

**Clusters of Scientific Innovation in the Middle East and North Africa
(COSIMENA)**

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COSIMENA Winter School on Entrepreneurship

Between March 23rd and April 8th, 2021, the DAAD Regional Office Cairo in cooperation with the **Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport (AASTMT)** hosted a 10-day online event on the topic of entrepreneurship.

This “COSIMENA Winter School on Entrepreneurship” represented a unique opportunity for the selected attendees from the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa to come together to learn, discuss and exchange ideas in the field of innovation. In a virtual format due to the global pandemic circumstances, the Winter School offered the learning experience of consolidating scientific research methodologies with entrepreneurial industry-related practices. The combination of the three main components of scientific research topics, practical industry-related topics and general informative topics helped to form a comprehensive understanding of the articulated field of entrepreneurship. Notably, the scientific and content experts from Germany and Egypt chose to structure the Winter School in five modules around the following subjects: Academia overlapping Entrepreneurship, Higher Education Institutes, Managing Innovation, Business Literature Basics and Growth-Seeking steps. In each session, participants actively engaged in presentations with theoretical analyses and practical examples, success stories, fruitful exchanges, dynamic workshops and mentorship sessions. “Inspiring, learning and networking,” stated **Mr. Taha Yassine**, a participant from Tunisia, to describe his experience at the end of the Winter School.

Using the number of inputs received throughout the 10 days, the attendees lastly presented a variety of innovative entrepreneurial projects created in different groups. These final presentations highlighted the enriching impact of the Winter School on participants, who exhibited remarkable confidence, creativity and enthusiasm in sharing their projects. Feedbacks from both speakers and attendees indicated the success of the event in meeting its primary goal of training young researchers in the challenges of science and technology transfer, while supporting them on their exciting journey from new ideas to innovations and eventually start-ups or university spin-offs. “It was an incredibly rich event, thanks to the vast material presented, the various perspectives taken and the different backgrounds of all participants,” the attendee **Ms. Reema Mohammed Abu Safat** stated in an interview following the conference.

The first day started with welcoming words from **Ms. Isabell Mering, Director of the DAAD Regional Office Cairo**, then the COSIMENA project team detailed the plan of the COSIMENA Winter School on Entrepreneurship. In addition, major contributors to the event, such as **Prof. Dr. Ismail Abdel Ghaffar**, President of the **Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT)** and the Egyptian Partner, offered motivating opening speeches, highlighting the prominent role of innovation, creativity and exchange in facing current global challenges.

The Winter School then started with a general introduction to the concept of entrepreneurship by **Prof. Dr. Michael Stephan** from the **University of Marburg**, Germany, the scientific and content expert from the German side. In this first module, **Prof. Dr. Stephan** defined basic terms and phases related to entrepreneurship, including the pre-seed and seed stage, the ramp-up business period and the expansion phase.

The following session involved a rich explanation of the intersection between research and entrepreneurship. By presenting the **Sharjah Innovation Park’s** activities, its operation mode and programmes, **Mr. Tarek Salam** highlighted the necessary effort to boost collaboration between the three sectors of Academia, Industry and Public. Lastly,

participants were offered some advice based on **Mr. Waddah Maleeb's** success story from **DLOC Biosystems**, Lebanon. Remarkably, he reminded of the importance of being driven by a strong passion, of seeking the favourable supporting environment and of being extremely focused, while acknowledging the development of each individual and his specific way to approach the entrepreneurial journey. After the Winter School, several participants highlighted the value of these success stories in reminding them to continue working hard for their dreams.

On the second day, **Prof. Dr Michael Stephan** held detailed sessions on further elements related to entrepreneurship. In his first presentation on "Entrepreneurial Solutions for Global Economic Challenges", he listed major global trends and the respective potential solutions coming from the entrepreneurial sector. Remarkably, the session shed the light on the role of disruptive change and the necessity for entrepreneurs to bring about radical changes, at the source of global development.

Prof. Dr Stephan proceeded with another presentation on "IP Management and protection". This session introduced the main tools for the protection of rights and tackled a central topic in the field of entrepreneurship. "I greatly benefited from the material presented by **Prof. Dr Stephan**; it helped me understand central topics especially with regards to the protection of rights," **Mr. Ibrahim Hamouda**, a participant from Egypt, highlighted in a successive interview.

In the conclusive presentation entitled "How can Science boost Entrepreneurial Ventures Performance?", **Dr Nezar Sami (Cairo University, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport)** highlighted the fundamental role of science and technology to build a robust technology-based venture. As part of the workshop exercise, each group imagined the creation of a business that takes into consideration the problem to be solved, the beneficiaries of the innovation and the technological means involved for such scientific innovation. Finally, the attendees were invited to reflect on the commercialization of this technological innovation.

