



Press Release

MAS Workshop on Socially Responsible Investment



Ramallah, Wednesday, 23 October 2019: The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) organised a two-hour workshop on socially responsible (impact) investment. The aim of the workshop was to introduce participants to the array of tools and terminologies used in socially responsible investment, as a better understanding of them will enhance partnerships between the corporate sector, non-profit sector, and the government for sustainable development. Another aim was to also show practices that can increase funds available for social good and bettering life for marginalized communities in a way that moves away from charity approaches and looks at more sustainable solutions with multi-sectoral cooperation.

The workshop was presented and moderated by Dr. Atallah Kuttab, Chairman and Founder of SAANED for Philanthropy Advisory in the Arab Region, and former Director General of Welfare Association – Taawon, and it was attended by a number experts from the private sector, government, and civil and academic society. Dr. Kuttab presented the idea of impactful socially

responsible investment as the provision and use of finances to generate social, as well as economic, returns. It is the evolution from what is commonly known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), an add-on to traditional business practice of carrying out charity works using profits made from running a business. However, consumers are demanding that companies give special attention to more parameters (such as environmental protection and social justice), over and above profits. Consumers, while understanding that profits are businesses' prime motivation, expect them to also focus on creating opportunities for women and youth, ensuring environmental sustainability, fair pricing policies, safe and ethical production etc.

Participants of the workshop reviewed an Indian case study where light and energy were provided to a poor community without access to these provisions, through a partnership of the private sector, philanthropy sector, and government. Electricity generation and distribution were undertaken by private and philanthropic investors capitalizing on local solutions that were environmentally friendly, affordable, and reliable.

Many of the participants posed inquiries about matters relating to the difference between non-profits and for-profit private companies, and whether the priorities of socially responsible investments will be determined by the private sector or by government bodies that identify societal needs, such as decreasing poverty and unemployment. A number of attendees affirmed that the model of socially responsible investment is still not sufficiently widespread, and it needs to become a core corporate value, as well as a tool for communities to pressure companies to adopt policies on environmental protection and community support, along with their primary aim of profit.

Various participants also affirmed that one of the main points of socially responsible investment should be the focus on developing projects that use local resources and expertise in order for these projects to have a sustainable development impact. Additionally, work in this field should aim to find methods to reduce household expenses and provide them with tools to protect them from poverty, such as investing in renewable energy projects, the likes of which have previously found success in Palestine.