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**Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Employability in the  
Arab Region: Partnership between Public and Private Sectors**

**Dr. Sulieman Sulieman  
UNESCO Regional Bureau – Beirut**

**Ms. Maja Zarini  
UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET - Bonn**

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## ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship Education (EPE) in the Arab States is a joint project between UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States-Beirut, UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET-Bonn, and the StratREAL Foundation, United Kingdom, which includes two main components:

**Component one:** The collection, systematization and dissemination of innovative and successful experiences of EPE from different countries of the region (2009–2010); and

**Component two:** Providing technical support for the development of strategic plans to facilitate the incorporation of the concept of EPE in the education systems of the Arab region (2010–2012).

As part of the outcomes of Component One, four country case studies of Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Tunisia had been prepared and published on the current situation of entrepreneurship education in these countries. Based on the four case studies, as well as international and regional experiences in this field, a regional synthesis report was prepared by the team of experts to highlight the national and regional contexts and expectations of EPE in the Arab region.

UNESCO and other concerned International Organizations (i.e. ILO, UNIDO, and ETF) will continue this joint effort and partnership in order to provide countries of the region with necessary technical support and mobilization of resources to enhance the adaptation of EPE in the education and training systems. The focus will be on developing national and regional strategies and plans of action for EPE, which include the following priority areas: Policy and Coordination; Curriculum Development; Teacher Education and Training; Equipment, Laboratories and Infrastructure; and Networking and Connectivity. Four countries in the region (Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia) have been selected for Component two of the project. Moreover, a fifth country (Oman) is expected to join the group at the end of 2011.

The outcomes of the project will reflect on new teaching and learning strategies, mainly at secondary and TVET programmes to enhance youth capabilities, in self employment and initiation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Entrepreneurship Education strategies will facilitate more partnership on the generation of knowledge and skills on business and industry in the education system.

## **Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Employability in the Arab Region: Partnership between Public and Private Sectors**

***'The spirit of entrepreneurship is one of the principal factors in whether communities can successfully overcome the difficulties that global changes have generated.'**<sup>1</sup>*

### **I. Introduction**

All over the world, young people face highly uncertain futures when slow growth in the economy is coupled with very fast growth in the youth population. With burgeoning youth populations, demographic pressure alone means that the relative size of many labour markets across the Middle East and North Africa is shrinking. In essence, economies have no hope of growing fast enough to absorb the numbers of young people entering the labour market. The impact of the 'youth bulge' is significant. Unemployment, informality and inactivity are threatening the labour market prospects of youth across the Arab region, and limit the region's potential to stimulate economic growth. Lack of opportunities and recurring frustration can put youth at risk, increasing feelings of social exclusion and reducing social cohesion.

In the context of economic environments where there are no guarantees for life-long, stable and salaried employment, for financial security or for professional development, self-employment and entrepreneurship become particularly viable options. From the point of view of the individual, entrepreneurship can foster financial independence and give a person more control over his or her work situation. For the community, entrepreneurship is a tool that can stimulate local economic development, contribute to the diversification and promotion of local industry and promotion, and strengthen the local input to national economic processes.

Consequently, entrepreneurship education is considered as a useful strategy for diminishing youth unemployment and precariousness in the Arab region, since it provides the youth with knowledge and competencies that empower them to face socio-economical challenges and changes throughout their lives.

### **II. Entrepreneurship Education and Learning**

Entrepreneurship education is about creating an entrepreneurial mindset/culture that fosters innovation, problem-solving and active citizenship and where individuals have the self-confidence and belief in their ability to succeed in whatever they choose. The objective of entrepreneurship education is to assist young people become innovators and active participants in the labour market. Entrepreneurship education is made up of all kinds of

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO/ILO, Towards an Entrepreneurial Culture for the Twenty-first Century, 2006

experiences that give students the ability and vision to access and transform opportunities of different kinds. It is about increasing individuals' ability to anticipate and respond to societal changes and encourages individuals to develop and take initiative, responsibility and risks. Not every person who undertakes entrepreneurship education will become an entrepreneur and be self employed, but the skills acquired, especially when linked with practical skills in demand, will surely make a contribution to personal empowerment and increase individual capacities for employability and citizenship. Indeed, the European Commission calls entrepreneurship a "new basic skill"<sup>2</sup>.

