Accountability refers to the need for states, non-state actors, and institutions to be responsible to the beneficiaries of policies. Therefore, responsibility should be carried out by foreign policymakers and implementation partners not only to state institutions, but also to the public and individuals whom the policy is intended to assist. This value pertains to the system of policy accountability and reporting, the entities driving the evaluation process, and the distribution of funds or actions.

5. Active Peace Commitment

Active peace commitment refers to the traditional approach of foreign policy by emphasizing demilitarization, mediation, and non-violent approaches to promote human security that considers gender. This value emphasizes the need to eliminate all forms of violence and sources of insecurity, including the military, and encourages positive peace, which means collaborative, inclusive, socially just, and welfare-oriented peace. This value also involves an active commitment to peace through reconciliation, empathetic dialogue, equality, equity, and diplomacy in conflict resolution.

## **METHOD**

This is a research with interview method to elicit comprehensive responses from related parties. (Creswell, 2009; Miles et al., 2014) categorizes interviews into four distinct types, they are: (1) one-on-one interviews; focus group interviews; (3) telephone interviews; and electronic mail interviews. In this study, interview was conducted by electronic mail with Monika Wirkkala, Director of the Department of Communication and Analysis of Sweden at the Swedish Institute (SI) as the organizer of SHE-Leads Program. In this research, the method was employed to elucidating Sweden feminist foreign policy in building women entrepreneurship (SHE-Leads Program) in Saudi Arabia 2017-2021.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **SHE-Leads Program 2017-2021**

Based on the document sent by Monika Wirkkala, Director of the Department of Communication and Analysis of Sweden at the Swedish Institute (SI), it interprets that the SHE-Leads Program is a program that contributes to dialogue, knowledge exchange, and long-term relations between actors in Sweden and Gulf countries initially, specifically the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The SHE-Leads Program was established to contribute to the overall goals of SI's strategic objectives, which are to promote Sweden. In this regard, Sweden seeks to have international influence and attract talent, competence, and investment. The operational objectives of the program are to facilitate access for Swedish and other actors to dialogue meetings and experience exchange (Wirkkala, 2023).

The SHE-Leads Program was initiated in 2017 and has consistently attracted an average of 20 participants annually. This program specifically targets female managers and leaders in both the public and private sectors who are in either the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that the program operates under the auspices of the government, as evidenced by a letter of appreciation received in 2017. Over the course of the four-year period from 2017 to 2021, a total of 82 Saudi Arabian women have been included in the SHE-Leads Program, with specific details as follows (Wirkkala, 2023):

**Table 1. Number of SHE-Leads Program Participants 2017-2021**

| Country      | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | Total |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Saudi Arabia | 18   | 17   | 13   | 10   | 24   | 82    |

Moreover, the document highlights that the implementation of the SHE-Leads Program, as mandated by the Government Decision in 2017, necessitates close collaboration with the Swedish Embassy in the region. This collaboration primarily involves the embassy's assistance in participant recruitment, logistical support during program implementation, and their presence in specific programs. However, it is important to note that the embassy has not been involved in program design, including the selection of program content or its substance. Additionally, in 2018, a cooperation agreement was established between the Saudi Arabian authorities responsible for the Small and Medium Enterprises Authority (SMEA) and various other actors in the region, such as Ericsson, Accenture, and start-up companies focusing on women leadership. The SHE-Leads Program was initially conducted in Sweden in 2017-2018, followed by a shift to Dubai in 2019, which also included visits to Sweden. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent global restrictions, the program was conducted entirely online in 2020 and 2021 as an adaptation measure. It is worth noting that the author of this research was unable to interview SHE-Leads Program alumni from Saudi Arabia for the years 2017-2021. The Swedish Institute (SI) stated that they are unable to share the names or contact information of alumni to avoid putting participants in an uncomfortable position. It is important to clarify that this restriction is not one of the stipulations for participants in the SHE-Leads Program.

