

Palestinian Talent

From Ramallah to Silicon Valley



By Rawan Abu Ishira

Just as elsewhere, Palestine stands to benefit from the development of an innovation-based economy. Innovative economic activity can provide Palestinian enterprises with easy access to regional markets and even the global market. Our experience at Leaders Organization, however, points to a few challenges faced by Palestinian entrepreneurs when establishing enterprises that are able to compete on the global scale. We therefore launched the Palestinian House in Silicon Valley program (PHSV), sponsored by the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem, in order to expose Palestinian entrepreneurs to the global innovation economy. It aims to fill the gap of the limited business training programs by invoking the expertise of successful entrepreneurs from the world's innovation capital: Silicon Valley. The program directly relates to the larger economic strategy of focusing on the potential of the ICT sector as a key driver of Palestinian economic growth, especially given the relative ease of doing business in this sector.

PHSV contributes to increasing the potential of innovative Palestinian enterprises by developing a training program that combines short-term courses on business and technical subjects with hosted talks by some of the most influential entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley. In-house training was also delivered in Palestine by five local and more than 25 American experts. Now embarking on its fourth round of implementation, PHSV has sent 14 start-ups to Silicon Valley, where they were hosted for a month in local accelerators and well-known co-working spaces. They met with investors, initiated beneficial partnerships, and had the chance to participate in international networking events.

Although the numbers in themselves are a testimony to the type of opportunity created by this initiative, it is the impact that interests us the most. So far, four of our companies are now Google-affiliated start-ups through the Google Cloud Platform program, which aims to surround start-ups with the necessary resources and infrastructure to help them build and scale their platform, including a wide network of mentors and experts to accelerate the growth of the start-ups affiliated with Google, in addition to a \$100,000 package of cloud services.

Seven new companies are travelling to Silicon Valley in May 2016 to explore

opportunities through our customized program. Thus, we are always on the lookout for creative local talent in Palestine, strategic partnerships with actors committed to development (such as the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem), and an expanded network of connections in the United States and other global markets to widen the scope of growth opportunities for Palestinian entrepreneurs.

Rawan Abu Ishira is the digital entrepreneurship program coordinator at Leaders Organization, an NGO dedicated to developing the Palestinian innovation-based economy.

Leaders at work!



LEADERS

eZone

MINI TECH PARK

Achievements in 2014- 2015

A 1000 m² facility in Ramallah that includes Palestine's first Startup Accelerator FastForward, co-working space, incubation space, activities hall, meeting rooms and entrepreneurs café.

Entrepreneurship Training Events

131

Entrepreneurs Attending Capacity Building Programs

2072

Jobs Created

181

Seed Investments in Startups

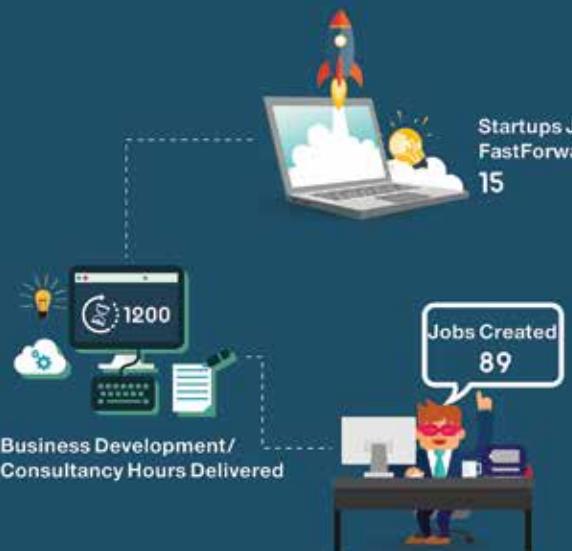
\$750,000

Startups Travelling to Silicon Valley

14



FastForward Accelerator



eZone

TECH PARK



19

Hosted Companies

82
Jobs Created

Entrepreneurial Events Hosted at e-Zone



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