### III. UNESCO and StratREAL Foundation Cooperation on EPE

Many programmes on entrepreneurship education are implemented in the Arab States at the non-formal level by NGOs, local communities and associations, aid agencies, or by the private sector. The joint project "Entrepreneurship Education in the Arab States" between UNESCO and the StratREAL Foundation, UK complements these existing initiatives and programmes. Through UNESCO's programmes in the Arab region, interested countries are supported in the development of educational policies that aim to include the concept of "entrepreneurship" in their national development plans, as well as in their formal education systems.

In order to trigger change in public policy, it is important to raise issues and start debates in a coordinated and systematic way, through the education and training systems. In the area of entrepreneurship education, it is important to highlight examples of good practice that already exist, but whose outcomes are not widely known. **Component one** of the project (2009-2010) identifies such examples and assesses the status of entrepreneurship education in the educational systems of **Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Tunisia**. Based on the four case studies, a regional synthesis report has been arranged to guide future work and actions in other countries of the region. The outcomes of component one is an important input for countries that aim to develop strategic plans for the incorporation of entrepreneurship education into their educational systems.

In **Component two** of the project (2010-2012), UNESCO is providing technical and financial support to four countries/institutions that sent proposals to integrate EPE in the education system during the next 2-3 years. The identified institutions are mainly Research and Development (R&D) Centres, within the Ministry of Education or departments/authorities responsible of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The countries include **Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia**. A Fifth country (**Oman**) is expected to join the group at the end of 2011.

The budget of the project is US \$ 275,000 covering four years (2009-2012). The UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET-Bonn is the lead Unit in the project, with technical support from UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States-Beirut and the TVET Section at UNESCO HQ-Paris.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, 2000

#### **IV. Challenges in Youth Employment in the Arab Region**

The problem of unemployment in the Arab region is first and foremost the problem of youth unemployment. Unemployment amongst Arab youth is the highest in the world. According to ILO statistics for 2007, the rates stand for 21%, while it is 12% for the world. It is more among female than male (29% vs. 19%), while the world percentages are 12% female and 11% male. Youth unemployment represents 50% on average of all unemployed, it is higher amongst female. What makes the situation more intriguing is the high rate of unemployment amongst educated youth who have completed secondary and/or tertiary education.

In order to better understand and analyze the underlying factors explaining youth unemployment, the ILO applied its “School to Work Transition Survey” to three countries including Egypt, Jordan, and Syria amongst countries in the region. The survey aims to capture the experience of young men and women from five target groups: in-school youth, job seekers, young employees, young self-employed, and own account workers (youth who are neither in school nor in the labour market). The results of these surveys show, that the lowest percentage of youth had successfully transitioned from school to work. These include those who are working either in a job with a permanent contract or that they are satisfied with and do not wish to change. These results are indicative of the major obstacles faced by Arab youth. The young generation of today is the most educated the region has ever seen. However, finding decent work is particularly hard. The sheer size of youth in the working age population and their aspirations present a particular challenge to policy makers and some of the national policies and regional initiatives are examined in greater depth by the thematic paper on youth employment (ILO Issue Paper, Arab Forum on Development and Employment, Doha, Qatar, 15-16 November 2008).

According to recent report issued by ETF on Education and Business in Syria, youth unemployment is high, standing at 23.1% in 2008. The education system compounds the situation by failing to provide the skills and competences demanded by the labour market (Huifeld and Kabbani, 2006). Syria has a young population with 60% below the age of 25 (around 12 million). Educational attainment levels are low and have little relevance to work, especially at the basic level. The qualifications acquired in school only match the requirements of employers to a limited extent, and personal networks are far more important in finding a job than qualifications (ETF/CBS, 2010). The Government thus faces a two-pronged challenge of increasing levels of qualification in the labour force and the population in general and fostering dialogue between education and the world of work for improved school to work transition. (ETF, Education and Business Report: Syria, 2011)

#### **V. EPE Programme Focus Areas**

UNESCO/ILO publication “Towards an entrepreneurial culture for the twenty-first century”- 2006 identified the precise focus for entrepreneurship education programmes in the different school settings and environment. Some programmes adopt a sectoral focus (i.e. agricultural entrepreneurship, new technologies, e-commerce, environmental sustainability, developing innovative social frameworks). Some programmes also specifically target different population

groups, such as minority groups, young girls and women, or have a geographic focus (i.e. rural vs. urban areas).