The Winter School continued in the third day with stimulating sessions providing deep knowledge on additional topics. Primarily, **Dr Dina Belal** from the **University of Khartoum** offered a rich presentation on "How to Transform Research into Entrepreneurial Enterprises". She highlighted the different ways in which universities can support the development of entrepreneurial projects, while outlining major steps to develop a solid entrepreneurial enterprise. Finally, based on the case study of successful projects supported by the **University of Khartoum**, she encouraged young entrepreneurs to continue working on their projects despite the several challenges that they might encounter.

In the second session, **Ms. Khansa Elhag (249Startups)** offered an "Entrepreneurial Ideation Workshop" rich of guidelines to generate and actualize innovative ideas. After presenting some founding principles and concepts, she concluded with a practical exercise. Here, the participants needed to come up with collective business ideas. After defining their persona according to the primordial questions: "Who am I?", "What do I know?", "Who do I know?", each group started designing business ideas, to be further matured during the advanced workshop in the following days.

The day ended with **Mr. Mohammed Obiaa's** success story of **Askova**. By illustrating the building process of the Egyptian wind energy start-up **Askova**, he emphasized the necessity to come up with a unique idea and then follow the necessary steps with patience and persistence. As in the previous modules, participants left with a number of insights, on which they could further elaborate during the weekend break.

The participants gathered again on Monday, 29th March, with renewed energy to interact in the rich series of planned sessions. The first presentation by **Prof. Dr Michael Stephan** offered a comprehensive introduction to “Innovation Management, Technology Management and Technology Transfer”. Remarkably, **Prof. Dr Michael Stephan** encouraged entrepreneurs to bring about radical innovations, which differ from incremental innovations as they cause outstanding new dominant designs. In a successive interview, **Prof Dr Michael Stephan** shared additional advice for a successful entrepreneurial journey. Primarily, he urged entrepreneurs to validate the business model as early as possible, to carefully choose a complete, coherent and harmonious team and to focus on networking.

The second presentation on “Entrepreneurship Education” by **Dr Mourad Mansour** highlighted the need for universities to support entrepreneurship and innovations through dedicated programmes. **Dr Mansour** presented the example of **King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals** as a leading university in the region to build the entrepreneurial ecosystem and boost regional development.

Furthermore, **Dr Hesham Magd**, **Ms. Muthla Al Busaidi** and **Mr. Raihan Syed** presented the **Modern College in Oman** and its ‘Center of Entrepreneurship’ as a model for preparing students to become successful entrepreneurs. They emphasized the need to adapt education programmes to the circumstances of the current global pandemic, notably the switch to the digital formats.

Finally, **Ms. Khansa Elhag (249Startups)** led the “Advanced Ideation Workshop” on the use of ‘Business Model Canvas’. She guided participants on the use of this business tool, which structures the ideation process according to the following central elements: customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partners and cost structures.

The workshop was followed by a mentorship session where participants were divided in different groups and were assisted into the discussion of a business project and then developing it into a business project idea with the target of presenting it by the end of the Winter School as a project pitch.

At the beginning of the fifth day, the mentorship session continued with participants discussing in separate rooms the chosen entrepreneurial project.

Successively, in the presentation on “Entrepreneurship education”, **Ms. Mariam Makram** from the American University in Cairo illustrated the start-ups ecosystem. For each area, including the person, the market and the network, she explained the principles to apply, respectively the ‘bird in the hand’, the ‘pilot in the plane’, the ‘lemonade’ and the ‘affordable loss’ and the ‘the patchwork quilt’ principles. In the Q&A time, she emphasized the necessity to prioritize the person above the other areas, as the self is the founding force of the project before anything.

In the next session, **Mr. Khaled Adas** from **King Abdulaziz Foundation for Giftedness & Creativity** offered a detailed presentation on “Innovation management impact on higher education”. Remarkably, he investigated when tremendous innovations are possible and the role of education in supporting them.

The second part of the day involved an “Actionable roadmap workshop” on how to design entrepreneurship and innovation programmes in university. **Dr Wael EIDesouki**, the Egyptian expert, Head of the Center of Entrepreneurship at the Arab Academy, detailed different tools available to accompany entrepreneurs during their ideation process. Among others, he showed the ‘Entrepreneurship Implementation Strategy Matrix’, highlighting the need to adjust it to each specific case. He also presented a number of centres and institutes supporting entrepreneurs, notably the **Arab Academy**, the **University of Ciputra in Indonesia** and the **University of Michigan**.

