

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating Dynamics of Social Edupreneurship Toward Combatting Educational Marginalization in the MENA Region

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of technology in recent decades, entrepreneurship is increasingly being viewed as an essential tool of empowerment. Social entrepreneurship, in particular, helps to transform conservative minds into innovative creators and develop extensive opportunities across all fields of knowledge. In this study, I aimed to investigate the exogenous and internal factors responsible for entrepreneurial activity in the MENA region, with a specific focus on Qatar and Morocco, as well as understand the roles played

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<https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/socialedupreneurship.pdf>

by various stakeholders within the local entrepreneurship ecosystems in the region. A series of interviews with entrepreneurs and key training providers in Qatar and Morocco was conducted, along with comprehensive analyses of relevant legal documents and governmental reports. My findings underline the importance of government involvement and bureaucratic assistance in ensuring entrepreneurial growth and success for local youth and new business ventures. Socioeconomic factors, such as gender and culture, as well as individual attitudes to risk also affect the productivity and efficiency of entrepreneurship in Qatar and Morocco. Furthermore, both governmental and non-governmental bodies were found to play crucial roles in advancing local entrepreneurial standards. Understanding the dynamics of entrepreneurship in these two Arab nations enables the formulation of effective strategies and policies in order to benefit society at large.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, social edupreneurship, educational marginalization, MENA region

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has been traditionally defined as starting a new, and typically small, business and generally involves the process of constructing, launching, and operating the business.¹ However, more often than not and particularly in today's context, this definition runs way short. Indeed, the dynamic interaction between enterprising individuals and lucrative opportunities should be greatly emphasized, with the former facing numerous challenges and obstacles in search of the latter.²

Entrepreneurship is rapidly transforming into a global, cross-cultural, and multi-dimensional phenomenon,³ with countries increasingly viewing it as an integral element for long-term economic development, job creation, and competitiveness.⁴ Cooke, Uranga, and Etxebarria (1997) suggested that the sustainability of national economic growth is highly dependent on the continuous promotion and advancement of entrepreneurial activity.⁵ Indeed, a landmark report commissioned by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2004 determined the importance of entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging countries, in spurring domestic employment and wealth toward achieving one of

1 Ali K. Yetisen et al., "Entrepreneurship," *Lab Chip* 15, no. 18 (2015): 3638-60.

2 Sankaran Venkataraman, "The Distinctive Domain of Entrepreneurship Research: An Editor's Perspective," in *Advances in Entrepreneurship, Firm Emergence, and Growth*, ed. J. Katz and R. Brockhaus (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1997); and Gerry Segal, Dan Borgia, and Jerry Schoenfeld, "The Motivation to Become an Entrepreneur," *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research* 11, no. 1 (2005): 42-57.

3 Bart Clarysse and Nathalie Moray, "A Process Study of Entrepreneurial Team Formation: The Case of a Research-based Spin-off," *Journal of Business Venturing* 19, no. 1 (2004): 55-79.

4 Jodyanne Kirkwood, "Motivational Factors in a Push-pull Theory of Entrepreneurship," *Gender in Management* 24, no. 5 (2009): 346-64.

5 Philip Cooke, Mikel Gomez Uranga, and Goio Etxebarria. "Regional Innovative Systems: Institutional and Organizational Dimensions," *Research Policy* 26, no. 4 (1997): 475-91.

the most critical Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations (UN) in 2000—the alleviation of poverty and hunger.⁶

Today, social entrepreneurship (SE) is increasingly being touted as a strategy in propelling the development and sustainability of global economies, with various studies citing it as crucial in shaping attitudes, aspirations, and intentions of individuals striving to launch new ventures. In addition, known as altruistic entrepreneurship, SE refers to doing business to serve a particular social purpose. Social entrepreneurs integrate commerce and social issues such that the lives of people connected to the cause are significantly enhanced. Success to social entrepreneurs is often not defined along the profits margin alone—rather, their contributions and impact on the world are also essential factors.

Ranked as the richest country in the world per capita as of 2018,⁷ Qatar has few incentives to pursue entrepreneurial skillsets for its citizens. Yet, the Qatari government is keen to stimulate entrepreneurship as a tool to diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on oil and gas exports. This fervent enthusiasm is illustrated by the introduction of a number of government measures aimed at driving entrepreneurial activity to exploit business opportunities, including the establishment of semi-governmental agencies and the creation of free economic zones. Nevertheless, the entrepreneurship sector in Qatar continues to face major obstacles and wide-ranging challenges impeding its growth prospects.

In contrast, there remains limited collaborations between the private sector and the Moroccan government in providing health and social services to the needy and vulnerable.⁸ Despite their undoubtedly massive potential, social enterprises in Morocco remain predominantly latent, often starting as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These NGOs have limited capacities, with restricted access to finance and generally low levels of revenue generated beyond donation funding. Only by identifying and rectifying such integral issues in both countries will they be able to effect positive change and emerge as key players in the regional and global entrepreneurship sector.

Through this study, I aim to fill a gap in the literature by identifying critical socioeconomic factors in the Qatari and Moroccan schemes, which would then allow for more targeted and better-suited policies and programs, thus ensuring higher productivity and success rates in the entrepreneurial sectors in these countries. Using different sources, I also investigated the roles played by key contributors to the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

6 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, Commission on the Private Sector and Development), *Unleashing Entrepreneurship: Making Business Work for the Poor* (2004), <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/library.html>.

7 “World Economic Outlook Database, April 2019,” International Monetary Fund (IMF), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/01/weodata/index.aspx>.

8 Kareem El-Bayar, “The Legal and Regulatory Framework Governing Social Entrepreneurship in the Middle East: Opportunities, Challenges, and the Way Forward,” *Middle East Youth Initiative, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law* (2010); Meryem Kabbaj et al., “A Study of the Social Entrepreneurship Ecosystem: The Case of Morocco,” *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship* 21, no. 4 (2016): 1650021-1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1084946716500217>.

KEY DETERMINANTS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Essential Behavioral Characteristics of a Social Entrepreneur

The phenomenon of SE has progressively infiltrated public discourse over the preceding decades.⁹ However, the concept is still, by its own nature, open to multiple interpretations owing to its innate feasibility and capacity to focus on individuals versus organizations. Numerous definitions have since been put forth, attempting to address the sustainability and scalability of the social enterprise and subjectivity of the term “positive social impact,” including entrepreneurial innovation, financial stability, and pattern-breaking social change.¹⁰ Indeed, entrepreneur M2, a youth mentor, program manager, and solopreneur of SkillsMotion, described the local SE scene in Morocco as a relatively new concept, having first gained traction around 2015, but without a unified definition as yet:

“There are very diverse definitions of SE in Morocco. Some communities define it as NGOs or non-profit organizations, others define it as being an entrepreneur or social enterprise with only marginalized people as the main target. A third category refers to a classical entrepreneurial company with an end goal of directing social activities such that it can reimburse its benefits.”

Entrepreneur M2 acknowledged the frustrations of having such divergent definitions as social enterprises and entrepreneurs often do not fit entirely into either definitive category and thus face rejections by potential investors, sponsors, and communities. Nevertheless, she believes that this could also mean that budding entrepreneurs could find their own spaces within the ecosystem given the broad spectrum of definitions of SE in Morocco.