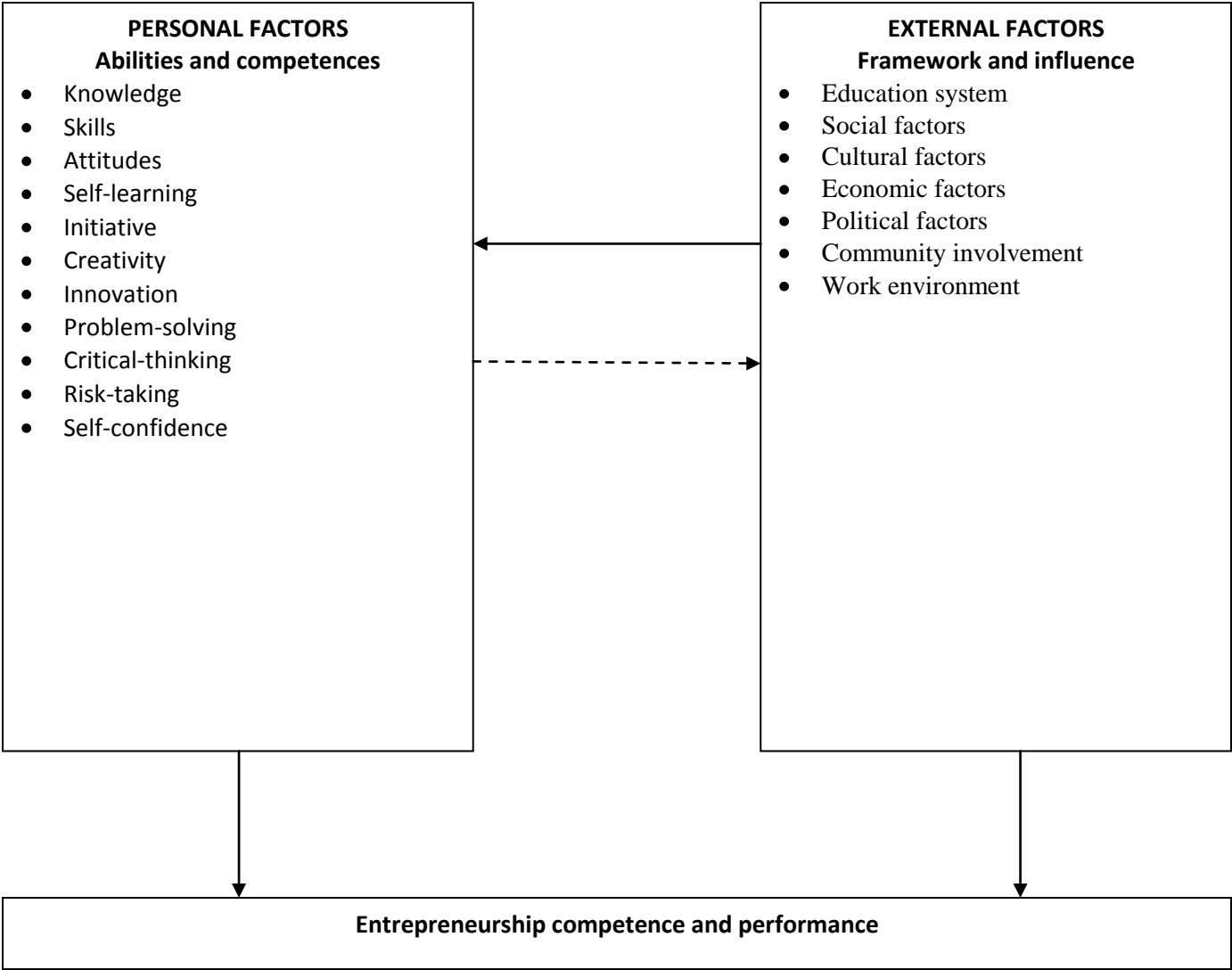
A broader model has recently evolved around the concept of *life skills*, which encompasses the psycho-social aspects of dealing with issues related to vulnerability and poverty, as well as education for citizenship, community welfare and health. But most interventions try to integrate the natural learning processes and assets of youth living in different circumstances and help them to become self-reliant by developing their own simulation projects, sharpening their academic skills, forming positive attitudes about themselves and their communities, as well as the skills required in the workplace.

Young people benefit from teachers' and mentors' knowledge, resources and community connections. They are based on the adoption of appropriate local technologies and are often built around and respectful of existing community social structures and resources. Training providers may include governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The fields of entrepreneurship education can cover the following areas:

- Economic and ecological literacy;
- Entrepreneurship skills (knowledge, starting a business, and running a business);
- Social entrepreneurship skills; and
- Employability skills.

