



Jordan | October, 2019

Young graduates in Jordan lifted by MySTARTUP

‘THEY FACE THEIR SEVERE CHALLENGES WITH A POSITIVE MIND’

The Dutch Foreign Ministry stimulates young people in the MENA Region. mySTARTUP by INJAZ is part of the Shiraka Program since 2018 and helps young graduates to develop their companies. Enad Kanaan has been part of INJAZ’ team that initiated mySTARTUP, and Aia Abul-Haj is currently incubated. They share their experiences.



Aia Abul-Haj (down the right) visiting a SOLVillion project

INJAZ mission is to inspire and prepare youth to become productive members of their society and accelerate the development of the national economy. The organization has been doing so since 1999, as a social enterprise supported by various stakeholders and donors, and has generated more than 35,000 volunteering opportunities throughout the country. INJAZ has reached over 2 million beneficiaries over the years.

Not synchronized

“Jordan is going through hard times”, says Enad Kanaan, Business Development Manager of mySTARTUP. “The influx of refugees from neighboring Syria – about 1.25 million out of 10 million citizens – puts pressure on the boiler, but is not the main reason. Jordan’s economy is in a very difficult situation. The unemployment rate of youth between 20 and 24 years is almost 40 percent. Seventy percent of the population is under thirty, so this is severely affecting the youth in the country. The current education system is not synchronized with what the labor market demands, and even with a university degree, you’ll find yourself faced with a weak job market. We see that it takes an average of two years for graduates to find employment, with the situation in capital Amman still relatively better. In addition, our country has to deal with one of the lowest percentages of women participation in the labor market. Our Social Enterprise is actively working on changing all of this, especially with the mySTARTUP initiative, which is specifically aimed at higher educated young people.”

THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE OF YOUTH BETWEEN 20 AND 24 YEARS IS ALMOST 40 PERCENT. SEVENTY PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS UNDER THIRTY, SO THIS IS SEVERELY AFFECTING THE YOUTH IN THE COUNTRY.

MyStartup part of the Shiraka program

MySTARTUP has been part of the much wider program Shiraka since 2018. Shiraka is a Dutch bilateral effort that supports sustainable democratic transition in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa). Apart from democratization and construction of the constitutional state and the protection of human rights and minorities, the program aims at stimulating economic growth. It does so partly by developing the economic infrastructure, which includes stimulating employment, especially for youth, women, refugees and people with disabilities.



Enad Kanaan

Enad recalls: “mySTARTUP was launched before it came under the wings of Shiraka in December 2018. We already helped some ten to fifteen young entrepreneurs a year, but after the connection with Shiraka there were many more; currently about 75, with 180 young entrepreneurs involved. We help them with workshops, connect them to field experts and offer legal, financial and marketing support. We guide them through the entire process so that they can also commercially transform their initiatives. We also bring entrepreneurs into

contact with economic ecosystems that are relevant to them; more than 40 major companies in Jordan have a seat on our board or trustees. That helps.” The startups vary widely: from IT to marketing research, agriculture and tech. “We notice that mySTARTUP really has an impact, not only do we create opportunities for the entrepreneurs involved, but there is also a broader effect. They can hire people and support their families. And: we offer women extra support; 40 percent of the 75 young companies are run by women.”

Plastic tanks

One of them is Aia Abul-Haj, who along with her husband Motaz Althaher founded the company SOLVillion in 2018. The company sells decentralized water treatment systems. Motaz brings in a large experience in design and manufacturing of plastic tanks and knows a lot about mechanical fields servicing. Hence, he is responsible for technical issues and logistics. Aia on her part has worked for more than seven years in business and development management. Research work, writing proposals and articles are part of her job. Together, they represent their company in conferences and events. Her motive for starting the company is a personal one: “My colleague Zaid and I have suffered for decades from absorption holes as an alternative to sanitation systems. With bad smell, environmental and health hazards, and on top of that the monthly expensive discharge of the holes. This is especially a problem for people with low income living in rural areas, and in houses with no connection to sanitation systems.” Furthermore, she emphasizes, “People living in other governorates than Amman, where illegal discharge of the waste from absorption holes in valleys and agricultural areas is very common, suffer from bad smell and polluted air.”

