

LOOKING A-STEP-AHEAD

Since August 2017 **Dr. Manuel Schubert** is the Regional Representative to the Gulf States of Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) and previously served as Resident Representative to Jordan.

Dear Mr. Schubert, the “ASStepAhead” career fair for Saudi women set a successful signal in terms of women’s empowerment in September last year. What is the idea behind the event and how did the cooperation with Glowork, the first organization dedicated to women recruitment and empowerment in the GCC, come about?

The idea behind “ASStepAhead” – which is Glowork’s brainchild and which we are honored as KAS to become a partner of – is that there is tremendous untapped potential in Saudi Arabia amongst the youth, and women particularly, that can and should be used. On the one hand, more than half of college graduates in the Kingdom are female, on the other hand, roughly a third of Saudi women still remain unemployed. So the main idea behind “ASStepAhead” is to bridge that gap.

Last year it successfully brought together 37,000 women with 85 employers. And I think there is a recognition from the government side that this is a priority – the Vision set a 30% goal for women’s employment in 2030 and we saw a great involvement from agencies such as the JCC and the SME Authority in the career fair to make that happen.

Glowork, as you said, is spearheading the field of women’s employment in the Kingdom and the region. So, when we heard about the organization, we were very enthusiastic to support their pioneer initiatives with a contribution from the German side, too. This is why we have and will continue to organize also other events, such as career trainings and workshops, with Glowork.

“ ... there is a great momentum in entrepreneurship on both, the Saudi and the German side, and the main benefit is that we can learn from each other. ”

What long-term goals do you have for your engagement in Saudi Arabia and where do you see your thematic priorities?

I believe our engagement will be fundamentally driven in the long-term by the opportunities created by the remarkable transformation process under the umbrella of Vision 2030 that is underway in Saudi Arabia. KAS is quite uniquely positioned as a hybrid between a think tank and advisory body but also as a networking hub to German stakeholders. We would like to contribute this key competence in those areas where we can create added value for both sides.

This means we will emphasize German expertise in economics, specifically on reforms stimulating competition, and empowering entrepreneurs, SMEs, women and the youth. Another priority is continuing to build bilateral platforms for exchange and dialogue. We believe these channels, when grounded in mutual trust, are essential to reducing stereotypes and prejudices on both sides. Also, we would like to expand the discussion on joint security issues, such as shared concerns of Saudi Arabia and Germany about extremism. Finally, we will continue to embrace the many incubators of positive social change that already exist in the Kingdom, wherever possible.

With your commitment during the 1st German-Saudi Startup Competition, you support a quite new German-Saudi cooperation format on the economic and political level. In your opinion, how can Saudi startups benefit from exchange trips to Germany and which services and support does the Konrad Adenauer Foundation offer for young Saudi entrepreneurs?

My impression is that there is a great momentum in entrepreneurship on both, the Saudi and the German side, and the main benefit is that we can learn from each

other. In Germany, there is already a vibrant ecosystem, in Berlin but also in other places, while the enormous ambition to foster a startup scene in Saudi Arabia is quite unprecedented.

As KAS, we would like to unleash these synergies by linking entrepreneurs with each other. Not only do we have many former KAS-scholarship holders who are successful entrepreneurs today and can share their experience and advice, our colleagues in Berlin have also developed a modularized mentorship program that could be brought to Riyadh in the future to provide more formalized training.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation regularly organizes delegation trips from Saudi Arabia to Germany. How is your schedule for 2018?

Yes, we believe that direct people-to-people exchange is an integral



ABOUT

Dr. Manuel Schubert is a behavioral economist by education with profound working experience as a strategy consultant and advisor to various international organizations. He started his professional career in 2003 at KAS Palestine, spent some time in Afghanistan working for the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and later headed the KAS office in Jordan. Since 2017, he is the Foundation’s Regional Representative to the Gulf States.

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Women Empowerment:
H.H. Princess Haifa
Bint Mohammed Al Saud thanks Dr. Manuel Schubert for supporting the “ASStepAhead” career fair.



building block for better mutual understanding. In the first half of 2018, we are excited to organize with GESALO the visit of two Saudi entrepreneurs to Berlin, where they will attend the MENA Business Forum and explore the local startup scene. Furthermore, we are planning to bring a delegation of female young leaders from the Kingdom to Berlin in summer, connecting them with their peers in Germany. I believe this will be an outstanding opportunity to create awareness about success stories and the important contributions women are making in both countries.

You have been working in the international field since 2003. Whether Palestine, Afghanistan or Jordan – what is your view of the fascination of working in the intercultural area?

To me, the fascination is that, whether in Europe, Central Asia or the Middle East, people are fundamentally the same in many ways. For instance, we all care about our families and beloved ones. And surely we all want to make a contribution to our societies that gives us self-worth. Here in the Middle East and the Gulf specifically, I am particularly fascinated by the social fabrics and the warm-hearted hospitality people have shown me. I think this is definitely something we, in Europe, have partly lost and we could learn again from Middle Eastern societies.

Finally, which first experiences and impressions did you gain in Saudi Arabia during your visits and what is still on your to-do list?

My visits as the designated new KAS Representative to the Gulf States were also my first ones ever to the Kingdom and I was immediately taken away by the vitality and energy surrounding me here. To me, it was very palpable how Saudi Arabia is undergoing a positive change. I have met many Saudis and very quickly was infected by the enthusiasm with which they approach the future of their country.

I have only been here for a short time, so naturally, my bucket list is still long. It definitely includes traveling to other parts of Saudi Arabia – so far I have visited only Riyadh and Jeddah – to see more of the country’s diversity.

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