

Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges for Arab Youth and Women

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Background

- Women & youth labour force participation
 - Lowest in the world
 - Biggest gender gap
 - Highest underutilisations of young women
- Women Entrepreneurship
 - Increasing
 - Obstacles
 - Environmental conditions
 - Development programmes
 - Blessings Foundation
 - Berytech
- Youth entrepreneurship
 - Some countries high numbers
 - World Creativity and Innovation Day



Opportunities: Digital Platforms & Content

- Digital platforms:
 - Digital start-ups – services via mobile platforms
 - E-Commerce
 - Some important development, remains limited
 - Focus very much national or limited so few countries
- Digital content - requires further development online
- Digital technologies & empowerment of women
 - Linked since beginning
 - Offering new opportunities for entrepreneurs
 - Broader markets, access to niche markets for products



Opportunities: Digital Platforms & Content

- Chinese female entrepreneurs
 - 2015 – 55% new Internet businesses founded by women
 - Alibaba
 - 46% sales female-owned businesses
 - 49% of stores in Tmall are owned by women
- Reasons for the increase
 - Better access to markets with new business models
 - Lower start-up costs
 - Support networks – women led venture capital firms and female incubators - TechBase
 - Fast growing Chinese markets provides highly educated women with more opportunities



Opportunities: Social Enterprise

- Use market-driven methods to advance a social mission
- Strong presence and understanding of the local communities were they serve,
- Develop a business model that is faster and more cost-effective in providing basic, quality services and products
- The poor are their clients, not just beneficiaries

- 3 Objectives
 - provide a public good,
 - ensure profitability and
 - spark acceptance and adoption by target populations.

- Sectors : water, energy, education, health and the environment



Opportunities: Social Enterprise

- Still young in Arab region with little data
 - Young and male (28 per cent female)
 - Tertiary education
 - Culture of social impact is only now taking hold
 - Still facing many challenges – depend on innovation
- Challenges
 - Regulatory mechanisms are missing in most countries
 - Duality in focus on profit and social
 - Some countries have provisions
 - Others must choose between profit and non-profit
 - Attracting funding
 - specifically early stage investors
 - ROI vs social impact
 - Attracting human resources



Opportunities: Social Enterprise

- There are **several examples** in the region:
 - **Recycle Beirut:** collects recyclable material from homes and offices around Greater Beirut, sorts and processes it, and sells it on.
 - **3D MENA and Refugee Open Ware (ROW) (Jordan):** for-profit organizations using technology, such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and 3D printing, to aid refugees.
 - **Nafham (Egypt):** online educational platform that targets school going students. It provides access to crowd-sourced, online videos via the website or mobile application as lessons related to the Egyptian public curriculum.



Way forward: harnessing the opportunities

- **Women entrepreneurship**
 - Raise women's awareness about property and inheritance rights particularly in rural areas;
 - Provide incentives to growth-potential women-owned enterprises that move their businesses to the formal economy.
- **Youth entrepreneurship**
 - Improve access to finance
 - Provide business assistance



Way forward: harnessing the opportunities

- **Social enterprise**
 - Governments should facilitate the regulatory framework for social enterprises
 - Investors and donors should consider social enterprises as an important avenue to fulfil their mandate
- **Digital Platforms**
 - Governments should also open access for digital services and products in and beyond their countries - support scaling platforms that can compete globally
 - Digital platforms that address issues of local concern to populations should be developed

Thank you



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