For curriculum content, teaching and learning strategies, entrepreneurship knowledge and skills (competencies) are usually influenced by personal and external factors illustrated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: The personal and external factors that influence entrepreneurship competence and performance.**



## VI. Major Achievements of the EPE Project

Four case studies of Egypt, Jordan, Oman, and Tunisia had been prepared and published, as part of Component one (2009-2010).

The **case study of Egypt** measures to anchoring entrepreneurship education (EPE) in its national education system, including past and present difficulties. After decades of policies that favored a centrally-planned economy, which impacted negatively on the entrepreneurial spirit of the population, Egypt has been liberalizing its economy and has been adapting it to the constantly changing developments in society, technology and the labour market over the past 30 years. From the beginning, establishing and developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) played a major role in this reform process. In 2004, the Egyptian government passed a new law on small enterprise promotion, which contains a strong EPE component. Since then, many diverse EPE training centres and programmes have been established. As a next step, these programmes, being national or donor-supported, they should be better coordinated to increase effectiveness. Entrepreneurship education at all education levels would raise awareness among young pupils and students on entrepreneurship and would lead to increased creation of enterprises once they have reached the age of adults.

The **case study of Jordan** focuses on the extent to which several aspects of EPE are conducted in the different areas of the Jordanian educational system. Such EPE characteristics can start in basic education, and then continue in secondary education programmes (academic or vocational education). Moreover, higher education and technical education in community colleges were surveyed for teaching and learning experiences related to EPE. The reform plan for the educational sector (2003) emphasized that entrepreneurial life skills and mindsets such as innovation, initiative, problem solving, and critical thinking are major goals of education in Jordan. Other possibilities to enhance EPE in Jordan are the projects financed by the Educational Innovation Fund to improve efficiency, innovation, sustainability and competition in education (i.e. the knowledge-economy project). In addition to the government initiatives, there are several NGOs or non-profit organizations programmes and initiatives with international and donor organizations that focus on EPE. Awards and incentives such as the Queen Rania Al-Abdullah Award for Excellence aim to enhance the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship through spreading awareness about distinguished performance concepts.

The **case study of Oman** analyses how entrepreneurship education (EPE) is integrated within the Omani educational system. Between 2003 and 2006, a major review of the education system in Oman was undertaken carried out. Various approaches were outlined to prepare students for the labour market, including through teaching entrepreneurial skills such as decision making, problem-oriented thinking and discipline. Several pilot projects and private-sector programmes have been implemented to promote entrepreneurship and to provide entrepreneurship education. They include business simulation classes at Nizwa College of Technology and the SANAD programme, which promotes the launch of youth business ventures through the provision of loans and expertise to recent graduates.



The **case study of Tunisia** addresses the challenges that the country education system faces due to recent demographic and economic developments, as well as the ways in which entrepreneurship education can be an important factor in overcoming these challenges. Currently, 62% of the Tunisian population is of working age, and this number is increasing. The number of enrolled students is also rising in all levels of education (basic, secondary, and higher education). Statistics indicate that 80,000 new jobs need to be created each year to meet this rising demand for jobs. The case study also presents several other entrepreneurial education projects that aim to promote self employment and training, such as the Tunisian Bank of Solidarity's loan scheme for SMEs or entrepreneurship education and business administration programmes such as INJAZ Al-Arab or ILO's Know About Business (KAB) programme.

**The regional synthesis report** adopted a broad concept of EPE that includes economic, social and cultural dimensions, with special emphasis on both the higher mental skills of the individual and the preparation for the world of work. The scope of EPE comprises all aspects and dimensions of the education system, including the relevant inputs, processes and practices, and the possible educational disciplines (courses) in formal and non-formal education.

EPE (in general), can be influenced by two groups of factors within the education system: personal and external factors. Personal factors include professional competences, communication skills, and higher mental skills. External factors include social, cultural, economic and political conditions that prevail in society, with direct effects on EPE or the education system.

More information on the case studies and the regional synthesis report (in Arabic and English) can be found at the following link: [http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=191732&set=4E311967\\_1\\_273&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1](http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=191732&set=4E311967_1_273&gp=1&lin=1&ll=1)

Component two of the Entrepreneurship Education in the Arab States project (2010-2012) is focusing on the following priority areas:

- Policy and coordination;
- Curriculum Development;
- Teacher Education and Training;
- Equipment, Laboratories and Infrastructure; and
- Networking and Connectivity.

