

EVENT CONTRIBUTION

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

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Innovation requires great courage

OMANI STUDENTS LEARN BASICS OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Be it on the small or the large scale, any form of innovative development first and foremost requires the courage to question the conventional wisdom and embrace change, German Ambassador Hans-Christian von Reibnitz told the thirty participants of "Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung"'s social entrepreneurship workshop in Muscat, Oman, during his welcoming speech. But as representatives of Oman's coming generation, they also carry a special responsibility to muster this courage and actively engage in the development of their country, he added.

This view was shared by Dr Dhafir Al Shanfari, Dean of the Faculty of Management and Co-Director of the Academic Innovation Assistance Program at Sultan Qaboos University, who emphasised the important role innovative initiatives by young Omanis play in the social and economic modernisation of Oman.

Indeed, with a rapidly growing population - more than half of all Omanis are under the age of 25 - the country is confronting major economic and social challenges. At least 50,000 new jobs have to be created every year to prevent any further rise in youth unemployment, currently already estimated at 21%. At the same time, however, Dr Al Shanfari emphasised, Oman's demographic challenge must also to be understood as an opportunity to use the creative potential and entrepreneurial spirit of the coming generation for the further transformation of the Sultanate into a modern state.

It is precisely for this reason that the idea of social entrepreneurship is so acutely relevant for Oman. Social entrepreneurship not only shows young people a way to secure their own livelihood by setting up a business, but it also enables young Omanis to take on social responsibility for their country and their fellow citizens at the same time. For this reason, social entre-

preneurship entails much more than merely running a socially responsible business, said Sonja Andjelkovic, the workshop trainer. Rather, it is a way of life, that upends conventional wisdom by putting the contribution to society, not profit-maximisation, at the core of any business model.

Ms Andjelkovic, who has worked as an independent consultant for clients such as GIZ, several major German companies and various ministries throughout the Middle East since 1995, provided the participants with the necessary skills to later turn their own business ideas into reality. Under the direction of Ms Andjelkovic, the students were able to familiarise themselves with the basics of social entrepreneurship and identify areas in which social business models could help improve the situation in Oman.

The participants then selected four ideas from the fields of education, business creation, health and tourism, which they developed into sustainable business models over the remaining days of the workshop. Finally, they presented their ideas before an independent jury (consisting of Nasra Al Adawi, Business Development Manager at The Achievement Centre, Nabhan Al Kharusi, General Manager of the Extra Miles LLC, Dr Topoyame Moremong-Nganunu,

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Professor at the Faculty of Management of the Sultan Qaboos University, and Dr Dhafir Al Shanfari) who evaluated the students' proposals according to the criteria of innovation, quality, feasibility and relevance to society and provided them with qualitative feedback as a basis for the further steps on their way towards setting up their own business.

The extensive feedback and methodological skills the students have acquired will enable them to further develop their proposals into concrete business plans and thereby move closer to their goal of becoming socially responsible entrepreneurs.

With the social entrepreneurship workshop in Oman, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung aims to contribute to the establishment of an entrepreneurial culture and raise social responsibility among the next generation of Omani leaders. The event is the fourth collaboration between the Regional Programme Gulf States and the Sultan Qaboos University.