### **Sweden Feminist Foreign Policy in Building Women Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia Based on Five Core Values**

#### 1. Intersectionality

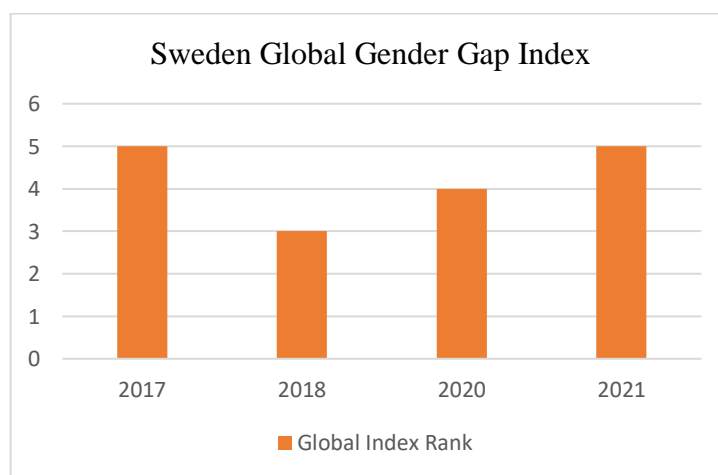
Based on Monika Wirkkala's statement on July 8, 2023, by email interview regarding intersectionality in the SHE-Leads Program, she stated that SI treats all participants in the SHE-Leads Program equally, without any special or differential treatment. All participants receive the same facilities, resources, and infrastructure. SI does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, social status, or economic status in its policy-making process, participant recruitment

process, or program learning from year to year. Participant recruitment is based on occupation and residence, not factors such as ethnicity and religion (Wirkkala, 2023). The SHE-Leads Program specifically targets Saudi Arabian women aged 25-45 who own or operate SMEs in Saudi Arabia, work in the private or public sector, and are involved in entrepreneurship or leadership. Wirkkala also conveyed that alumni of the SHE-Leads Program have gained valuable experience and learning that can be applied in their everyday entrepreneurial lives (Wirkkala, 2023). This represents a step in showing that Sweden pays attention to and creates benefits for women entrepreneurs who are often overlooked in entrepreneurship training programs.

Moreover, Wirkkala stated that SI plays an active role in designing and implementing this policy. Through the SHE-Leads Program policy, SI under the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has a crucial role in fostering women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia. However, Wirkkala stated that she does not have detailed data regarding the individuals involved in the SHE-Leads Program policy-making process. In this study, she explained that Swedish authorities receive an annual allocation letter, then SI receives it from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs at the end of each December for the upcoming year. They then translate it into various forms of communication, websites (sharingsweden.se), programs, or others. This means that the SHE-Leads Program is designed and implemented by SI (Wirkkala, 2023).

Furthermore, regarding the global power dynamics between Sweden and Saudi Arabia, while Sweden globally excels in gender equality, the situation in Saudi Arabia is quite different. However, Sweden continues to strive to promote gender equality values in Saudi Arabia through the SHE-Leads Program (O.E.C.D., 2018). The following graph illustrates of Sweden's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index for 2017-2021:

**Figure 2. Sweden Rank in GGP Index 2017-2021**



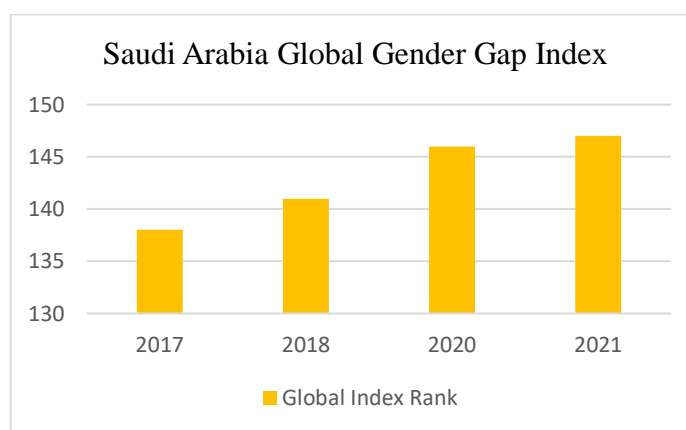
(Source: World Economic Forum, 2021)

Based on the chart above, it can be observed that during the period of 2017-2021, Sweden consistently maintained a global ranking not lower than 5 (five). In 2017, Sweden had closed more than 81% of the overall gender gap. Sweden also maintained a strong position in the sub-index of economic opportunity and participation, partly due to wage equality factors (World Economic Forum, 2017). Sweden has achieved a closure of over 82% in the overall gender gap in 2018 and