Such priority areas will be formulated into national strategies and frameworks for entrepreneurship education covering short and mid terms planning (3-5 years). Four countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia) are currently receiving financial and technical support, while a fifth country (Oman) will join the group by the end of 2011. The work plan for 2012 interventions is under consideration by the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET-Bonn and UNESCO Regional Bureau-Beirut.

UNESCO, ILO, and ETF have agreed to formulate a joint working group for EPE in Lebanon, in order to coordinate with national authorities on the implementation of joint activities: policy advice, curriculum revision and development, and capacity development/training of teachers.

## **VII. The Role of NGOs and the Private Sector**

The four case studies of the Arab countries highlighted technical and financial cooperation between schools, NGOs, and the private sector. An example of such cooperation at the international, regional, and national levels is the INJAZ Al-Arab model of cooperation in several Arab countries, supported by local and international business and industry.

Within the framework of Global Development Alliance, Junior Achievement International (JAI) has partnered with Exxon Mobil Corporation, Citigroup, MEPE, USAID, INJAZ Jordan (part of INJAZ Al-Arab), and other private companies throughout the Middle East and North Africa to develop seven self-sustaining Junior Achievement Organizations (NGOs) in the Middle East.

Through US\$ 1,000,000 grant, more than 100,000 secondary school students and youth in Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, and UAE completed at least one of twenty Junior Achievement programmes (adopted to local communities) to gain a fundamental understanding of business, economics, and entrepreneurship.

In Jordan, INJAZ is a national initiative launched in 2003 with funding from Save the Children/USA. 62% of Jordan's population below 25 years of age, and 25% between age 14-24, it was felt that a programme framework on entrepreneurship will promote economic opportunities for Jordanian youth. The INJAZ programmes focus on personal and business economics, entrepreneurship, leadership and community service courses that serve to foster creative thinking and critical problem solving among the learners. The EPE learning and training opportunities are offered through volunteers from business, industry, and community through several public and private schools, as well as Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) Centres in many cities of Jordan.

For more information: <http://www.injaz.org.jo>

## **VIII. Conclusions**

The concept of entrepreneurship education in the Arab education systems is fairly new. It includes classroom-based learning more explicitly connected to the real life applications, as well as competencies to develop knowledge and skills in the initiation and management of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

International experiences on entrepreneurship education objectives and applications have been shared with policy-makers and professional in the Arab countries, through UNESCO, ILO, ETF, and WEF publications and resource materials. The regional Entrepreneurship Education (EPE) project between UNESCO and the StratREAL Foundation explored how can government authorities, NGOs, and the private sector can work together for the enhancement of such programmes and initiatives.

During the coming 2-3 years, a set of national strategies/frameworks on EPE will be developed in the Arab countries, with technical and financial support from concerned UN/International Organizations, such as UNESCO, ILO, and ETF.

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## **Author Biographies**

### **SULIEMAN SULIEMAN, Ph. D.**

Programme Specialist: Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education (STV)

UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States– Beirut

E-mail: s.sulieman@unesco.org

Dr. Sulieman received his Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction: Industrial Technology Education from Indiana State University (1983); MS. in Industrial Professional Technology (1981); B.S. in Mechanical Technology and Physics (1980) and (1976).

He has joined UNESCO in 1993, after work experience in education, training, and human resources development in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and United States of America. His current job responsibilities include advisement to Member States, planning and implementation of UNESCO regional programme and projects in the following fields: general secondary education; technical and vocational education and training ; and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014).

Research and development interest focus on curriculum development, teacher education and training, and promotion of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in teaching and learning.

Professional Membership includes the Arab Council for Gifted and Talented (ACGT)-Jordan; Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)-USA; and National Association for Industrial and Technical Teacher Education (NAITTE)-USA.

### **Maja Zarini , Ms.**

Head of Communications

UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET-Bonn

m.zarini@unevoc.unesco.org

Ms. Maja Zarini is the focal point for communications at UNESCO-UNEVOC, and the chief editor of the UNESCO-UNEVOC website as well as the Bulletin. She also takes care of the UNESCO-UNEVOC activities in the area of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in TVET and entrepreneurship education. She initiates, develops, coordinates and manages ongoing UNEVOC activities in these and other areas.

Maja has extensive research and work experience in international development and on workers' rights issues. Before joining UNESCO-UNEVOC in April 2004, Maja worked for a German trade union. She has written several articles for publication and is a member of the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) and the International Vocational Education and Training Association (IVETA).

Maja studied in France and the United States and holds a Master's degree (USA) in International Affairs. Maja is a German national and has a German/Palestinian background.