IFAD
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Fostering employment through business support to young entrepreneurs in Lebanon

Berytech

Berytech is a Lebanese-based organization that provides incubator services for start-up businesses and a business support centre for prospective entrepreneurs and young high-tech firms. By creating an ecosystem and network that foster innovation, Berytech contributes to employment creation and economic development in the Middle East and North Africa region. This brief showcases how a new web-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system substantially improved Berytech's ability to track results. It also helped to assess the performance of the services Berytech provides to entrepreneurs whose business ideas are still in an early phase. Throughout the M&E system, an important focus was put on identifying and addressing the specific needs of female business owners.

KEY MESSAGES

■ **Buy-in of stakeholders:** Organizations that develop a new M&E system should make sure that they involve all staff in consultation and implementation, while not increasing the employees' workloads.

■ **Digital data management:** Cloud-based databases enable efficient data collection and make data easily accessible throughout the organization.

■ **Real-time feedback:** The feedback received from online forms enables Berytech to better customize its ongoing programmes and services to the needs of the targeted population.

■ **Gender-sensitive M&E systems:** Disaggregating survey data by gender and choosing indicators relevant for both female and male target groups allows organizations to obtain insights into the gender-specific needs of women and men and can be used for the design of new programmes.

the **LAB**
MARKET SYSTEMS
DEVELOPMENT FOR
DECENT WORK

Berytech
The Ecosystem
for Entrepreneurs

WHAT WORKS
In Youth Employment

Background

Berytech

Created in 2001 by Beirut's Saint-Joseph University, Berytech fosters an entrepreneurial community in Lebanon and supports the economy through job creation and retaining talent in the country. It achieves this by providing a dynamic ecosystem for the creation and development of start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through the promotion of innovation, technology and entrepreneurship. Berytech has established three business development centres across Lebanon, where project holders and young start-ups benefit from various support programmes, events and the help of a qualified team of professional business counsellors and mentors who accompany them throughout their incubation period. Since its inception, Berytech has housed more than 300 businesses, assisted more than 3,000 entrepreneurs, created more than 1,600 job opportunities, granted more than US$600,000 to start-ups and invested more than US$ 70 million in Lebanese technology companies.

Source: Berytech

Berytech offers support to entrepreneurs at different developmental stages of growing their businesses. In order to raise entrepreneurial awareness and to select potential entrepreneurs, Berytech organizes business plan competitions. Early stage incubation provides entrepreneurs with skills and helps them to pitch for seed funding. Subsequently, the young people can start and grow their firms and access larger funding opportunities. In later stages, Berytech supports more mature businesses to expand into international markets. The platforms and activities offered by Berytech include research, incubation, business support, networking, mentoring, financing, access to markets, accommodation and acceleration.

During the past few years, Berytech has put an increasing emphasis on gender equality as a main objective throughout all its activities. As such, it underwent an assessment on gender mainstreaming and released its gender equality policy, which reflects its commitment to support gender equality and female empowerment not only in Lebanese society, but also within the organization itself. Berytech particularly promotes women's entrepreneurship and empowerment by collaborating with the Lebanese League for Women in Business on several interventions. As an example, it organizes the annual Female Francophone Entrepreneur (FFE) competition, and takes part in regular focus groups and work committees looking at the experiences of women in SMEs or in the workplace. Berytech also provides services and networks that are specially designed to meet women's needs, considering for example that women entrepreneurs tend to spend more time than men validating their business ideas and getting product validation before they launch.

The rural economy and access to value chains for innovative SMEs in agriculture are another important aspect of Berytech's activities, and resulted in the Agrytech programme. This programme addresses the need to create jobs and opportunities for young people and women in the agri-food sector. The

objective of this project is to support innovation, improve competitiveness and expand employment opportunities through supporting innovative start-ups. The project accelerates about 30 start-ups per year, which go through a bootcamp, an accelerator and an incubator.

Taqeem support

Over the years, Berytech has established a structured support system for the incubated companies, but has struggled to quantify the outcomes of its activities. In order to raise its profile and showcase its impact, Berytech aims to publish an annual report with factual and graphical descriptions of its achievements, but lacks reliable data. With no consistent M&E system in place, Berytech had a strong interest in developing the required tools and processes for data collection, progress analysis, performance measurement and results monitoring.

Through the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Taqeem Initiative, Berytech received support to lay the foundations for an efficient results measurement system that covers the "start-up" or ideas phase of business support – the stage that the vast majority of entrepreneurs at Berytech are being assisted with. In particular, Taqeem provided group learning sessions and dedicated expert support to help Berytech develop a results chain and logic to collect appropriate data and ensure they will contribute to the desired outcomes. Additionally, the lab, an ILO research and knowledge generation project on how to measure and maximize jobs while working in value chains and sectors, provided support to develop the M&E framework in compliance with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) Standard.