2020, as well as 82.3% in 2021. Sweden also retained a strong position in the sub-index of economic opportunity and participation until 2021, due to the sustained progress in female workforce participation. In this regard, Sweden remained among the top 15 countries in the world in terms of workforce participation (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Meanwhile, the following graph illustrates Saudi Arabia's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index for the years 2017-2021:

**Figure 3. Saudi Arabia Rank in GGP Index 2017-2021**



Source: (World Economic Forum, 2021)

In 2017, Saudi Arabia was ranked 138<sup>th</sup> in the GGP Index. Saudi Arabia made progress in closing the gender gap in primary education enrollment and some advancements in gender disparities for professional and technical workers. In the same year, Saudi Arabia also experienced a slight decline in wage equality for similar job roles based on estimated earnings. Nevertheless, 2017 marked Saudi Arabia's largest improvement within the region in the overall index over the past decade and the second-largest relative improvement globally in the sub-index of economic opportunity and participation (World Economic Forum, 2017).

In 2018, Saudi Arabia saw improvements in wage equality and female workforce participation. In 2020, based on an analysis by the WEF in 20 countries where women constituted 40% of the workforce, Saudi Arabia had one of the lowest figures, with only 16% of its workforce being female. Meanwhile, Sweden was one of the countries with the highest figures, with 48% of its workforce being female (World Economic Forum, 2020). In 2021, Saudi Arabia also ranked among the countries with the highest gender gap in managerial positions, with a rate of 93% (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Based on Figures 1 and 2, it can be observed that the positions of Sweden and Saudi Arabia in terms of gender equality are vastly different. Throughout the years 2017-2021, Sweden consistently ranked among the top 5 out of approximately 150 countries, while Saudi Arabia remained among the bottom 10. Therefore, the author assesses that Sweden's feminist foreign policy in promoting



women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia could assist Saudi Arabia in improving its rankings, particularly in the sub-index of economic opportunity and participation. This is evidenced by Saudi Arabia's improvement in its ranking in 2022, moving from an initial range of 138-147 in the years 2017-2021 to the 127<sup>th</sup> position in 2022. Similarly, the ranking based on the sub-index of economic opportunity and participation improved to 128<sup>th</sup> (World Economic Forum, 2022).

## 2. Empathetic Reflectivity

The first aspect of reflexivity discusses the responses of leaders or stakeholders regarding Sweden's feminist foreign policy in promoting women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia, particularly through the SHE-Leads Program. The author assesses that the SHE-Leads Program has received positive responses from stakeholders in Sweden. Based on Monika Wirkkala's statement in the email interview, she stated that Sweden highly values gender equality, which is considered an essential topic for all countries and societies to focus on. She also mentioned the existence of SHE-Pioneers Program, which is a result of the development of the SHE-Leads Program and currently offered to all Swedish Embassies ([Wirkkala, 2023](#)). Furthermore, there has been a development of the SHE-Leads Program from initially only being in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to being available in all Swedish Embassies. This expansion aims to provide a broader perspective on leadership, with a focus on sustainability and gender equality to the public.

The second empathetic aspect is Sweden's role in partnership with Saudi Arabia concerning women entrepreneurship (the SHE-Leads Program). In this regard, Wirkkala stated that in this program, SI facilitates dialogue, knowledge exchange, and experiences between actors in Sweden and Saudi Arabia. SI also aims to portray a positive image of Sweden's competence in respective fields of interest, a positive image of the relationship between Swedish leadership culture and innovative organizations, and to strengthen networks for Swedish actors in Saudi Arabia ([Wirkkala, 2023](#)). Based on these roles, it can be concluded that Sweden has implemented the SHE-Leads Program empathetically, and empowering Saudi Arabian women to enhance their capabilities as entrepreneurs.

The third empathetic aspect of reflexivity pertains to past experiences or conflicts involving Sweden and Saudi Arabia. Sweden and Saudi Arabia began to establish relations when both countries committed to remaining neutral during World War II in the mid-20th century ([Boyfield, 2022](#)). In 2015, Sweden and Saudi Arabia were involved in a dispute when Margot Wallstrom criticized Raif Badawi, a Saudi writer and activist. He was arrested in 2012 on charges of insulting Islam through electronic media. At that time, Saudi Arabia responded by recalling its ambassador in Stockholm, and Sweden also canceled a military agreement with Saudi Arabia. Wallstrom, at that time, expressed her belief that a feminist foreign policy perspective could be an important tool to ensure that human rights are respected for both men and women ([Crouch, 2015](#)).

