



A joint contribution

Conference paper by Riad Al-Khoury

The Middle East has for the past twenty years seen attempts to promote civil society and entrepreneurship for stability and social justice. Many such initiatives, however, especially those focused on the Arab/Israel conflict, have failed to work, while others that did (sometimes only partially, and in ways not envisaged by their promoters) were or remain embroiled in controversy. As new conflicts erupt in the region and old ones fester, lessons can be learned from previous initiatives to understand how entrepreneurship and civil sector activity can be deployed, both now and in the future, as resources for achieving a stable and socially just society.

More than ever, the Middle East is in need of civil justice and stability, while entrepreneurship to spur sustainable development remains scarce. In this situation, especially in places of great instability – including those undergoing de-development – social entrepreneurship may help provide solutions. In turn, civil society, whether within a state torn by strife or between countries in conflict, could deliberately or indirectly contribute to stability and social justice through social entrepreneurs' activities.

For other parts of the Middle East enjoying somewhat greater stability, the fruits of successful entrepreneurship focused on profit can be deployed towards wider goals, including promoting local or regional stability and social justice. The micro-economic link in this respect comes through the application of the concept of corporate social responsibility, which, while becoming more common, is still the exception rather than the rule among the region's business entrepreneurs.

On the macro level, there are links between entrepreneurial activity and civil society on the one hand, and stability and social justice on the other (e.g. as was the case in Lebanon before 1975), which may provide guidelines towards supporting entrepreneurship and civil society in the contemporary Middle East. An example of this is the improving relations between some Arab Gulf states and Iran in the wake of the recent Iranian-Western détente.

Using the above and other cases, the topic of how G7/donor states can support such processes will be presented and analysed at the Deauville Partnership Conference from a Middle East vantage point with a view to proposing solutions for development problems in the region. I have particular insight into this topic, having served in 2012 as a member of the high-level advisory group to the Deauville Process of the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development that aims to aid the countries in the MENA region.

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