Berytech's business support team was trained to use the new M&E system and implemented the process in the context of the Agrytech project to measure its impact and performance. This included the preparation of essential planning documents with regular evaluations of the progress of the activities of the project, the use of resources, the achievement of results and the management of risks. The collection of information and data followed the new process, as did the elaboration of monthly and quarterly analytical reports.

Monitoring and results measurement

Setting out the logic

The results chain of the "start-up" phase describes a pathway to Berytech's theory of change for creating employment and economic growth and retaining young people in Lebanon. Through the support provided to entrepreneurs to incubate their ideas and secure funding for their product launches, Berytech envisions the creation of sustainable and innovative new businesses, economic growth and the reduction of gender gaps in the labour force as ultimate impacts.

Source: Berytech

As described in the stylized results chain shown in figure 1, entrepreneurs in the early stages obtain structured business support for a period of six months, renewable depending on the outcomes of the

first period. Business training workshops and practical working sessions enable the participants not only to test their business ideas, but also to develop knowledge and strengthen their soft and business skills. During one-to-one mentoring and coaching sessions, participants develop a roadmap and receive general guidance. Monthly or bi-monthly team sessions serve to review the roadmap of activities and to ensure the progress of the start-up incubation. Networking events are organized that foster collaboration and exchange of ideas among both new entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs with established businesses. Finally, Berytech offers grants to the winners of business idea competitions among the programme's participants, as well as grants based on progress achieved with roadmaps. As a consequence, businesses can be started and scaled up, and innovation is fostered in the Lebanese start-up scene.

FIGURE 1. **Results chain for Berytech's "start-up" phase support programme**

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
■ Business skills training workshops	■ Workshops and work sessions attended	■ Increased business skills of entrepreneurs	■ Sustainable new businesses
■ One-to-one mentoring and coaching	■ Coaching sessions conducted	■ Improved business propositions	■ An innovative start-up scene in Lebanon
■ Business plan and pitch deck reviews	■ Review sessions completed	■ Partnerships and collaborations in the start-up scene strengthened	■ Improved labour market prospects for young people
■ Networking events	■ Network events attended	■ Start-up funding secured	■ Reduction of gender gaps in the labour force
■ Financial support through grants	■ Grants received by entrepreneurs	■ Businesses started	

Data collection instruments

Table 1 describes the main data collection tools of the results measurement system for Berytech's structured business support during the start-up phase. The business proposition assessment acts as a record of the starting point of the business as it begins the developmental journey with Berytech. It also plays a role in the competition selection process. The business status survey, which is conducted at various intervals in time, is designed to take a snapshot of the development and performance of the start-up business as it is nurtured by Berytech. The skills test and event attendance register evaluation forms capture information about single Berytech activities that the start-ups participate in.

TABLE 1. **Short description of the new data collection instruments and selected indicators**

Instrument	Description	Main indicators
Business Proposition Assessment	Qualitative and quantitative assessment of the quality and completeness of the business plans submitted by the entrepreneurs. The assessment is completed by Berytech staff.	■ % increase in perception of the maturity of the business proposition ■ Increased number of suppliers, partners and channels included in the business proposition ■ % increase in scores from business evaluation

| Instrument	Description	Main indicators
Business Status Survey	Practical quantitative data that measure the growth of the entrepreneurial business. Data are collected and recorded by the M&E team.	■ # grants offered ■ Amount of grant received/spent ■ % split of equipment (hardware) and services ■ % of businesses securing next stage funding ■ % of target funding secured ■ % of businesses launched ■ % increase in profit within first year ■ % increase in staff in first year ■ Number of new businesses still profitable one year after launch
Skills test	Quantitative data capture the improvements in participants' skills during training sessions. Data are collected by the M&E team.	■ % test score before the skills training ■ % test score after the skills training
Event attendance register	Practical quantitative data that measure the uptake of the support offered to the entrepreneurs. Data are collected and recorded by the M&E team.	■ # training hours attended per business ■ # work session hours per business ■ # coaching hours per business ■ # review sessions attended per business ■ # networking events attended per business
Event evaluation form	Completed by the entrepreneur immediately after each support session attended. A subjective record of the value received and the quality of the information, trainer and facilities.	Quality of event delivery

Data management

Berytech's new measurement system is implemented using an online database application. This allows, for example, one M&E officer to distribute, receive and collate the skills tests and feedback surveys completed by beneficiaries. It considerably reduces the administrative burden on staff. Without the digital system, this survey data could not be collected and analysed in a meaningful way.