However, Saudi Arabia is one of Sweden's important trading partners. In 2014, Sweden exported \$1.3 billion worth of goods to Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the Swedish business community was deeply concerned about the financial impact of the dispute with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia purchased military equipment from Sweden worth \$39 million in 2014. Even before the dispute began, 31 Swedish business leaders published a statement in the DN Debatt newspaper urging the government to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia because Sweden's reputation as a trading

and business partner was at stake. A year later, Saudi Arabia and Sweden resumed diplomatic relations following a series of missions from Sweden to Saudi Arabia ([Taylor, 2015](#)).

The author concludes that Sweden and Saudi Arabia have a close and mutually dependent relationship. Despite differences in views of human rights, both countries can still maintain their relationship for their respective national interests. This is what makes Sweden also interested in continuing to implement its feminist foreign policy in Saudi Arabia by promoting SHE-Leads Program for Saudi women entrepreneurs.

### 3. Substantive Representation and Participation

Substantive representation and participation pertain to the representation or participation of women in the development and implementation of the SHE-Leads Program. Due to SI being the actor who forms and implements this program, Wirkkala stated in the email interview that 75% of SI's employees are women. This means that the majority of policy-related work is carried out by women. While the Director of the Department responsible for the SHE-Leads Program is a man, the Project Manager is a woman, and they are the ones who design, implement, and run the program. In this context, they have not encountered any structural, cultural, or political barriers related to women's participation. Wirkkala also stated that gender should not take precedence over skills, and she emphasized that SI has skilled and knowledgeable staff, both men and women ([Wirkkala, 2023](#)).

Furthermore, substantive representation and participation in this study also relate to the involvement of non-state actors or civil society organizations in the development of the SHE-Leads Program. Wirkkala mentioned that SI works by internally designing the framework with its staff, and then through procurement (tender), SI engages consulting firms that work together or collaborate with SI to further develop the scheme and also involves lecturers or facilitators for the sustainability of the program. Moreover, when SI needs additional suggestions regarding their programs or initiatives, they usually contact the Swedish Embassy. SI continues to engage in dialogue with the Swedish Embassy to ensure that the program concept can work effectively in their respective target countries. SI also makes adjustments to the program based on feedback from the embassy. Wirkkala stated that cooperation with stakeholders is the key to be a successful program.

### 4. Accountability

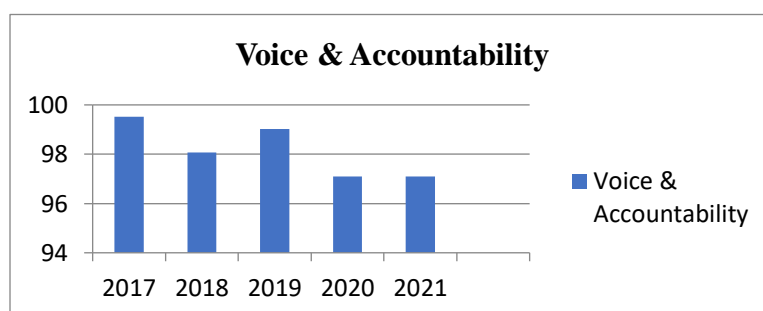
Accountability refers to the evaluation and monitoring process of the SHE-Leads Program. Wirkkala stated in the email interview that the evaluation and monitoring process of the SHE-Leads Program is conducted by SI, with following up on the responses from SHE-Leads Program participants, stakeholders, and partner organizations. Then the results are adjusted for the implementation of the program in the following year. This is done to ensure that the SHE-Leads Program can be more successful and beneficial to the participants ([Wirkkala, 2023](#)).

