

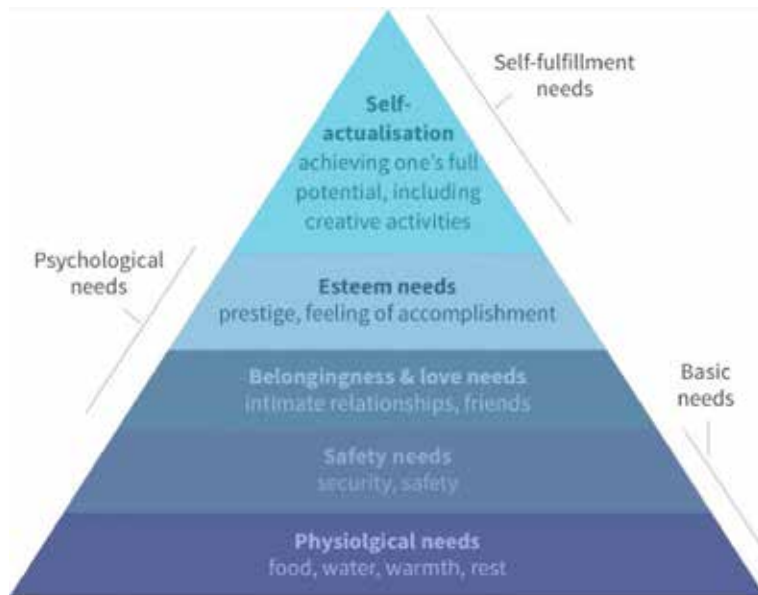


By Sari
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Entrepreneurship The Bittersweet New Norm

My colleagues and close friends accuse me of always managing to adapt my thinking and envision a positive outcome or a new status quo. Seldom is my ambitious thinking considered practical or expected to deliver the desired output. But I am sure that life is about doing the right thing while submitting to a journey that evolves naturally – not always leading straight to the imagined final destination.

Palestinian society is made up of individuals who are categorized by their gender, age group, economic status, level of education, location, and numerous other categories and subcategories. These individuals have human



Maslow's hierarchy of needs, represented as a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom.

rights that need to be ensured, respected, and protected. They have common basic human needs, as outlined brilliantly by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation."

On an individual level, we have a duty to demand and fight for our rights and complete freedom. In addition, we have a responsibility to work towards fulfilling our needs. Strong individuals make a strong society that then selects, informs, and guides a strong administration and governance body. Collectively, the individuals, society, and public governance establishment create a strong nation and state. This is a bottom-up development, and individuals carry responsibility, especially when a government has been weakened.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken our world. It has proven that countries and governments are incapable of sustaining economic cycles and worse, it has pinpointed the limitations of what could be done to upgrade and administer a crucial healthcare system. In the context of Palestine, the mission to minimize the repercussions is even more complex, given the abnormal starting point of the geo-socio-economic-political status of our occupied reality prior to the megashock.

Palestinian society was already suffering from a very high unemployment rate before the crisis. Our economy is small, consuming more than it produces and lacking self-sufficiency and independence across the spectrum of economic sectors. Nevertheless, our people have shown great resilience in the face of adversity. But perhaps we needed the pandemic nudge in order to take another in-depth look

inward and adjust our planning to practically execute our agenda of putting our citizens first. I would like to argue that the facilitation of entrepreneurship awareness, education, and practice conjoined with the utilization of innovation and technology will play a significant role in the post-pandemic future of an even more resilient Palestinian society and nation.

Progress is inevitable and it is driven by scientific research and advancement in technological innovation. In the past decades, long-established industries and traditional business models have been disrupted and remodeled. Artificial intelligence, automation, and digital transformation, whilst creating new specialized opportunities for income generation, are eliminating jobs for millions of others. When deliberating the ongoing trends and the future of job markets, we discuss the future freelance or gig economy. Millions of people are generating disposable income by selling products and services online. Indeed, e-commerce technology has reduced significantly the investment capital required to start a business, allowing entrepreneurs to create virtual rather than physical stores, and enabling them to market their services and products through various social media platforms while utilizing efficient, targeted sales and marketing tools. The market size is no longer limited by geographical borders, and the delivery of products is powered by a global logistics chain that is continuously upgrading to fulfill anyone's needs – as long as he or she can afford it.

In sum, our world is connected, and this presents an opportunity that requires realization. The population

of planet Earth will soon be nearing 8 billion, with immense and growing demands for products and services. At the same time, this population is also responsible for producing the supply necessary to respond to the growing demand and may not remain idle on the receiving end of the transaction.

We are all fortunate to have been born and to be alive today. Life is neither smooth nor easy, but it is the small moments of love and achievements that are worth the fight. We didn't have the luxury of choosing the circumstances in which we arrived, but we are responsible for knowing and understanding ourselves in order to steer our lives with the best of our knowledge and capabilities on a continuous basis. Next comes the examination of our surroundings, the consideration of our families, communities, and the people we interact with on a daily basis. We need to think about

how we could contribute to the well-being and needs of others while also satisfying our individual needs. This simple exercise is the basis that could translate into an entrepreneurial project of any size or level of complexity.

The role of the government is crucial in laying the foundation for a thriving entrepreneurship ecosystem. The focus of the Palestinian government – after taking into consideration the particularity of Palestine and the harsh reality of the Israeli occupation – lies in devising policies and introducing regulations and pioneering initiatives that will ensure the effectiveness of the six entrepreneurship core domains that were theorized by the Babson Global Entrepreneurship project, namely culture, markets, human capital, finance, supports, and policy.

In my opinion, there is nothing much that a government can

do to change cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship. This task relies precisely on us who must individually support our peers when they are starting their own projects. We do so by buying food and products produced locally and responding to an individual's trials and failures with encouragement and support. If entrepreneurs don't fail, they don't learn, and we need to allow more space for this in our culture.

Education is another very important cornerstone. Last year at a TEDx event, I had the opportunity to present a talk titled "Entrepreneurship for the Underdeveloped." I concluded that our best bet for planning for a more equitable future with improved social, economic, and also political conditions requires focusing on entrepreneurial education in the upbringing of a resilient Palestinian future generation that considers itself to be citizens of the world.

I proposed that the required entrepreneurship education framework should be designed to cover the following pillars: First, it should be characterized by comprehensiveness, which means that it should be at once multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary. Second, it must promote critical thinking and problem solving. Third, it has to provide a high level of exposure in terms of skills, technologies, and cultures. Fourth, it must promote a growth mindset and unlock an individual's potential. And finally, it must inspire to be and do good.

The above is not all platonic idealism and abstract theoretical thinking. Taking into account the reality of our lives in Palestine, it is clear and

obvious that neither the public sector nor the private sector will be able to provide the required number of jobs, and the growth projection of our economy is extremely humble and contained; add to this the projected sudden and rapid influx into the market of a young and educated Palestinian workforce that seeks employment. Individuals pursuing disposable-income-generating activities or the initiation of local entrepreneurship activities will eventually become the new norm, yet not necessarily less challenging.

Even though it is a lonely and difficult pursuit, entrepreneurship provides room for innovation and self-expression. It offers a path to financial independence or additional income once an entrepreneur has identified the goods and services that are of clear value and that respond to a certain demand, preferably focusing on our community and homeland. All this is a genuine attempt to keep Palestine alive and on its feet.

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Domains of the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem model by Daniel Isenberg, Babson Global.