Given the hazy definitions of SE within the Arab world, as well as the ambiguous distinction between traditional entrepreneurship and SE, we have detailed the essential behavioral characteristics of entrepreneurs that are generally distinct from those of non-entrepreneurs. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of stakeholders within the entrepreneurial ecosystems in Qatar and Morocco that were interviewed listed passion (46.7%) and

9 Charles Leadbeater, *The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur*, (London: Demos, 1997); and Paul C. Light, *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

10 See J. Gregory Dees, *The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship*, (Stanford University: Center for Social Innovation, Graduate School of Business, Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, Ewin Marion Kauffman Foundation, 1998), www.faculty.fuqua.duke.edu/centers/case/files/dees-SE.pdf; Roger L. Martin and Sally Osberg, “Social Entrepreneurship: The Case for Definition,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring 2007): 27-39; Sophie Bacq and Frank Janssen, “The Multiple Faces of Social Entrepreneurship: A Review of Definitional Issues Based on Geographical and Thematic Criteria,” *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 23, no. 5-6 (2011): 373-403; Janelle A. Kerlin, “Defining Social Enterprise Across Different Contexts: A Conceptual Framework based on Institutional Factors,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2013): 84-108; Rob Lubberink, “Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development,” in *Decent Work and Economic Growth. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*, ed. W. Leal Filho et al., (Cham: Springer, 2019). https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-71058-7_47-1.

resilience (46.7%) as the dominant characteristics essential for the success of entrepreneurs and their enterprises. This finding aligns with that of a previous study, which identified these two traits as the main drivers of entrepreneurial accomplishments. As entrepreneurs M1 and M7 noted, respectively:

“One needs to be 100% passionate, not about the solution, but about the problem because the solution can change. What matters is not how they do it, but rather how they end it; and there are many ways of ending a problem, and they will have to pivot many times to get to the end of the problem.”

“An entrepreneur needs firm conviction and resilience to succeed because things will get in the way. I believe the reason we do not have more social entrepreneurs is that people give up too easily, rather than pivoting or using the feedback loop to improve. Resilience is the key in going that extra mile toward entrepreneurial success.”

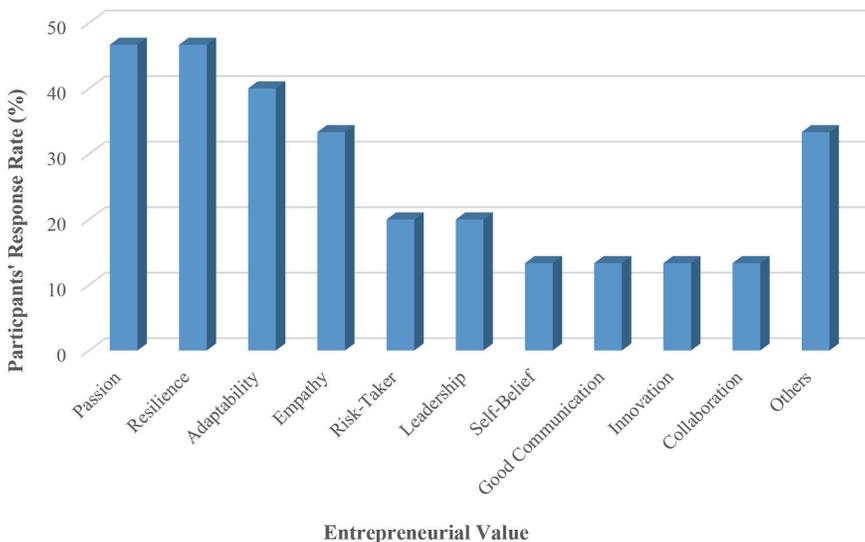


Figure 1. Behavioral characteristics essential for entrepreneurial success.

In addition, similar to previously cited literature, adaptability (40.0%) and risk taking (20.0%) constitute two other personal characteristics identified by several entrepreneurial stakeholders in this study (Figure 1). According to entrepreneur Q10, an entrepreneur needs to keep an open mind to be able to learn and embrace every step of his learning journey, including mistakes, changes, and important decisions. Having an agile mindset and being confident and unashamed to reach out and ask for assistance would open doors to new opportunities and collaborations. Being a risk-taker is also highly crucial in entrepreneurship as the business journey is a highly dynamic and ever-evolving one, brimming with ups and downs.

Interestingly, empathy was also listed as one of the most desirable personal values by 33.3% of the entrepreneurial stakeholders interviewed in this study (Figure 1). Even though several of these stakeholders do not identify themselves as social entrepreneurs, their entrepreneurial ambitions are undoubtedly propelled by their innate desires to do social good and create social impact in their communities. As entrepreneur Q12 succinctly noted:

“We need to see humans as humans. It is not only about my business idea, but rather about how I can turn my ideas into effective solutions for the end-user.”

Underlying Motivations Behind the Desire for Social Change

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2019/2020 Global Report, more than 40% of entrepreneurs in 35 of 50 countries at least agree that their underlying motivations of launching businesses are to make a difference in the world.¹¹ Mair and Marti have previously also stressed the relevance and importance of understanding the underlying motivations behind the desire for social change to the study of SE.¹² However, with SE being a relatively new field of study, much of the previous literature focuses on identifying motivations of traditional entrepreneurs, whereas those of social entrepreneurs have not been adequately investigated. This is particularly so with regard to the Arab region, where limited research has been conducted. However, these studies are highly pertinent given the socioeconomic and political events leading up to and following the Arab Spring in 2011.

Today, Arab entrepreneurs, and in particular social entrepreneurs, are often motivated by societal issues that have arisen through decades of instability and lack of progress within the region. Indeed, for entrepreneur Q12, who is originally from Palestine, the desire to venture into the entrepreneurial world stems from her astute observation of difficult challenges faced by communities in underdeveloped countries and conflict areas across the MENA region:

“I see a need for us to build better communities, better lives, and better conditions for all. Many complain about these social issues without trying to find solutions for them. Instead, what we need to do is to help these people identify their strengths and start their own circles of influence so that they themselves can come up with practical solutions and create an impact on others gradually.”

Although several entrepreneurs have determined a clear distinction between traditional and social entrepreneurs in other parts of the world,¹³ it is not as clearly defined

11 Niels Bosma et al., *GEM 2019/2020 Global Report* (London, U.K: The Global Entrepreneurship Research Association [GERA], London Business School, 2020).

12 Johanna Mair and Ignasi Marti, “Social Entrepreneurship Research: A Source of Explanation, Prediction and Delight,” *Journal of World Business* 41 (2006): 36–44.

13 Ganesh N. Prabhu, “Social Entrepreneurial Leadership,” *Career Development International* 4, no. 3 (1999): 140–145, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620439910262796>; Johanna Mair and Ernesto Noboa, “Social Entrepreneurship: How Intentions to Create a Social Enterprise Get Formed,” *IESE Working*

in the Arab world. Several social entrepreneurs interviewed in this study expressed their desire to merge traditional entrepreneurship with the non-profit world. This is probably due to the amalgamation of several inherently unique features of Arab social entrepreneurship in today's context, namely:

1. A generational shift in Arab demographics, leading to a burgeoning youth population and subsequent interest in change and innovation;
2. High levels of unemployment and low levels of traditional job opportunities, resulting in job insecurity; and
3. The desire to create a social impact and witness a change in social circumstances for their communities.

Entrepreneurs M3 and M8 voiced their opinions accordingly:

"I needed something encompassing both aspects; how to make profit while creating an impact globally. SE is the perfect answer between my passion, which is civic engagement, helping with problems that the community faces, and bringing added value to the world; and having something sustainable where you can think strategically and work with different resources toward certain goals."

"I embarked on SE so that I can combine entrepreneurship with non-profit objectives. You can combine creating an impact, changing others' lives, and changing your own life; and you can inspire yourself while indirectly inspiring others and making a change in their lives."

Moreover, entrepreneur Q9 noted that his primary motivation in launching his social enterprise was the realization that there was a gap in the education sector in Qatar, especially in terms of technology, compared with other sectors where its use was far more advanced. Similarly, entrepreneur Q15 described being inspired by the explosive nature and high accessibility of knowledge present today, quipping that the probability of an individual retrieving answers to questions and mastering skills through internet digitization is very high, whereas such ease of access to information is not available in traditional markets. He further stressed the importance of using knowledge to produce effective tools to make lives better.