SI also constantly adjusts their offerings or programs from year to year, and this has become their working system. Additionally, they report the results of the SHE-Leads Program implementation to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. However, the author cannot access annual reports as a whole, and these reports are not available on either the SI website or the government's website. In this regard, the author only obtained information about the SHE-Leads Program from summary documents sent by SI. Furthermore, regarding financial accountability, Wirkkala stated that the

Swedish Government always decides on their annual budget. In this case, SI receives funding from the export promotion allocation, both for the SHE-Leads Program and other initiatives. SI then decides how much of that allocation can be allocated to the SHE-Leads Program ([Wirkkala, 2023](#)).

Based on the explanation above, the author observes that Sweden has implemented accountability effectively. This is supported by the Sustainable Governance Indicators 2022, which indicate that with highly mature oversight mechanisms, Sweden ranks among the top countries internationally (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>) in terms of executive accountability. Its score in 2022 has increased by 0.2 points compared to 2014. Furthermore, according to the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), during the period of 2017-2021, Sweden consistently achieved scores in the 90s in the Voice and Accountability indicator. The following graph illustrates Sweden's scores in Voice and Accountability from 2017 to 2021 (World Governance Indicators, 2022):

**Figure 4. Sweden Score in Voice and Accountability 2017-2021**



Source: (World Governance Indicators, 2022).

## 5. Active Peace Commitment

Commitment to peace refers to a peace that is evolving, collaborative, inclusive, and enables community integration, as it can eliminate war or violence and promote social justice and well-being as valuable outcomes. In this regard, SHE-Leads Program is one form of Sweden's commitment to peace. This is due to the fact that the activities are implemented through collaboration with various parties. SI, the organizer of the SHE-Leads Program, collaborates with several stakeholders, such as companies, embassies in Saudi Arabia, academics, and other Saudi Arabian authorities. Additionally, the SHE-Leads Program also includes participants with diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, this peace commitment also relates to the goals of the SHE-Leads Program outlined by Monika Wirkkala in the email interview, including ([Wirkkala, 2023](#))

1. Developing relations between Saudi Arabia and Sweden through exchanges of experts, speakers, and companies from the respective countries.
2. Providing a positive image of constituents in Sweden's leadership culture contributing to innovation, sustainable work environments, and gender equality in the labor market.
3. Creating a strengthened network among the participants.

In terms of the peace commitment, Sweden is also one of the countries that prioritizes soft power and considered to have incorporated public diplomacy and nation branding into its international framework earlier than some other countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This can be demonstrated, in part, through Sweden's efforts to enhance public diplomacy through the SHE-Leads Program. In this regard, Sweden allocates significant resources to improve its perception abroad, including organizations operating under the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as SI. For example, in 2021, SI's budget was estimated at around 470 million Swedish kronor (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

The elaboration above indicates that Sweden places great emphasis on its international reputation, and its commitment to peace through public diplomacy is considered a high priority for the Swedish Government. Furthermore, according to the Global Soft Power Index 2017-2021, Sweden consistently ranks 9<sup>th</sup> out of approximately 105 countries worldwide (Nye, 2023). Therefore, Sweden's feminist foreign policy in building women entrepreneurship (SHE-Leads Program) in Saudi Arabia is perceived to fulfill the value of a commitment to peace.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sweden feminist foreign policy in building women entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia (SHE-Leads Program) has consistently reflected Sweden's feminist foreign policy principles and has implemented the five core values of the feminist foreign policy concept, including:

1. Intersectionality, the SHE-Leads Program policy was specifically chosen by Sweden to target women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia, a group often overlooked in the field of entrepreneurship. Sweden also applies this policy fairly, ensuring no differentiation among participants.
2. Empathetic reflectivity, leaders and stakeholders in Sweden responded positively to this policy by developing the SHE-Leads Program, which later evolved into SHE-Pioneer. Sweden also implemented this program emphatically, and empowering Saudi Arabian women by facilitating dialogue, knowledge exchange, and sharing experiences.
3. Substantive representation and participation, Sweden actively engaged women from the Swedish Institute (SI) in the formulation and implementation of policies and collaborated with non-state actors such as consulting companies and academics to ensure the sustainability of the SHE-Leads Program.
4. Accountability, the policy incorporates evaluation and monitoring involving program participants, stakeholders, and partners. The results are used for improvement and reported to the Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
5. Active Peace Commitment, the SHE-Leads Program policy is implemented through collaboration, involving participants from diverse backgrounds, with the overarching goal of strengthening relations between Sweden and Saudi Arabia.

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