



**AMERICAN
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUB's School of Business Hosts Regional Workshop to Support Startups and Sustainable Innovation in the Natural Products Industry

The Suliman S. Olayan School of Business (OSB) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), through its Business Practice and Policy Initiative, hosted a two-day regional workshop titled "Supporting Innovative and Regenerative Startups: Entrepreneurship and Innovation in the Natural Products Industry." Held in collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut; the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO); and the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, the workshop brought together youth-led startups, entrepreneurs, and experts from across the Arab region to exchange knowledge, promote sustainable business models, and advance innovation in the natural products sector.

The workshop focused on showcasing innovative ideas within the regional startup ecosystem, encouraging sustainability practices in business, and aligning projects with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly "Quality Education" and "Responsible Consumption and Production." It also aimed to strengthen participants' ability to scale their ventures while promoting green education, and fostering meaningful connections between entrepreneurs, industry, funding bodies, and policymakers. The workshop further examined potential policy reforms to enhance the productivity and growth of small enterprises in Lebanon and the region.

The opening session featured remarks by Raghda Kawass, knowledge and public policy specialist at the Business Practice and Policy Initiative at OSB, who stressed the importance of youth investment and evidence-based policymaking. Professor Yusuf Sidani, OSB dean, highlighted the school's role in developing entrepreneurs who value long-term purpose over short-term profit. Ramza Jaber Saad, director general of the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO, called for urgent support for youth entrepreneurship, emphasizing the value of partnerships and inclusive growth. Dr. Mohamed Sanad Abu Darwish, director of science and scientific research at ALECSO, addressed the role of startups in balancing economic and environmental goals, while Dr. Maysoun Chehab, senior education program specialist at UNESCO, and Assem Abi Ali, national education programme coordinator at UNESCO emphasized the power of education and innovation in shaping future green entrepreneurs.

Participants included regional experts from Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, and Tunisia, as well as twelve Lebanese entrepreneurs in the natural products sector. They engaged in interactive

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sessions led by faculty members from across the university as well as the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business. Dr. Bijan Azad, director of the Darwazah Center for Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at AUB, shared insights on startup growth, while Dr. Nada Khaddaj-Sobh, director of the Center for Women in Business at AUB, provided training on pitching and public communication. Dr. Marwan Wahbi, senior lecturer at AUB, addressed digital marketing strategies, and AUB's Environment and Sustainability Unit led sessions on clean production and green marketing.

The workshop also featured contributions from key regional stakeholders and incubators. The Talal and Madiha Zein AUB-Innovation Park (AUB iPark) discussed startup financing tools. Guest speakers—including entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders such as Tunisia's Zubair Yahya, Jordan's Nidal Bitar, Lebanon's Suleiman Barda, and Kuwait's Dr. Ihab Khalid Maqableh—explored funding models, market access, and innovation empowerment.

This two-day event marked a significant step toward building a more resilient and innovative entrepreneurship ecosystem in Lebanon and the Arab region. By uniting academia, startups, and policy actors, the workshop helped lay the foundation for sustained collaboration and youth-led solutions to regional development challenges.

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Note to Editors

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Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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