Indeed, the motivational index in the GEM 2018 global report highlights that Qatar-based entrepreneurs are 3.39 times more motivated by opportunity than necessity

*Paper No. D/521 (September 2003), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.462283>; Susan A. Ostrander, "The Growth of Donor Control: Revisiting the Social Relations of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2007): 356-372, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764007300386>; Karla A. Boluk and Ziene Mottiar, "Motivations of Social Entrepreneurs: Blurring the Social Contribution and Profits Dichotomy," *Social Enterprise Journal* 10, no. 1 (2014): 53-68, doi:10.1108/SEJ-01-2013-0001; Roger L. Martin and Sally Osberg, "Social Entrepreneurship: The Case for Definition," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring 2007): 27-39; and Filipe M. Santos, "A Positive Theory of Social Entrepreneurship," *Journal of Business Ethics* 111, no. 3 (2012): 335-51.*

compared to those based in Morocco (1.39 times) (Appendices A and B). This may be owing to the distinct differences between the two MENA countries in terms of levels of income and unemployment, as well as the differing levels of traditional job opportunities. Entrepreneurs in Qatar, with their high level of income and job opportunities, are more likely to view entrepreneurship as an opportunity for a change in the job environment, wealth attainment, high status, and success. In fact, eight of ten nascent entrepreneurs in Qatar indicated that building massive wealth has spurred them towards their entrepreneurial paths. This is highly typical of opportunity-based entrepreneurs, who zealously initiate a business as they are drawn to venture strategies and their economic potential.¹⁴ As Qatar propels itself toward an innovation-driven economy, the proportion of such opportunity-based entrepreneurship will continue to rapidly increase.

Conversely, GEM studies conducted over time have ascertained that the proportion of necessity-driven entrepreneurship is much higher in developing or low-income nations than in developed or high-income countries.¹⁵ Indeed, Morocco-based entrepreneurs often need to embark on their entrepreneurial journeys out of necessity because of a lack of traditional job opportunities in existing organizations, dissatisfaction with current positions, and high unemployment levels in the country. As a result, many Moroccans are pushed to start a venture to create a sustainable livelihood for themselves and their families.

Nevertheless, underlying motivations for some social entrepreneurs may be even more closely related to those of traditional entrepreneurs than for others. Indeed, entrepreneur M2 reasoned that SE provides a free space where she can make her own decisions and implement her ideas from scratch, being able to build innovative products while challenging herself. Although she asserted that she was not motivated by personal profit, she acknowledged the importance of having solid financial goals to enable entrepreneurs to move forward in their journey.

Socioeconomic Challenges Facing Entrepreneurship

Previous studies have found that several socioeconomic factors affect entrepreneurship, such as wealth status, education level, gender, and culture.¹⁶ In this study, specific factors are identified that are key in influencing entrepreneurial journeys in the Qatari and Moroccan context, albeit for differing reasons. For instance, the female interviewees identified gender bias as a major contributing factor in hindering their entrepreneurial capabilities, while the male interviewees reasoned that females in Qatar and Morocco face

14 Pavlos Dimitratos et al., "SME Internationalization: How Does the Opportunity-Based International Entrepreneurial Culture Matter?" *International Business Review* 25, no. 6 (2016): 1211-1222, doi:10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.03.006.

15 International Development Research Centre (IDRC), *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: GEM-MENA Regional Report 2009 (Middle East and North Africa)* (Cairo, Egypt: IDRC, 2010).

16 Gerard George and Shaker A. Zahra, "Culture and Its Consequence for Entrepreneurship," *Entrepreneurship and Practice* 26, no. 4 (2002): 5-8; and Alicia Coduras Martinez et al., "A Global Perspective on Entrepreneurship Education and Training," *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Special Report* (2010).

inherent issues that affect their entrepreneurial activities. Religious and cultural issues, such as the requirement of a male *mahram* for travel-related business activities, as well as women entrepreneurs desiring to enter already seemingly saturated markets, such as food and beverage and cosmetics industries, were several explanations identified as the rationale for gender preference toward curbing entrepreneurial interests.

In addition, entrepreneur M2 noted the relative ease with which male entrepreneurs were able to close business deals, whereas female entrepreneurs were expected to tread tentatively in a professional and formal manner and yet face rejections because of cultural stigma. However, a recently published article found no difference between Qatari men and women in assessing entrepreneurship-related challenges and barriers.¹⁷ The GEM Global Reports in 2018 and 2019–2020 further confirmed this finding with the ratio of nascent female to male entrepreneurs being equal (Appendix A).

The same, however, cannot be said in the Moroccan entrepreneurial ecosystem. The GEM Global Reports noted that male entrepreneurs dominate the ecosystem by a 2:1 ratio (Appendix B), although the Morocco-based entrepreneurs interviewed in this study did not broach the gender issue. More in-depth studies with different methodologies need to be conducted to establish the relationship between these socioeconomic factors and entrepreneurship in the Arab world.

Furthermore, there are several other cultural aspects that prove problematic for entrepreneurs and prevent them from thriving in their initial years. As with most Arab cultures, having strong, dependable, and extensive networks is important in facilitating increased earnings for budding entrepreneurs. According to entrepreneurs Q9 and Q16, accessing bigger markets remains a major challenge and an elusive reverie for many as there remains much room for improvement in the transparent processing and approval of tender applications.

Moreover, the level of education and wealth status are also entwined with the propensity to risk—the degree to which an individual responds to risk; which often differentiates entrepreneurs from employees.¹⁸ Local Qatari graduates consider government employment as a safe haven, providing them with both comfortably minted salaries and job security and permanence. In contrast, entrepreneurship requires more advanced and specialized training while offering little reward and incentive. As such, it is often regarded as an opportunity for a side income in addition to a regular government job, instead of a full-fledged business endeavor. Indeed, such concerns were raised by entrepreneur Q1, who courageously gave up his lucrative engineering and real estate career in favor of establishing a young start-up educating and providing guidance and support to fellow entrepreneurs in Qatar.

A similar thread is witnessed in Morocco with the lack of a fully supportive system and generally risk-averse mindsets. Although families are often at hand to provide

17 Ahmed Mehrez, “Investigating Critical Obstacles to Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies: A Comparative Study between Males and Females in Qatar,” *Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal* 25, no. 1 (2019), Online ISSN: 1528-2686.

18 Irfan Hameed and Zainab Irfan, “Entrepreneurship Education: A Review of Challenges, Characteristics and Opportunities,” *Entrepreneurship Education* (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41959-019-00018-z>.

financial assistance, particularly during the initial stages of business, entrepreneurial ambitions are consistently met with objection, skepticism, and doubt, in favor of “real jobs,” as related by stakeholder M5, an operations manager at Enactus, Morocco. Research findings by the GEM Global Reports in 2018 and 2019–2020, however, show that people in both Qatar and Morocco increasingly view entrepreneurship as an alluring career option (Appendices A and B). Interestingly, both entrepreneurs M4 and M8 also remarked on the negative way of thinking among fellow entrepreneurs, who treat one another as competition rather than being supportive of each other’s business ideas and entrepreneurial journeys.

PRINCIPAL STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN THE ARAB SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEMS

Exogenous Dynamics of Entrepreneurship

Similar to many parts of the world, entrepreneurship is rapidly gaining recognition and support in the Arab region. However, challenges remain in ascertaining the forms of entrepreneurship that should be encouraged and promoted to the Arab youth to ensure that their entrepreneurial mindsets and journeys are on the right path. Indeed, entrepreneur Q16, the founder of Riyada, broached on the issue,

“Entrepreneurship is on the rise, but the way it is being taught and advocated for in the MENA region is very commercialized and profit-oriented. Making millions and becoming millionaires should not be the end goals of every entrepreneur. We are not in the Silicon Valley where you are surrounded by venture capitalists, and if one just wants to make money, one will fail miserably. Entrepreneurship has a much bigger potential and role in making the world a better place.”

