Bahraini non-profit brings nature to the boardroom

Public Planet Partnerships trains businesses how to use nature to operate more efficiently and boost their bottom line

The World Bank values earth’s natural assets at $80 trillion. For instance, California’s street trees annually provide $5 billion in services by regulating the atmosphere and preventing floods, but such contributions are usually overlooked in conventional economics.

So, Al-Oiyani’s PPF model offers access and step-by-step methodology enabling mutually beneficial and regenerative collaborations between humans and the natural world.

“We’d like to see PPF become widely used, so new or existing business, NGO or government department would look at this framework and find it easy to implement,” she said.

By public, Al-Oiyani means businesses, multilateral organizations, scientists, governments and civil society. In place, she means all life on earth and its vast resources. PPF opens source tools combine design-thinking, management consulting and spiritual evolution with a science-based approach. About 20 downloadable tools help organizations to gain insights, from reforming nature or set it as a technology to connecting with nature at an intuitive level. These tools are available in English, Arabic and French. PPF’s co-founders piloted its program at COP22, the UN 2016 climate change conference in Marrakech. PPF also received a $100,000 Expansive Grant to develop its methodology and expand its reach. The framework is now 100% accessible.

“We wanted to create a planet-centered toolkit that anyone could use and was accessible,” Al-Oiyani said. “Most environmental frameworks are technical, so we set out to create something that would be easy to understand for everyone — from a change-maker to an entrepreneur, management consultant or government official.”

The 12 partner models include using nature as a sensor, a seed, an asset, a design-thinking tool, a tool for education, a tool for innovation, a tool for sustainability, a tool for leadership, a tool for design and a tool for impact frameworks.

“A start-up’s goal is to look for new asset and social capital that enables it to design products and take into consideration human ecosystems,” she added.

“Today’s approach is looking at what’s available to you and the species that do that could be useful to your business or organization,” Al-Oiyani said. “We look to parties to work with the species that are a part-time, how will that work? Or with another species as a recorder, what would that entail? Once you’ve answered this, you need to develop a business case. You may need to use an environmental economist to quantify the costs, for example, what impact a certain project can be done by anyone.”

Professional from more than 50 countries have used the toolkit. “Most of the traction we’ve had has been with design thinkers, sustainability professionals, environment NGOs or Al-Oiyani said. Meanwhile, a proposed project has been completed by 114 students as of September 2020. “It’s been pleasantly surprising and encouraged by the traction we’ve had,” she said.

**FAST FACT**

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**data partner**, a waste management consultancy. For instance, the internal capital of waste management firms enables them to digitize and identify the socio-economic impacts a human microcosm.

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**CI can now create a planet-centered toolkit that anyone could use and was accessible.**

**Lena Al-Oiyani**

The scientific and technological advancements of the last 100 years have left humanity even more remote from the natural world, as exploitation of natural resources has invariably been arrogantly prioritized over environmental protection.

Lena Al-Oiyani, a Bahraini social entrepreneur, has made it her mission to reset the paradigm, launching non-profit Public Planet Partnerships (PPF) to train businesses how to “team up” with nature to operate more efficiently and boost their bottom line.

“We see nature as something to protect or exploit, unfortunately. But we don’t see it as something to collaborate with as a socioecological partner,” Al-Oiyani said.

Across the world, social enterprises have been among the first to respond to the significant challenges posed by COVID-19. In Tunisia, the Biome Alimentaire facility dispatched food aid to neediest families during the month of Ramadan and beyond. While in Lebanon, the 305 Area Relief nearly twice as many calls on its domestic abuse hotline in the last four months of the year than it did over the decade of 2000.

This ability to deliver emergency relief to those in need, against governments and the market could see investment in social enterprises remain relatively steady, and perhaps even grow, A Time survey by NY-based Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) showed. Impact investment, valued at $755 billion worldwide, was defined as the for-profit projects that generate a positive social or environmental outcomes in the survey, which polled 200 leading investors with $800 billion of impact investment assets. The survey’s findings revealed that if they would maintain or increase their planned outlay for 2020.

“COVID-19 has increased the need for impact investment and augmenting investor’s interest in impact driven funds,” said Medha Mehta, co-founder and CEO of CI (Companies Creating Change). “Most social enterprises not only survived during the COVID-19 pandemic but also flourished. This proves that companies changing the game are the ones staying afloat.”

**Most social enterprises not only survived during the COVID-19 pandemic but also flourished.**

Medha Mehta, co-founder and CEO of CI (Companies Creating Change)

MIAN. It is also to help entrepreneurs working towards redefining at least one of UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to maintain their social impact and ensure their financial viability.

Noyan says there has been increased interest in regional companies creating a positive impact and better understanding of their business models.

“Most of them are new. We are seeing companies as small initiatives to non-profit organizations. However, the pandemic made them realize that companies are an asset to create a positive impact. The asset can be valuable, sustainable, resilient, and indeed investable,” Noyan said.

Startup that sit at the intersection of technology, development and social impact could benefit from this increased interest, particularly businesses that are data-driven, tech-enabled and aligned within the MIEEN region.

As the co-founder and CEO of Salita Health, a hybrid healthcare company focused on diagnosing and monitoring unhealthy conditions in women, Salita Health has noted in increased interest since the coronavirus outbreak.

“Un COVID, there was little or no interest among Middle Eastern venture capital firms to invest in life sciences and health care. Today, we see several of the big VC’s pivoting away from commerce, real estate, logistics and others to focus almost exclusively on healthcare,” she said.

“Venture capitalists are rethinking the need to invest in accessible and affordable healthcare for people across the region, to enhance overall population health and protect against future pandemics.”

The general consensus among social impact companies, she says, is that the coronavirus pandemic has made it easier to attract investment.

“The closing of borders and suspension of trade has made governments realize the importance of building local, sustainable businesses, with a particular focus on food and population health security. This is good news for social impact companies that usually already have a sustainability mandate and a desire to uplift the local community,” she said.

Beyond their micro-level impact, social enterprises could also play a larger, national role. For example, financing social enterprises in South America could contribute an additional 3.5 percent to GDP per year and create more than 200,000 new jobs by 2030, according to September estimates from PwC. In contrast, the UK’s sector accounts for about 8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

As a result, there is a need for a non-profit social organization for every 10,000 people in South America, compared to about 50 to 100 in Canada and the US and 200 to 250 in France, PwC said. The country’s social enterprises are a promising way to help the nation achieve the ambitious economic transformation outlined in its Vision 2030 development plan.

Whether in South America or elsewhere, impact investing can lead to a more equitable distribution of resources, while generating social and environmental and economic returns.