Solutions to sanitation hazards

Within SOLVillion, a group of young engineers join forces to invent and spread innovative solutions. This means sustainable, affordable and customized solutions to the sanitation hazards mentioned. In concrete terms, this means decentralized wastewater treatment system, training and consultation in the field of water management. The company employs four women and two men, and works for households, real estate companies and NGOs based in Refugee Camps. “I am involved in the TechWomen Program as well. One colleague in this program introduced me to mySTARTUP to present our project.



Bijzchrift..

After the evaluation process, we got incubated by mySTARTUP. ‘mySTARTUP now helps her company to grow, with mentorship, networking and co-working space. The program also offers access to investment capital and gives access to events and conferences. “The mentorship, access to capital, and commercial opportunities are specifically vital to us.”

Fight for an equal salary

Being an engineer with an impressive resume did not give Aia any job guarantee. “Jordan has one of the highest engineers per capita in the world – one engineer for every fifty persons. So, it’s not at all easy for someone like me to find a job. You need to be highly qualified with unique skills. As a woman, it’s even harder. The main challenge is to fight for an equal salary. Males with the same qualifications and who do the same jobs earn more. For a married women, it’s even harder to be employed, and after that to safeguard our rights as moms in times of pregnancy and maternity.”

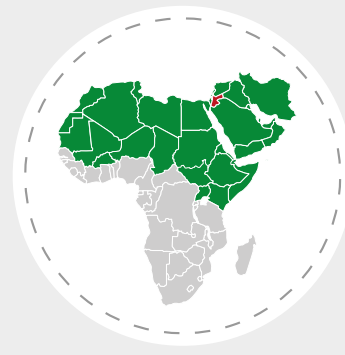
AS A WOMAN, IT’S EVEN HARDER TO FIND A JOB. THE MAIN CHALLENGE IS TO FIGHT FOR AN EQUAL SALARY. MALES WITH THE SAME QUALIFICATIONS AND WHO DO THE SAME JOBS EARN MORE.

Women’s economic participation

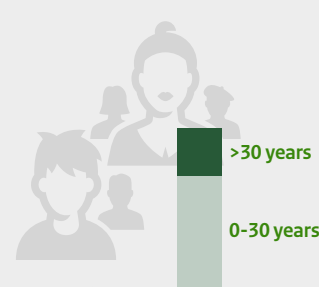
Aia says ‘it is crucial for young women to be more involved in the country’s economy. “The USAID Report states that Jordan has one of the lowest rates of women’s economic participation in the world, with less than one-fifth of women engaged in the total workforce, despite the fact that 93 percent of Jordanian women are educated. On the other hand, our economy is heavily depending on human resources, and 47 percent of Jordan’s population are female. So we simply need to find proper solutions.”

Engineering is my lifestyle

Enad Kanaan says young people in Jordan are facing their severe challenges with a positive mindset. Aia is the living proof of this; she couples a deep sense of the country’s needs with a pragmatic entrepreneurial attitude. “Engineering is my lifestyle, and education is my passion. Love, simplicity and knowledge are my techniques. Nowadays, there are many stimulating programs and funds Jordanian women with startups can benefit from. I’m very happy to be one of them.”



The Netherlands places youth at the heart of its development policy. There are more young people in the world than ever. This offers an enormous opportunity, provided that young people are offered opportunities and the right skills. We invest in a better connection between education and work, for a better future for youth in the MENA region, Horn of Africa and West Africa.



70% OF THE JORDANIAN POPULATION IS UNDER 30 YEARS OF AGE

29% OF JORDANIAN YOUTH AGED 15-24 WERE FOUND TO BE NEITHER EMPLOYED NOR IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET) IN 2016

53% OF 15-29 YEAR OLD WORKERS ARE EMPLOYED IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

52% OF YOUTH AGED 15-29 YEARS SURVEYED IN 2012-13 FELT THAT THEIR QUALIFICATIONS DID NOT MATCH THEIR EMPLOYMENT, EITHER OVER- OR UNDERQUALIFIED FOR THEIR JOB

19% OF THE 655,00 REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES ARE BETWEEN 15 AND 24. 84% OF THEM ARE OUT OF SCHOOL OR UNEMPLOYED



SHIRAKA PROGRAM
Shiraka means “partnership” in Arabic. With the Shiraka program, the Netherlands has been supporting the democratic transition in North Africa and the Middle East since 2016. Central to the program is the changing attitude between citizen and government. Shiraka strives for lasting changes in the region that ultimately lead to an inclusive society, a functioning rule of law, economic growth and employment.