Given the recent exponential interest in entrepreneurship globally, various wide-ranging challenges have inevitably arisen. Barriers to entrepreneurial growth include bureaucratic and corporate governance issues and ease of access to finance and funding.¹⁹ As individual Q6 reported in her Masters dissertation, these factors may indeed play a significant role in influencing the negative business attitudes of some small businesses and young start-ups in Qatar, particularly prior to the Gulf crisis (June 2017 to January 2021) when Qatar experienced immense pressure to adopt a more aggressive business friendly approach to its investment and entrepreneurship.²⁰

19 Susan Marlow and Dean Patton, “All Credit to Men? Entrepreneurship, Finance and Gender,” *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 29, no. 6 (2005): 717-35; Fredrik Svensson, *Essays on Entrepreneurship and Bureaucracy* (Doctoral dissertation, Mid Sweden University, Sweden, 2008). <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:117369>; and Mansheng Zhou and Haixia Xu, “A Review of Entrepreneurship Education for College Students in China,” *Administrative Sciences* 2 (2012): 82-98.

20 Sousa R. A. AlSelaiei, “Female Entrepreneurs – Obstacles and Challenges in the Qatari Market (Masters dissertation, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar, 2017).”

Furthermore, it was found that over two-thirds (68.9%) of the experts interviewed in the 2017 National Entrepreneurship Survey (NES) cited a lack of public policy on entrepreneurship, bureaucratic processes, and government regulations as key constraints, with 37.8% stating difficulties in accessing financial support (Figure 2).²¹ Nonetheless, based on findings reported in the GEM Global Reports in 2018 and 2019–2020, which established the National Entrepreneurship Context Index (NECI) to measure the ease of starting and developing a business, government policies on taxes and bureaucratic processes in Qatar are relatively sufficient and above the global average ratings (Figure 3a). Indeed, the Arab nation is among the top-placed countries globally, behind only Switzerland and the Netherlands.

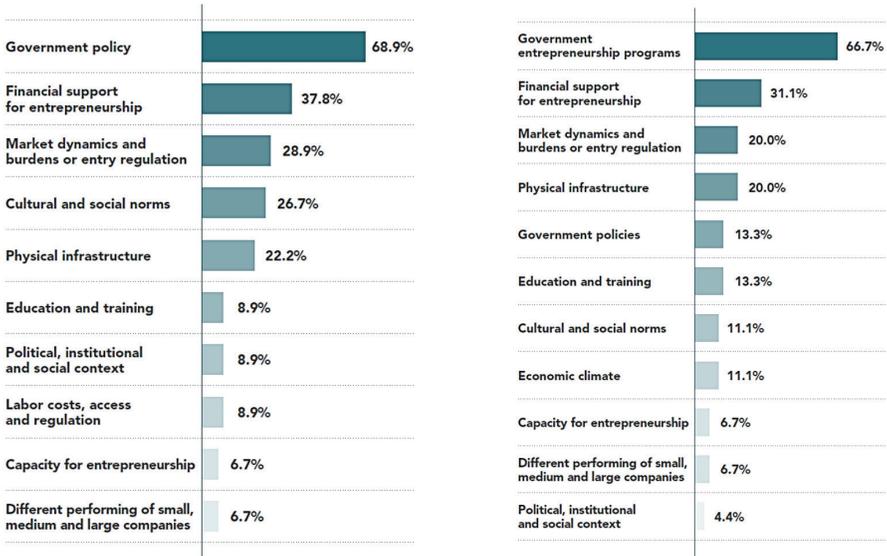


Figure 2. Key factor constraining (left) and fostering (right) entrepreneurship in Qatar, 2017 (adapted from GEM, 2017).

21 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), “Qatar National Report 2017,” <https://www.gemconsortium.org/report/qatar-national-report-2017-english>.



Figure 3. Entrepreneurial framework conditions in (a) Qatar and (b) Morocco (yellow: 2018; red: 2019; grey: global average expert ratings—1: highly insufficient, 5: highly sufficient; adapted from GEM, 2017).

In particular, entrepreneur Q12, a lecturer at QU and co-founder of EduEnterprise and WomenEdMENA, noted differing opportunities provided to local and expatriate entrepreneurs, with the latter having limited options in relation to legalities and access to funding. As such, they tend to register their enterprises in a foreign country to gain sufficient freedom in managing their own businesses as well as to sidestep unfavorable legal policies and regulations pertaining to entrepreneurship. This opinion mirrored that of stakeholder Q13, an outreach program manager at Akhlaquna, who acknowledged that Qatari nationals were given priority in gaining sponsorships and financial support from major national organizations.

Similarly, the lack of a comprehensive legal framework is also proving to be a challenge for Moroccan entrepreneurial stakeholders, and this finding is further supported by the GEM Global Reports, whereby bureaucratic government policies are deemed to be insufficient and below global average ratings (Figure 3b). Indeed, entrepreneur M1, CEO at Education for Employment (EFE), Morocco, lamented that current public policies on entrepreneurship meant that NGOs are often forced to take “creative” and risky decisions to generate revenues via the establishment of separate private entities owned by the NGOs to support their non-profit activities. To be instated as Moroccan associations—a term used in the legal policy framework to define organizations that are not allowed to generate profits, but will be one of the few to be eligible for high governmental funding—one would need to show a tremendously high level of compliance with the given criteria set by the government.

This view was echoed by entrepreneur M2, who noted that the local entrepreneurial ecosystem was currently skewed toward companies legally registered as NGOs, enabling them to benefit hugely from funding and sponsorships from the Moroccan government and impact investors. Entrepreneur M6, president of Fondation Sanady, one of only 200 associations out of 150,000 with such privileged benefits, acknowledged that social entrepreneurship has not yet taken off in Morocco, and legal statuses of social enterprises are vague and ambiguous. Stakeholder M3, the director of training programs at Moroccan

Center for Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (MCISE), concurred on the lack of legal statutes afforded to social entrepreneurship,

“We still exist within the model of charity in Morocco. SE is not the main focus of the ministries in charge of commerce and entrepreneurship so there is no advertising, and it is not covered in the academic curricula. However, given that Morocco is a developing country, the ground and context is perfect for SE that can help in solving social issues sustainably.”

In addition, capital investments remain one of the dominant concerns of budding entrepreneurs in Morocco who are both unable and unwilling to pursue their entrepreneurial goals to their full capacities owing to a lack of resources and proper business mentoring. For instance, access to skilled talent is dismally lacking within the Arab entrepreneurial ecosystem. Viable and supportive human capital (individuals who are passionate, versatile, autonomous and creative) is essential to creating a competent team and building a scalable and sustainable enterprise, yet it is woefully scarce. Entrepreneurs, particularly new startups tight on budget and funding, thus often rely on volunteers and young professionals, resulting in high turnover rates and unnecessary expenditures. As entrepreneur Q15, a professional trainer and International Coach Federation (ICF) coach, bemoaned:

“We need to understand the golden triangle comprising economic, social, and political aspects existent within the MENA region. It is a very complex field; however, as is common among many Arab nations, the youth population is huge, the countries are economically poor, and the level of awareness is lacking. Money is not a good enough motivator despite the fact that they are in need of it. We, therefore, find ourselves with individuals who are comfortable with the status quo and are unwilling to change with the times and learn new skills and systems.”

Interestingly, stakeholder Q2 and entrepreneurs M1 and Q16 also perceived the lack of market diversification and flexible business models as an equally dominant reason behind the faltering entrepreneurial activity in both Qatar and Morocco. As stakeholder Q2 succinctly explained:

“During the blockade, when Qatar lost a lot of traditional economic partners, people started to view entrepreneurship as a tool of empowerment, and new opportunities and programs arose along with changes in societal needs. However, the market is not large enough to absorb a wide spectrum of entrepreneurs and is currently saturated in certain areas such as the restaurant business and other profitable businesses that attract interest. We need economic diversification beyond hydrocarbons and gas. The more diverse the economy, the more opportunities there will be for entrepreneurs.”

