

# Q&A with SICO Head of Market Making Shaikha Mohammed Kamal



Shaikha Mohammed Kamal,  
Head of Market Making

**You've held several positions during your 14-year career at SICO. Can you tell us a little bit about the experience that you gained?**

I joined SICO in 2004 as a Senior Dealer with the Treasury Department, where I was exposed to multiple functions within the department, such as liquidity management, proprietary investments and market making. During that time, I had successfully obtained a Series 7 Investment Representative Certificate which was required to become a licensed trader on the Bahrain Bourse. I've specialized in various asset classes and recommended investments in GCC equity and fixed income markets. In 2011 I was appointed as Portfolio Manager, where I was responsible for the proprietary investment within Treasury. My responsibilities included setting the annual budget and overall asset allocation of the proprietary book as well as monitoring its performance and presenting to the investment committee on a quarterly basis.

**How has your previous experience prepared you for your current role as Head of Market Making?**

SICO's culture focuses on preparing younger generations to take leadership positions within the organization. I joined at an early age and had the privilege of working with highly qualified and experienced managers. My previous experience, from a dealer to a portfolio manager, have helped me to understand the equity market,

evaluate investment opportunities, take investment decisions, and improve my trading skills. Having that experience gave me insight into how to price and trade the market, and how to negotiate the terms of each agreement with the authorized regulators and the clients. In my current role as Head of Market Making, I survey the market for illiquid and/or undervalued stocks that would benefit from having a market maker.

**SICO has achieved several important milestones with the new accreditations in the UAE and the two major mandates that you acquired last year (Bank ABC and BATELCO). To what do you attribute this success?**

These achievements required a lot of hard work, from dealing with the authorized regulators to negotiating terms with the client. At SICO we always work as a team, from the CEO to the dealer, we are all in sync and therefore I would attribute our success and the achievements to good management, effective teamwork and the dedication of each member of our team.

**You were also appointed as the post-IPO market maker for APM Terminals. What impact has that had on the share price thus far?**

APM Terminal was one of the most successful IPOs on Bahrain Bourse. Every market making mandate has three elements, the company, the market maker and the investor. In brief, the company, APMT, was transparent to the public and had attractive valuations. The market maker, SICO, created the liquidity needed on the Bourse on both sides of the market, buy and sell, which provided the stability of the share price. One of the main objectives with market making is to reflect the true value of the company's stock price. Once you achieve that, you can build investor confidence to invest and trade APMT shares. This particular mandate went through two phases; the stability period which was

over a month, and after that the market making period, which is running up till today. During that period, the share price appreciated by more than 30%.

**In your opinion, how important has the market making function in general been to creating more liquidity on the Bahrain Bourse and improving market sentiment?**

The Bahrain equity market is among the most attractive in the region in terms of valuations and investment opportunities, however it lacked liquidity, which caused investors shy away from the market. In general, a market maker is a trader that provides liquidity and adds depth to the market. They are essentially a counterparty for investors that are single directional in the market. Having a market maker gave investors the confidence to consider investing in Bahraini stocks, so we have managed to attract more investors and improving the liquidity of the market. As the market maker for Alba, we've managed over the past eight years to boost liquidity of the stock. This clearly shows the necessity of having a market maker, particularly in an illiquid market.

**SICO has 37% females on staff, a female CEO and both the Brokerage and Market Making Divisions are run by women, these are great statistics particularly given the fact that globally the financial sector suffers from an under-representation of women. Why do you think this is such a male dominated field and what can be done to encourage more women to pursue careers in finance?**

Yes, it is a male-dominated field. Finance is generally a profession that requires working longer and inflexible hours, where women may find it challenging given their other obligations outside work. However, you can see a cultural shift in the region even if the pace is slow. To encourage more women to build a career in finance, I believe, we should start, at an early age, to promote the field to younger generations of females through

education, skill developments, and by providing awareness of the opportunities that currently exist. We also need more successful women in the financial sector to act as role models and to reassure women that these senior positions are not just restricted to men. Women can and do compete with their male colleagues for senior roles.

**Why did you decide to study finance?**

I graduated with a degree in business information systems, which gave me background on how technology impacts corporate banking. During my early years in SICO, I was given the opportunity to work as a dealer in the treasury department where I was exposed to the capital markets. The markets are impacted by everything around us, from climate change to politics. Every day there's a new thing to learn and no two days are ever alike which I find very interesting. That's where I found my passion, in investment and portfolio management, and that's why I decided to pursue a career in that field. Getting my Masters of Science in finance not only helped my career, but also prepared me for tasks in my everyday life, from decision making to money management.

**What professional achievement are you most proud of?**

I am very proud of the new position that I hold, it took me almost 14 years to get there given that I came from an IT background. SICO has given me the opportunity to build my knowledge and expand my skills. I wake up every day with excitement knowing that I'm making a difference and adding value to Bahrain's financial sector. Introducing the market making concept and expanding its activities in the market have been very rewarding.