



Social Entrepreneurship and Social Investment in the Middle East: Roundtable Discussion on Opportunities, Challenges and the Way Forward

Tuesday, February 23, 2010, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm

The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC

On February 23, the Middle East Youth Initiative and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government convened a group of over 40 policy makers, international donors, private sector and civil society leaders to discuss the state of social entrepreneurship and corporate social engagement in the Middle East. From the Middle East Youth Initiative, speakers included Samantha Constant, associate director, and Ehaab Abdou, advisor to the Initiative and leader of the Initiative's forthcoming research on social entrepreneurship in the Middle East. From Harvard's CSR Initiative, Jane Nelson, also nonresident senior fellow at the Global Economy and Development program at Brookings, presented a framework for corporate sector social engagement and ways for policy makers to encourage links between corporations and local social entrepreneurs.

Johannes Linn, fellow and director of the Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings, Samantha Constant, and Jane Nelson provided introductory remarks welcoming attendees. This was followed by self-introductions by all participants at the table. Each spoke about their organization, their current efforts in the area of social entrepreneurship and social investment, both globally and in the Middle East in particular, and their expectations for the meeting.

The organizations represented at the meeting included: AccountAbility; AllWorld Networks; Ashoka Arab World; The Aspen Institute; Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE), The Aspen Institute; The Arthur M. Blank Center for Entrepreneurship, Babson College; Office of Commercial and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State; Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative, Harvard University; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State; Office of Development Partners, U.S. Agency for International Development; Dubai Initiative, Harvard University; Education for Employment (EFE); Fundacion Paraguaya; Global Business School Network; Global Economy and Development Program, The Brookings Institution; Global Partnership Initiative, U.S. Department of State; International Finance Corporation; International Labor Affairs Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor; The Kauffman Foundation; Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; Making Cents International; Mercy Corps; Middle East Partnership Initiative, U.S. Department of State; Monitor Group; Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE); Skoll Foundation; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); Wolfensohn Center for Development, The Brookings Institution; The World Congress of Muslim Philanthropists.

As the Middle East Youth Initiative prepares to release a report on the state of social entrepreneurship and social investment in the region, the event provided the opportunity for key global stakeholders to provide feedback. Ehaab Abdou presented initial findings from the Initiative's research, which has included six roundtables in Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab



Emirates, and Jordan; in-depth interviews with social entrepreneurs, support organizations, and investors in the region; and extensive desk research to identify global trends and lessons learned in crafting supportive policies and institutions to encourage the development of an active social entrepreneurial ecosystem. The presentation was followed by remarks from designated respondents from USAID and the Kauffman Foundation.

In the second session, Jane Nelson delivered a presentation on a global framework for corporate social responsibility and its applicability to current contexts in the Middle East region. She noted that there are three main levels through which businesses can generate social impact: through their core business activities, through engaging in social investment, and finally, through contributing to a broader enabling environment for social impact activities. She concluded by offering several recommendations for joint action to encourage stronger links between corporations and social enterprises.

In discussions throughout the day, participants shared their experiences and discussed the need for new legal forms to support social enterprises, methods for measuring impact and social return on investment, and cultural, linguistic, and institutional factors affecting the environment for entrepreneurship in the Middle East. The meeting also served as a venue for participants to identify priorities in advance of the upcoming Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, part of the Obama administration's efforts to engage with Muslim communities around the world.