Role of Governmental Institutions

Since year 2000, Qatar has intensified efforts to regulate financial investments into the local economy. For instance, Law No. 13 of 2000 allows foreign capital investment in a

variety of fields such as education, development, information technology, and industry.²² Indeed, pursuant to the recently approved Investment Law No. 1 of 2019, a non-Qatari investor may now invest up to 100% of the project capital across all economic sectors, including banking, insurance, and real estate,²³ and may receive such incentives and privileges as exemptions from income tax and customs fees. Similarly, other ministerial decrees were formulated to spur local investment opportunities, with laws related to businessmen, investors, consumer protection, and partnerships with the governmental sector being continually ratified in the past two decades. In particular, Law No. 34 of 2005 on Free Zones Investment and Decree-Law No. 16 of 2010 on e-commerce transactions have contributed toward developing an investor-friendly business environment in Qatar.²⁴

Other ministries in the Qatari government have also jumped on the entrepreneurial bandwagon. The Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) established the Digital Incubation Center (DIC) to boost information and communications technology (ICT) innovation in Qatar, particularly among local youth at the critical initial stages of developing viable technology-related ventures.²⁵ By recently launching major projects in partnership with Microsoft and Huawei, respectively, MoTC and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) underscore the emphasis on the development of digital and technological skills among Qatari youth and students and the importance of entrepreneurial skills to empower them in their efforts to pursue education.²⁶

Several entrepreneurs and entrepreneur educators interviewed for this study stressed the importance of governmental institutions in easing the entrepreneurial journey, particularly for start-ups and young businesses. Indeed, the majority of the stakeholders within the Qatari entrepreneurial ecosystem highlighted the significant roles played by QDB and Qatar Business Incubation Center (QBIC) in promoting entrepreneurship and SMEs in the country. This coincided with the findings of the GEM NES 2017, in which government entrepreneurship programs were mentioned by 66.7% of experts as a key factor in fostering entrepreneurial activity in Qatar.²⁷ QDB and QBIC, along with other governmental organizations such as Bedaya Center, Silatech, and Nama, provide extensive support programs through accelerators, incubators, and education and mentorship programs to assist young Qatari nationals in establishing their business ventures.

Just like its Qatari counterpart, the Moroccan government is also actively promoting entrepreneurship at the national level, revamping and rejuvenating business systems and career prospects for budding entrepreneurs while also injecting numerous capital investments into the ecosystem. In particular, entrepreneur M2 and stakeholder M5 noted

22 The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI, Invest in Qatar), “Laws and Regulations” (2019), <https://invest.gov.qa/laws-and-regulations/>.

23 MoCI, “Laws and Regulations.”

24 MoCI, “Laws and Regulations.”

25 Ministry of Trade and Communications (MoTC), “Digital Incubation Center” (2019), <http://www.motc.gov.qa/en/dic>.

26 MoTC, “Digital Incubation Center”; MoEHE, 2019.

27 GEM, “Qatar National Report 2017.”

the establishment of an “automatic entrepreneurial status” for youth, offering more attractive and flexible tax deductions to entice them to venture into entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneur M8, a social edupreneur and founder of NoBox Lab, Morocco, also remarked that the Ministry of Education has piloted a nationwide initiative aimed at further promoting entrepreneurship in the country. First initiated two years ago in Rabat and Casablanca, the Student Entrepreneur project offers a dedicated innovation and incubation center and student entrepreneurship club in every tertiary institution, catered to assist and support final year projects for young students with innovative ideas.

Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

Although Qatar has instituted many entrepreneurial and educational initiatives to drive economic diversification through the establishment of a knowledge-based economy, there remains much room for improvement.²⁸ The Qatari government realizes the crucial role played by NGOs and privately-owned companies in the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Qatar. Such institutions and companies provide essential entrepreneurial skillsets and know-how, as well as well-rounded services to assist individuals and businesses in achieving success in their entrepreneurial journeys. For instance, INJAZ Qatar collaborates with leading local organizations and educators in preparing local youth for workforce preparedness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.²⁹

Similarly, ibTECHar, a young start-up company that has already achieved regional and global success, provides integrated services through the implementation of technological and educational domains, in creating an effective and adaptive environment across the entire educational system in Qatar. Voicing his ambitious aims for the company, entrepreneur Q1 asserted:

“Today, we have a global Pearson model having an impact on education. How can we develop our own regional Pearson model that understands our culture, heritage, language, and system of values and provide a suitable educational experience for the people in the region to flourish and to nurture?”

Entry into non-saturated business markets in Qatar could not only mean lucrative profits, but also opportunities to transform societal mindsets and create niches according to the present needs of the society. EdClude, a social enterprise promoting awareness on Down Syndrome and other special needs, is such an example of a community-based organization aiming to be a changemaker in advocating for inclusive educational systems in Qatar. Entrepreneur Q3, co-founder of EdClude, stressed the need for vocational training and internship programs for youth with special needs, as well as subsequent job placements in proper workspaces:

28 Yagoub Ali Gangi, “The Role of Entrepreneurship Education and Training on Creation of the Knowledge Economy: Qatar Leap to the Future,” *World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development* 13, no. 4 (2017): 375-88.

29 INJAZ Qatar. (n.d.). <https://injaz-qatar.org/>.

“Every child has the right to education, no matter what his abilities. What we want to eventually achieve is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn and be independent.”

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in Morocco may be relatively young, although many NGOs are working with the youth in deciphering entrepreneurship, keeping them motivated and positive. These organizations, including INJAZ Al-Maghrib, MCISE, StartUp Maroc, ENACTUS, Global Shapers, and Startup YourLife, aim to bring about a positive impact on society through the facilitation of establishing businesses and providing sustainable support. In particular, ENACTUS has firmly established itself at the top of the entrepreneurial pecking order by introducing its labs and integrating its programs into the core curricula of higher educational institutions in Morocco.

Indeed, entrepreneur M2 acknowledged the supportive role of local NGOs in Morocco facilitating SMEs and female entrepreneurship, and providing youth with early stage funding, training, and incubation opportunities to ensure the viability and scalability of their business models. Entrepreneur M8 listed three main forms of support readily available and highly accessible for Moroccan entrepreneurs:

“There is a high-value chain of organizations providing support from pre-ideation all the way to the scaling phase, particularly in the last three years. We now have support in the form of training—technical, entrepreneurial or managerial; funding—small seed funding to huge grants or loans for innovative projects at zero interests; and mentorship, where you get access to a network of fellow entrepreneurs and investors within the ecosystem.”

The media has also played a leading role in promoting entrepreneurship in the Arab world. Stars of Science, the pioneering innovation television initiative by QF, was created to empower budding Arab entrepreneurs to develop technological solutions for their communities. Entrepreneur Q8, deputy executive director at Qatar Scientific Club and founder and chief executive officer at Thakaa Technologies, acknowledged his place as a finalist in the edutainment program in jumpstarting his entrepreneurial journey. As entrepreneur Q12 aptly noted:

“The Qatari entrepreneurial ecosystem is highly dynamic with many organizations working with social media influencers to promote entrepreneurship in coordination with the youth and economy ministries. We also have individuals and enterprises supporting and providing online sessions for start-ups via Twitter and other social media platforms.”

Similarly, in Morocco, apart from several social media initiatives to raise awareness, a recently produced television show was aired to showcase start-ups and diverse experiences through their entrepreneurial journeys. With more than five million people tuning in each week, accounting for approximately 15% of the Moroccan population, entrepreneur M8 believes that entrepreneurship is no longer a taboo concept in society.

Efforts are still insufficient in providing wholesome business aid and relief toward

attaining entrepreneurial sustainability across the country, with support primarily directed toward the public promotion of entrepreneurship and the foundations of starting a business. Entrepreneur M4, a professional coach at EducationCM, Morocco, bemoaned the realities behind pursuing entrepreneurial journeys for many:

“There is a difference between reality and merely having competitions and pitching presentations at the end. I have seen some very good projects and presentations on education, including learning strategies, tools and platforms; however, they have yet to come to fruition. A lot of projects crash due to lack of funding and support; hence, social entrepreneurship in Morocco is not rooted in reality at the moment.”