The chosen platform, goProve (www.goprove.org), provides online data collection for all instruments, management of the data and analysis of results. Each instrument (skills test, feedback survey) is sent to the beneficiary by email with a unique link for them to access the form. Taqeem provided expert support for the configuration of the goProve platform to make sure that beneficiary and event records can be fully disaggregated and cross-compiled by gender, age, educational attainment, region, trainer and subject. goProve also allows the data collection instruments to be used offline and the M&E officer to attend events to collect data via a tablet.

Although data collection is immediate and has been greatly facilitated by goProve, some staff members initially lacked trust and were reluctant to use the new system. However, once it was bedded in, the staff time saved was considerable and meant more focus could be given to further implementation of the system.

FIGURE 2. **Overview of the data collection workflow of the M&E system**
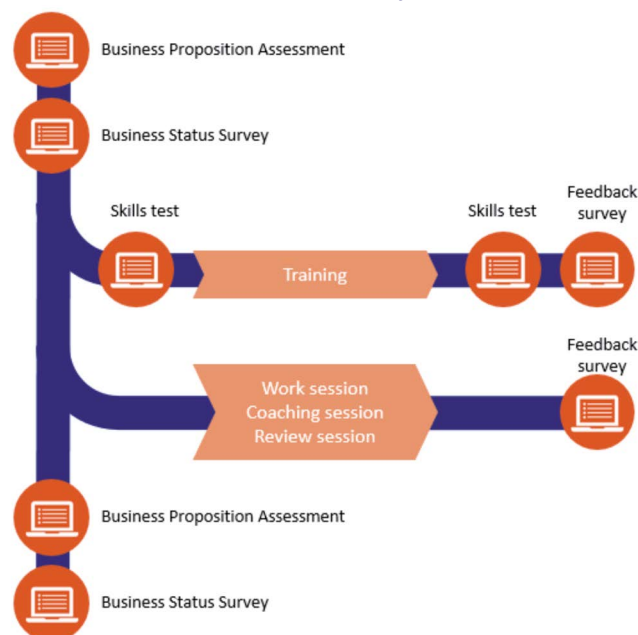
Achieving results

Since piloting the M&E system in the Agrytech programme, Berytech has used the new data collection and results measurement system to gather information on a broad range of indicators. The digital system is not only time-efficient, but also helps to build a comprehensive database. While the M&E systems has so far provided rich data on the activity and output level, follow-up surveys with beneficiaries on the level of outcomes are yet to be carried out. Because the results from the training evaluation forms can be disaggregated by many variables, the new M&E system has helped to identify the challenges facing specific beneficiary subgroups and how Berytech can improve its programming to meet these needs.

For instance, in regard to the strongly fluctuating attendance numbers for the training sessions, the results from the online evaluations suggest that the training did not correspond well with the needs of the businesses, which are all at different developmental stages. Whereas owners of relatively mature businesses have little time and attach little value to classroom-based training, entrepreneurs who are in the early stages of development, or who do not have any business acumen, feel lost and do not benefit from the training either. As a consequence, Berytech adapted the training sessions according to these findings. Businesses in the "start-up" phase are now offered customized support programmes with more masterclasses, follow-on sessions and some work sessions, while more advanced start-ups receive more one-on-one coaching sessions from technical experts.

Substantially fewer women than men participate in many of Berytech's programmes, including the Agrytech programme used to pilot the new M&E system (figure 3). However, Berytech also offers programmes that are targeted solely at women, such as the annual FFE competition. From surveys conducted in the context of the FFE, a couple of gender-related recommendations have emerged: compared with men, more women entrepreneurs are willing to improve their soft skills and to attend training workshops. Therefore, Berytech decided to include more structured training and support for women at the ideas stage in its programmes.

Another area where women are found to request particular support is access to capital. IM Capital (a Berytech subsidiary), in partnership with the Lebanese League for Women in Business, has recently introduced the Lebanese Women Angel Fund, an impact programme redefining the role of women in

business beyond social and economic boundaries and empowering women to become seed investors. It is an angel mechanism, with funding passing from women to women, and seeks to address women's integration in business by engaging them in the funding space on one hand and encouraging female entrepreneurs on the other, creating opportunities for women both to give and receive funds.

