

# Report on Roundtable Meetings on Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Amman on March 3<sup>rd</sup> & Cairo on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024



**Swedish Dialogue Institute**  
for the Middle East and North Africa

## **Report**

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 2024, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, gathered diverse actors from the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Jordan and Egypt respectively, in two separate roundtable discussions. At both meetings, the participants came from a broad spectrum of the entrepreneurship ecosystem – from startups, companies, accelerators, investors, as well as research institutions.

### *Background*

The meetings in Amman and Cairo were part of a series of activities carried out by the Institute during Spring 2024. In addition to these two meetings, the activities include bilateral consultations, meetings, workshops etc. in different parts of the MENA region in-person and online. These activities aimed at broadening the Institute's contacts and networks with relevant actors in the region and at developing ideas and recommendations for future work in the field of entrepreneurship. They were a chance to learn more about how the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region has developed over the last few years, to get a better understanding on challenges and opportunities, and to explore how the Institute could play a relevant and meaningful role. The aim was to build on Sweden's exciting engagement and to do complementary work to that of Business Sweden, Swedish Institute (SI), SIDA and Swedish embassies in the MENA region.

### *Meetings in Amman and Cairo*

In welcoming participants to the meetings, the Institute's director Charlotta Sparre provided a brief overview on the Institute's mandate and areas of work, highlighting the role in bringing people together for networking and for dialogues on topics of mutual interest, through conferences, workshops, and other activities, aiming at "bridging silos" between actors from different parts of society, different ages, genders and from different countries in the region and from Sweden/Europe.

Sparre said that the Institute had identified a need to engage more with the private sector, especially on innovation and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, she stressed the central role that the private sector can play in contributing to inclusive sustainable economic development, to strengthening regional economic integration, and to enhancing dialogue and cooperation between MENA region and Sweden/Europe.

Participants brought up some of the challenges in innovation and entrepreneurship, including on legal and administrative barriers, limited access to global markets, financing challenges and limited access to resources, and needs in further developing knowledge of starting and scaling up businesses.

In their advice to the Institute, participants provided input on potential focus areas, organizations and individuals who could be relevant to engage with. They recommended narrowing the topics, objectives and outputs and they pointed to some of the many existing programmes and underlined the need for the Institute to find its own niche, where it could have and added value. Some of the areas highlighted as potentially more relevant to the Institute's were related to areas such as green businesses and creative industries, and to work on gender and youth inclusion. Connecting the MENA region with Sweden/Europe, through networking, exchanges of experiences and present best practices, were also seen as valuable areas to engage in.

Some more concrete recommendations from the discussion included to work on:

- Enhancing contacts and exchanges between the MENA region and Europe in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Exploring the potential “connecting role” of diaspora entrepreneurs.
- Building on existing networks such as alumni from the Swedish Institute's leadership programs.
- Finding synergies with already exciting efforts carried out by other organizations.
- Integrating inclusivity and diversity in the dialogues on entrepreneurship and innovation, by connecting entrepreneurs with policy makers, politicians, CSOs, think tanks, etc.

- Supporting more inclusive business environment, especially paying attention to the needs of women and of youth.
- Exchanging of experiences amongst countries and best practices through presenting successful models of entrepreneurial ecosystem that can be adopted in other countries.
- Focusing on human connections related to entrepreneurship and innovations as storytelling, films, arts.

### *Intergenerational dialogue*

During the meetings the Institute presented its recent work on intergenerational dialogue and the guidance note on “[Connecting Generations](#)”. This led to an interesting conversation on the specific intergenerational dimensions within the private sector. Participants highlighted the potential of fruitful collaborations, when different generations have “mutual need” of each other’s competences, i.e. when “new” knowledge, perspectives and ideas are brought to the table by the younger generations and is combined with and supported by older generations’ experiences, contacts and financing capacity. Another dimension that came up was the question of inherited businesses, where this on one hand have a chance to create bonds and continuity, on the other hand where tension may arise when there are differences in vision for where the business should be taken.