Nevertheless, international organizations have also staked their claim and set a firm foothold at the top of the Moroccan entrepreneurial ladder, possibly much more than in Qatar, which is more reliant on local entrepreneurial networks. These organizations, including the U.S. Embassy, the World Bank, and the British Council, assist in cultivating entrepreneurial values and mindsets in society and provide training and support opportunities for budding entrepreneurs. Entrepreneur M2 was a recipient of a lucrative grant from the British Council, which enabled her to pursue her entrepreneurial ambitions through the first years of her start-up venture.

Although widely available, these entrepreneurial initiatives, workshops, and training services are not usually intensively promoted, and the lack of grassroots movements and national-level marketing results in budding entrepreneurs and start-ups within the Arab world being unaware of their existence. Entrepreneurs find it difficult to formulate their own strategic plans and business models for their enterprises as they would need to abide by specific stipulations set by their investors and sponsors. Nonetheless, with even King Mohammed VI pushing for entrepreneurship to be fostered by both the private and public sectors in Morocco, the ecosystem and its principal stakeholders are doggedly aiming to nurture and build an entire community of young and driven entrepreneurs.

SOCIAL EDUPRENEURSHIP IN THE MENA REGION

Social Edupreneurship as an Innovative and Effective Tool

As in other parts of the globe, educational institutions in the Arab world have been shut down, either partially or fully, because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, affecting almost 100 million children between 5 and 17 years of age.³⁰ Owing to the lack of digital infrastructure in many Arab countries, these children are unable to continue with their education virtually. The longer the children are not in school, the bigger the risk that they lose interest and motivation to learn, forget what they have learnt previously in school, and may not resume school upon re-opening. As shown in Figure 4, Morocco was one of the

30 United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), *Preventing A Lost Decade: Urgent Action To Reverse The Devastating Impact Of COVID-19 On Children And Young People*, (New York, U.S., 2021), <https://www.unicef.org/media/112841/file/UNICEF%2075%20report.pdf>

top countries facing educational poverty in 2010,³¹ with 37% of the population aged between 17 and 22 years with less than four years of formal schooling, the minimum amount of time required to gain basic literacy skills. The global pandemic has inevitably exacerbated educational poverty, particularly in many of these Arab and African nations.

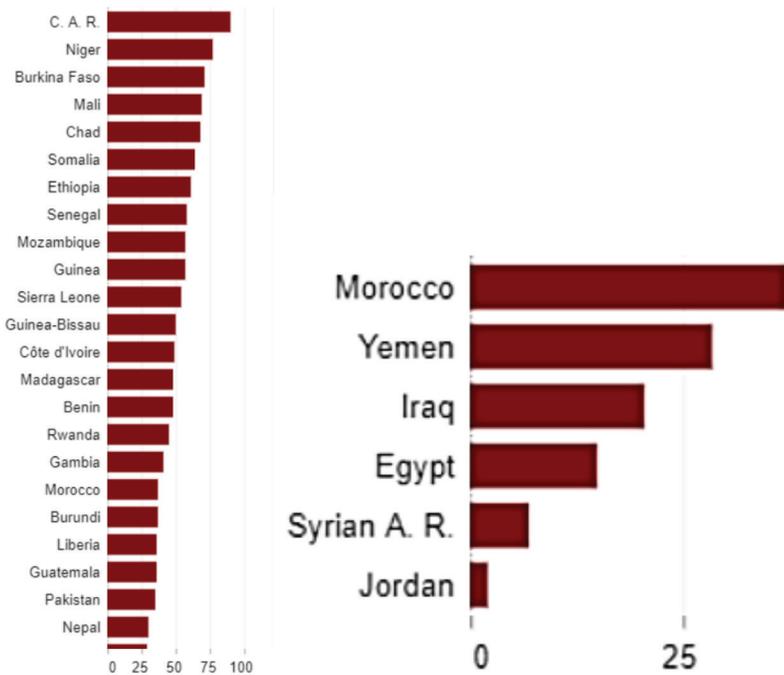


Figure 4. Top countries facing highest levels of educational poverty, 2010 (adapted from UNESCO, 2010).

The youth constitute a substantial slice of national populations across the Arab states. As this slice becomes considerably larger in the coming decades, it is imperative to address pertinent societal issues faced by the youth. These challenges include high levels of unemployment, mediocre quality of education, and inadequate and restricted access to other basic services such as healthcare and public transportation. This study focuses on how social entrepreneurship in the education sector can facilitate in combatting educational marginalization experienced in the MENA region.

According to entrepreneur M6, 600,000 babies are born in Morocco annually, and 3,000,000 students abandon formal education. These children leave school by the age of 12 years, many of whom do not complete or even start high school education. Similar to

31 UNESCO, 2010.

many other countries in the MENA region, gender-based discrimination remains rampant in Morocco, with young women and girls marginalized from equal access to decent work and tertiary educational opportunities. Entrepreneur M7 cited:

“What does it say about your education system if it results in girls dropping out of school, getting married, and having babies? The system right now is very gendered, with opportunities often going to boys. However, we know that girls and boys are intellectually equal, so why would you lose out on the potential that the girls would have to offer?”

Traditional educational systems in the Arab world are becoming increasingly dated, inadequate, and incapable of conforming to societal development and emerging needs. Targeted at memorization, these classical systems do not foster critical thinking and entrepreneurial skills. Furthermore, the skewed educational processes do not highlight potential and cater to students’ needs. As acknowledged by entrepreneur M6:

“Every year, 27%–28% of the national governmental budget is spent on education in Morocco. We spend a lot of money, but we spend it badly. The quality of the educational curriculum in schools is also outdated, and there is a lack of proper infrastructure, sanitary facilities, and training for teachers.”

These factors, coupled with high levels of youth unemployment and socioeconomic exclusion, present an urgent need for the Moroccan educational system to be transformed. Social entrepreneurship provides a useful and effective tool in aiding stakeholders within the education sector to reconstruct and revolutionize the educational frameworks as noted by entrepreneurs M6 and M8, respectively:

“In social entrepreneurship, you need to answer a need, and there is definitely a need in the education sector and to help support the youth. Even if it is a drop in the ocean, we need to make it happen.”

“When you’re working in the education sector, there is always a sense of social responsibility because the youth is an important component of the society. It will be good to have stakeholders besides the ministry to reform and rethink the educational system in the country, such that you will not just have one way of thinking and you can be more efficient.”

Qatar-based entrepreneurs interviewed in this study paint a slightly varied picture of the educational system in the country. This is probably owing to the differing socioeconomic conditions faced by the Qatari population, with much lower levels of unemployment and relatively higher level of education. In fact, entrepreneur Q14 surmised that unlike many other parts of the Arab region, there is a higher proportion of women pursuing tertiary education than men. Strong-willed and determined to forge brighter futures for themselves, their families, and the country, these women often progress to powerful positions and create a substantial impact in society.

Several Qatar-based entrepreneurs have expressed their desire to see the educational

system in the country develop even further. For instance, entrepreneur Q9 hoped for entrepreneurship to be introduced in schools and integrated within the curricula to change prevailing mindsets. Similarly, entrepreneur Q16 wished to foster social innovation mindsets starting from high school to equip students with useful and empowering skills so that youth themselves will be able to recognize societal problems, seek improvement, and take responsibility in creating changemaking solutions for society. As entrepreneur Q12 aptly noted:

“There is a difference between education and schooling. We focus a lot on schooling, but we do not celebrate the idea of continuous learning, developing skills, building capacity, and trying out new ideas. Social initiatives help people test their skills and see their strengths in a different light. Besides the classic way of gaining knowledge, SE connects knowledge to day-to-day life and experiences.”