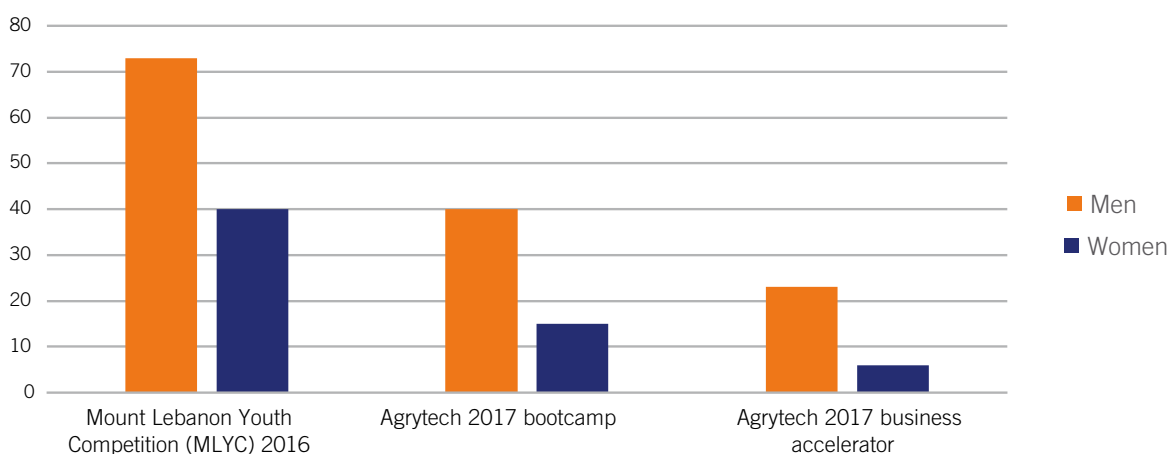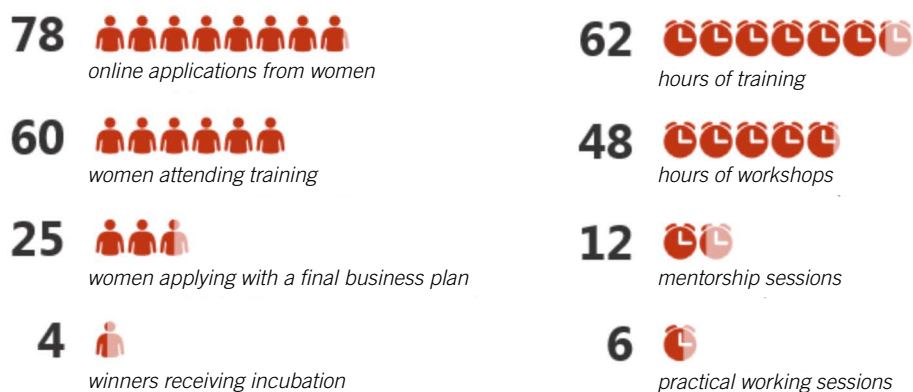**FIGURE 3. Number of participants in selected Berytech programmes**

FIGURE 4. Participants in and outputs of the FFE competition 2017

78 online applications from women

60 women attending training

25 women applying with a final business plan

4 winners receiving incubation

62 hours of training

48 hours of workshops

12 mentorship sessions

6 practical working sessions

Lessons learned

■ **Team alignment and buy-in of stakeholders:** Developing a strong culture of M&E within an organization may require the M&E officer and the sponsoring manager to promote the use of a new results measurement system to all staff. Convincing employees of the importance of data collection, encouraging them to adopt new working practices and building trust requires time and effort. Interim results and findings that are disseminated to all staff can showcase how their work produces tangible results and evidence. This in turn builds confidence in the system and encourages better and more efficient data collection.

■ **Digital data management:** Digitizing and automating data collection tools using a single cloud-based platform enables efficient data collection in real time. This not only saves working time, but also improves data quality and the size of databases. Information is easily available throughout the organization and results can be used to showcase achievements to clients and donors.

■ **Data disaggregation for monitoring purposes:** Disaggregation of survey and test data by numerous characteristics such as gender, age or business characteristics enables important insights into the different needs of specific beneficiary subgroups. If this feedback is used at the programming level, services can be tailored to the very specific needs of the targeted audience, promising higher satisfaction and better results. Disaggregation is also important to identify target groups and customize the communication and outreach plans accordingly.

Next steps

Having implemented the new M&E and data collection system in the Agrytech and Projects Lab programmes, Berytech envisions expanding its use further. Berytech is currently reviewing a methodology to put in place an innovative M&E system for all departments – not just for business support services – with the long-term objective to implement the new system at the organizational level. In a relatively new entrepreneurial tech ecosystem, this overarching M&E system would help to showcase the role Berytech plays in the adoption of new regulations. This would be a major milestone towards estimating the impact of Berytech as a whole in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the Lebanese economy.

Source: Berytech

Berytech will use its M&E results to further improve the quality and content of its services. In particular, it plans to develop further progress assessments for entrepreneurs after they graduate from its programmes, tracking their progress and business growth and identifying their needs. These data will not only allow insights into the long-term success of Berytech's beneficiaries and work, but will also provide valuable feedback for the design of future programmes that prepare young women and men to be successful entrepreneurs.