The sixth day opened with a detailed presentation on “Agile methodologies”. Principally, **Prof. Stephan** detailed the “Scrum methodology”, while **Mr. Ahmed Bastawy** focused on the “Lean start-up”.

These sessions led to a final success story. **Mr. Christian Rötz** explained the developments of his co-founded company **CrystalsFirst** from a service provider to a therapeutics company. Specifically, he focused on the most efficient ways to attract investors and finding fundraising to transform his business.

Thanks to this variety of presentations, the attendees could move to the seventh day with the fundamentals in the field of entrepreneurship. **Prof. Dr Michael Stephan** offered an introduction to “Opportunities in entrepreneurship, trending research areas, market research importance”. By the end of this rich session, the participants could develop a practical understanding of how to perform a market and competitive research with patent information through the most effective tools.

The following module focused on “Entrepreneurial marketing”. **Dr Wael EIDesouki** listed some major tools in entrepreneurial marketing, giving advice on the most preferable ones. In a successive interview, he also brought to light the current transformation in the use of entrepreneurial marketing tools due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Ms. Heba Al-Ashry (Deputy Director of the **Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport**) further clarified some effective tools for “Entrepreneurial marketing”. Among others, content marketing, email, SEO, affiliate, referrals and social media represent the central channels for online marketing.

After the final mentorship session, the participants had a long weekend break, during which they continued being active on the dedicated virtual learning platform ‘Moodle’.

The Winter School resumed on Tuesday, April 6th, with sessions focused on the economic aspect of entrepreneurship. Through **Prof. Stephan’s** analysis of major principles, basic terms and business examples, the participants could develop an understanding of how the economics of entrepreneurship breaks with (Neo)-classical assumptions in economics, as it is based on more uncertain factors.

In the next module, **Mr. Marwan Jamal (Victoria University of Wellington)** introduced core financial principles and fundraising basics in the entrepreneurial world. In his presentation on “Entrepreneurial finance”, participants learned the application and adaptation of financial tools and techniques to the planning, funding, operation, and valuation of entrepreneurial ventures.

In the last module, the participants received insights on primordial aspects for the development of the financial sustainability of the entrepreneurial project. **Dr. Nader Ibrahim**, CEO of **Epic Advisory**, offered a presentation on “Entrepreneurial financial planning and management applications”, with details on the development of the financial plan of a business or project.

After another lively mentorship session, the following day, **Prof. Dr Stephan** went deeper into the different categories in the field of entrepreneurship with a focus on international, corporate and social entrepreneurship. “It is important to emphasize the social aspect of entrepreneurship and not only thinking of entrepreneurship in business terms,” he clarified in an interview at the end of the event. In the second session, **Mr. Andre Abi Awad**, from **Entrepreneurgy** explained how to pitch and present entrepreneurial projects. After watching exemplary pitches, participants identified distinguishing elements for a memorable presentation, such as the need to present a captivating story, show enthusiasm, clarity, structure, and mention the unfair advantage.

During the mentorship session, the participants were again divided into different breakout rooms to discuss the presentation of their pitch for the following day. This brief time in separated rooms was followed by the pitching rehearsal in the main room. In a timeframe of three minutes, a representative for each group presented the common entrepreneurial project. Before leaving the session, the organizers reminded all attendees to continue believing in their dreams, with hope and enthusiasm.

The last day included a last set of various activities. After the rich lectures on “Scientific approach to capital fundraising and investment”, “Incubation and acceleration processes for start-ups” and a workshop on “Brief application on entrepreneurial capital raising”, the day moved to the long-awaited pitching moment from attendees. As **Ms. Nermine Abdelaty**, the project coordinator, from the DAAD Regional Office Cairo clarified, these presentations were the highlight of the entire event. Manifestly, they reflected the hard work of all participants throughout the days and the jury expressed high appreciation for the efforts in applying the knowledge from the Winter School. The projects included a variety of topics, as a result of the multiplicity of backgrounds and ideas of participants. Some pitches included live presentations, accompanied with visual support, others showed repeated rehearsal behind them and great passion. Each member of the jury was very supportive and eager to offer valuable advice for the realization of the participants’ entrepreneurial projects.

Overall, the Winter School on Entrepreneurship was a success, as the enthusiastic feedback at the end indicate. “The unique value of COSIMENA Winter School was to cover both the social and business aspects of entrepreneurial ventures, while combining the theoretical and the practical part as well as making the link between science and technology, research and academia and entrepreneurship,” **Prof. Dr Stephan** stated.