SE in the education sector within the Arab world remains highly underdeveloped, and there is much room for improvement. Entrepreneurs Q11 and M1 explained further, respectively:

“SE is one of the most difficult forms of entrepreneurship as there is no sustainable model of SE in the Arab world. It is a very new concept in the region, and we are still trying to figure it out. Fortunately, many people are already driven by charity, so the values are there. We just need to find ways to mobilize them and create support systems in which we can execute projects and make them sustainable.”

“The current ecosystem does not provide enabling conditions for SE to flourish as much as the other sectors due to an education system that is very outdated and not focused on 21st century skills, such as digital and soft skills. Although it is really taking off at the moment, there has yet to be many successful examples. It is a work in progress.”

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region

Across the globe, big and small corporate and non-profit enterprises are greatly impacted by the ongoing global pandemic. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, national governments have enforced strict restrictions across major sectors. Although some of these restrictions have eased in several parts of the world, the lack of compliance with public health policies, pandemic fatigue, and the emergence of viral variants have resulted in multiple waves of infection and consequent persistent disruptions to daily life. The MENA region is no different as Arab governments put in place stringent measures in an effort to curb the spread of the virus within their populations.

In Qatar, policymakers have been forced to introduce harsh restrictions that have affected entrepreneurs, such as an inbound travel ban, control of movement outside of people’s homes, and closure of many commercial entities such as cafes, gyms, and retail shops. Due to the significant reduction in demand and subsequent dwindling revenues, profits have drastically diminished, and operational costs have become a burden on entrepreneurs, further resulting in inevitable permanent business closures.

To counter the effects of COVID-19 on entrepreneurship, the Qatari government introduced several policies focused on supporting and enhancing the private sector and increasing its self-sufficiency, announcing an economic stimulus package of QAR 75 billion (approximately USD 20.6 billion). Other government-affiliated corporations soon followed suit. The COVID-19 National Response Guarantees Program was also introduced by QDB in order to provide financial relief to private businesses in supporting staff payroll and rental fee payments. In addition, several private and public institutions, including the national regulator of utility supplies (Kahramaa), offered utility fee exemptions for businesses during the initial phase of the pandemic.

The education system in Qatar has seen its entire delivery model severely disrupted, with schools and tertiary institutions shutdown completely for the first six months of the pandemic and only partially resuming until present day. According to entrepreneur Q10, who also teaches at a public girls' school, the pandemic has uncovered the depth of the educational gap in the country:

“If you are a student studying in a private school in Qatar, you inevitably pay a substantial amount for your education so you can get access to digital devices and systems if you need to. However, education in public schools is free, regardless of nationalities, which means that students are unable to get instant access to iPads or laptops required for home-based learning throughout the pandemic. I have students whom I had initially lost contact with as they were not attending classes. They did not know how to as they did not have Wi-Fi in their homes.”

To aid students to seamlessly resume their education, particularly those without access to technology, the Ministry of Education has since speedily distributed tablets and Wi-Fi routers at no cost to needy households. Indeed, the global pandemic has highlighted the inequality in educational opportunities still faced by many in Qatar, and perspectives have shifted on how to increase and provide equal access to the digital world for all students. With schools increasingly open to integrate e-learning platforms into their curricula since the pandemic, entrepreneur Q16 recognized the need for these schools to also adopt SE and its innovative ideas into the educational systems.

Since entering a state of health emergency on March 20, 2020, Morocco has received international praise for its rapid and coordinated pandemic response. Although a large number of business entities were forced to close down permanently, entrepreneurs across diverse sectors have kept the national economy afloat with localized healthcare solutions and creative digital systems. Medical masks were manufactured on a large scale to provide for the Moroccan population, while public administrative information and education were executed via innovative platforms. Vulnerable groups were also assisted with the introduction of specific support programs by the Moroccan government.

The strict lockdown measures imposed have culminated in abrupt closures of SMEs in the informal sector, potentially setting off a financial recession in the country and further resulting in 10 million people being at immediate risk of falling into poverty. In response to the pandemic, the Moroccan government has raised US\$3.2 billion towards its Crisis

Management Special Fund, and the Central Bank has introduced such fiscal measures as suspension of income tax returns, leasing maturities, and bank loans to provide financial support and ease bureaucratic constraints on businesses.

The IMF predicts the unemployment rate in Morocco will increase even further to 12.5% in 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic, particularly affecting youth and recent graduates (Moroccan Higher Planning Commission). To support these youth, the Intelaka youth entrepreneurship program was established in February 2020 to foster innovative ideas and skills and cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets. This is especially crucial to address the immediate needs of the youth population in Morocco as noted by entrepreneur M1:

“There is a lot of potential in our Moroccan youth, but there is also a very high level of unemployment among them. They want to work; however, they are not prepared, regardless of their level of education. Although local SMEs are in need of skilled talent, they lack the human capital to grow their businesses. Therefore, we need to provide the youth with demand-driven skills, either hard, soft, language or even employee eligibility, re-orientate and re-skill them so that they can apply for jobs that leverage their backgrounds and are career-launching and family-sustaining.”

Post-Pandemic Outlook of Social Entrepreneurship

The current health and economic crisis experienced globally has highlighted the influence of SMEs and entrepreneurship in sustaining the global economy, which has been severely affected by uncertain recovery outlooks, disrupted economic activity, and containment measures adopted by governments. Several sectors are more drastically affected than others, including hospitality and tourism, oil and gas, construction, and real estate. A recent global survey conducted on the impact of the pandemic on the private sector revealed that 45%–50% SMEs have experienced financial impact, with up to 79% of them expecting further decline in revenues in the coming months.

Entrepreneurship has been a powerful tool used within the MENA region to address such socioeconomic challenges as unemployment and market diversification over the past two decades. Given the elevated level of structural unemployment in the region (approximately 10%), especially among the youth at more than 25% on average, SMEs account for a significant level of job opportunities. This is probably a more accurate picture for Morocco than for Qatar because Moroccans view entrepreneurship as a necessity than an opportunity, whereas the reverse is true for Qatar-based entrepreneurs. Indeed, it was found that nearly 30% of formal employment in the private sector is attributed to SMEs, although this number is much higher in other parts of the Arab region such as Iraq (approximately 90%), Lebanon (55%), Jordan (43%), and Tunisia (40%). The global pandemic may have inevitably reversed these regional development efforts due to the drastic impact on the entrepreneurial ecosystem, resulting in even higher levels of unemployment and poverty.

Digital innovation has undoubtedly emerged as one of the most critical aspects necessary in today's world to strengthen resilience and effectively meet the needs of the

future. Enterprises and entrepreneurs have capitalized on the rapidly evolving socioeconomic environment by conceptualizing innovative initiatives and introducing digitalized services. For instance, a virtual hackathon (Hack COVID-19) was recently initiated by QDB to provide a platform to budding entrepreneurs to ideate creative solutions toward combatting the pandemic. QDB has also launched a virtual training program to assist SMEs in addressing operational challenges they face as a result of the pandemic. Entrepreneur Q15 says:

“When it comes to training and education, Arabs seem to prefer face-to-face interaction, although there has already been a plethora of educational services and courses available online. It remains to be seen if this will change post-COVID-19, although I hope that the society will embrace such positive change.”

CONCLUSION

To date, SE remains an unclear concept encompassing various distinct models across the globe, depending on a wide variety of exogenous and internal factors. Numerous scholars have attempted to define SE, yet the term remains vague and incomplete when applied to any particular ecosystem. Bacq, Hartog, and Hoogendoorn (2013)³² argue that a generalized worldwide definition of SE may not do justice to the distinct differences inherently existent within the phenomenon as a result of multiple factors such as the individual origins of each entrepreneurial ecosystem. This view mirrored the findings of this study, in which entrepreneurs interviewed voiced different opinions on what SE means to them. Although many associate it with non-profit organizations, some relate SE to businesses engaged in CSR, and others use the term for non-profit organizations starting private for profit ventures. The observation that SE implies concepts that vary hugely across cultures and contexts, therefore, substantially hinders identifying true determinants that are able to explain this phenomenon on a global scale.

Regardless of the ambiguity of its definition, the concept of SE is rapidly expanding and attracting increasing attention across many sectors. Social entrepreneurs can be called changemakers whose goal is to achieve systemic and sustainable social change. This is typically attained through innovation, either by inventing new products and/or services or through adapting existing systems, such as revamping healthcare services to make it more affordable and equitable. The end goal for social entrepreneurs is the alleviation of poverty or the general upturn and development in the well-being of their societies.

Today, the Arab world is experiencing a demographic shift with an average of more than 50% of the population aged younger than 25 years. Coupled with high levels of unemployment, decades of political hegemony, and economic stagnation, this has resulted in profound social unrest borne out of exasperation, resentment, and fury. Widespread

32 Sophie Bacq, Chantal Hartog, and Brigitte Hoogendoorn, “A Quantitative Comparison of Social and Commercial Entrepreneurship: Toward a More Nuanced Understanding of Social Entrepreneurship Organizations in Context,” *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 4, no. 1 (2013): 40–68.

discrimination along gender, racial, cultural, and religious lines have substantially deepened fractures within the social fabric. The region is in desperate need of political and economic reform.

Blending financial sustainability and social change, SE offers a highly effective solution to counter these societal issues in the Arab world. The region features unique characteristics of SE that are distinct from those in other parts of the world owing to the specific set of social, economic, and political challenges not witnessed elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, clear differences in the entrepreneurial ecosystems exist even within the region. Qatar was selected as a representative model of the relatively more developed Arab nation in the Gulf, while Morocco represents a developing environment in North Africa. In this study, we have showcased the similarities and differences between the two countries in adopting the concept of SE.

A common thread between both the Qatari and Moroccan ecosystems lies in the behavioral traits of the entrepreneurs interviewed in this study, and the underlying motivation behind their entrepreneurial ventures. The majority of stakeholders within the entrepreneurial ecosystems in Qatar and Morocco listed passion and resilience as the dominant characteristics essential for the success of entrepreneurs and their enterprises. Empathy, a value differentiating social entrepreneurs from traditional ones, also ranked high on the list of most important personal characteristics to possess. This finding aligns with previous studies, which have identified these traits as the main drivers of entrepreneurial accomplishments. Motivations of the social entrepreneurs interviewed also conformed between the two ecosystems as well as with a typical social entrepreneur. The aim of creating lasting social impact and aiding in societal development constitutes the primary motivating factor behind the push for SE for many of these entrepreneurs.

This study also raises several critical issues that hinder entrepreneurial growth in the Arab region. Arab entrepreneurs generally feel that their entrepreneurial journeys are hampered by the lack of support systems in the form of familial backing as well as community mindset toward SE as a legitimately solid career option. Furthermore, there is a lack of exogenous support due to gaps in legal frameworks, insufficient access to financing and funding, and dearth of skilled talent within the entrepreneurial ecosystems in Qatar and Morocco. Although governments and private corporations in both countries are increasingly promoting SE with a wide variety of entrepreneurial courses, workshops, and training services, these programs are often not effectively marketed and advertised to the general public. Budding entrepreneurial talents, therefore, remain unaware of the available opportunities, while the society maintains its dated misperceptions on SE.

The existing educational systems in Qatar and Morocco leave much to be desired, with varying forms of deep-rooted inequalities within. Although Qatar is a much richer nation with plentiful resources and a relatively higher level of educational system than Morocco, entrepreneurs in both countries seek educational reforms. They claim that inadequate access and meagre quality of education can be countered by introducing entrepreneurship in schools and integrating it within the curricula. Establishing this will set off a chain in fostering social innovation in the youth, equipping and empowering them with essential

and demand-driven skills such that they will be transformed into future changemakers within their societies.

Entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on SE, is increasingly being proposed, recognized, and peddled as a catalyst for growth and sustainability of global economies³³. Despite the massive development in entrepreneurship training and education and the upsurge in the number of entrepreneurial courses and organizations in recent years, the focus on the importance of relevant policies and programs remains inadequate, and guidance as to how they can be better implemented to support SE is insufficient.³⁴

Qatar has a unique opportunity to establish itself as a regional and global leader in the entrepreneurship sector. The Qatar National Vision 2030 comprises of a crucial element in promoting entrepreneurial values and nurturing talented young entrepreneurs in innovation and creativity. In addition, the stability of the Qatari government as well as the presence of well-established and internationally recognized banking and finance industries lends credence to its ambitious aspirations to evolve into a key player in the field of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education.

Similarly, the African market in general and the Moroccan market in particular presents a real opportunity for social entrepreneurs, even in the presence of numerous social issues. There has been a lack of initiatives to encourage and promote an entrepreneurial culture so as to set up a favorable environment for developing innovative solutions for addressing social issues. There is an urgent desire for collaboration, cooperation, and interconnectedness among significant actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem to ensure greater efficiency and productivity. Fostering local social entrepreneurship in Morocco is essential in achieving sustainable human and economic development in the country and region.

I believe the contribution of this study is, therefore, twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the nascent stream of literature investigating major contextual determinants of the SE ecosystems in the MENA region, particularly those in the education sector. Furthermore, analysis of major obstacles in the entrepreneurial journey in Qatar and Morocco as well as the determination of socioeconomic factors impacting social edupreneurship in these countries can assist in the adoption of constructive strategies to counter them. Productive policies and programs, both at state level as well as non-governmental, can then be efficiently implemented and specifically aimed to heighten creative critical thinking, self-assertiveness, and self-reliance. In addition, appropriate and targeted investments in social edupreneurship can nurture a generation of catalysts confident in embracing change through innovation. The success of such strategies and policies may provide an inspiring model for the region and even the world, as well as spur a global entrepreneurial movement as we continue to seek sustainable economic pathways toward personal and global development.

33 Heidi M. Neck, Patricia G. Greene, and Candida G. Brush. *Teaching Entrepreneurship: A Practice-based Approach*, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014).

34 Slavica Singer, Jose Ernesto Amoros, and Daniel Moska, *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2014 Global Report*, (Wellesley, MA: Babson College, 2015).

In this study, we successfully ascertained the major factors impacting entrepreneurship in the Arab world, with a specific focus on SE in Qatar and Morocco. The roles of various key entrepreneurial players in the entrepreneurship ecosystems in both countries were investigated, particularly in the SE sector. Figure 5 shows how the different contributors work together to spur entrepreneurial growth in Qatar.³⁵ The role of SE in addressing gaps within the education sectors in Qatar and Morocco was also thoroughly explored.

Education provides a much-needed stimulus for economic development, poverty reduction, and enhanced social mobility. Ensuring that everyone receives equitable access to quality education should thus be a central priority for all governments. Indeed, educational achievements should be the product of potential, talent, and merit as opposed to external social circumstances. However, deep-rooted inequalities based on gender, wealth and income status, race, and geography persist to this day.

With the exponential rise of SE across the globe, particularly in developing nations, key stakeholders within the entrepreneurial ecosystem can capitalize on it to effect social change. The use of SE as a powerful tool in addressing social issues and overcoming challenges can indeed provide value-added benefits to the developing world. Understanding the benefits of SE should, therefore, be doggedly pursued to ensure that SE is used to its fullest potential.

35 GEM, “Qatar National Report 2017”.

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APPENDIX A

Entrepreneurial Behavior and Attitudes in Qatar, 2018-2020
 (yellow bar: 2018; blue bar: 2019-2020; black bar: global average)
 (adapted from GEM, 2018 and 2019-2020)



APPENDIX B

Entrepreneurial Behavior and Attitudes in Morocco, 2018-2020
 (yellow bar: 2018; blue bar: 2019-2020; black bar: global average)
 (adapted from GEM, 2018 and 2019-2020)

