

# Empowering Entrepreneurs and SME Development through Mentorship

*Kathleen Bury, Business Manager, GCC & North Africa at the Mowgli Foundation, discusses the role of mentorship in promoting entrepreneurship and leadership development.*



The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has the highest youth unemployment rate globally; 27% of the youth (18-35 year olds) is unemployed. Just to maintain these current levels, the region requires 50-80 million jobs, or a 40% expansion in available jobs, in the next ten years (Arabia Monitor, World Bank 2012). The challenge is seriously daunting.

A key way to address this challenge is the incubation, development and support of sustainable entrepreneurship and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A number of factors are required to successfully foster an environment that is conducive to private enterprise development: the strengthening of regulatory frameworks as well as access to capital, business skills, training and mentoring. It was with the latter in mind that the Mowgli Foundation was founded in 2008.

The Mowgli Foundation is an award-winning, UK headquartered mentorship organisation. With primary operational focus on the MENA region, Mowgli provides trained mentors to inspire, support and empower entrepreneurs in achieving their business and personal potential. This is achieved through the recruitment, training and matching of mentors with entrepreneurs in relational and

business mentoring relationships through their unique year long Mowgli Mentoring Experience (MME) programs, through which Mowgli aims to encourage sustainable business growth as well as social and economic development. Mowgli believes that there are three critical phases in an entrepreneur's journey when a mentor is invaluable; start up, growth and success.

Since its launch, Mowgli has conducted 33 mentoring programs for SME sized entrepreneurs and micro-entrepreneurs in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Algeria, Qatar, Egypt and the UK. Through these programs, Mowgli has trained and matched over 250 mentors with entrepreneurs, doubling the size of the Mowgli Alumni to 540 in 2012. It was for this network and the program's impact that Mowgli won the Mohammed bin Rashid Award for Young Business Leaders for the Best Mentor Network in the Arab World, in December 2012. Some key highlights from Mowgli's impact data:

- Each Mowgli Entrepreneur, on average, creates 2-3 jobs in the first year and the trend seems to continue;
- c.90% would recommend the MME to other entrepreneurs, c.70% say that they would like to mentor others and c.80% say that they would like to continue with the mentoring

relationship after the Mowgli facilitated relationship ends;

- A high proportion of Mowgli Entrepreneurs report benefits in terms of developing confidence in their business decision-making and understanding how to move their business onto the next growth stage, while around 50% say that they have expanded their businesses and predict higher profits.

However, it is evident that the mentors also benefit from the relationship, through their own personal and leadership development, with around 90% saying that they will seek new opportunities to mentor in the future.

From Mowgli's experience, providing entrepreneurs with a solid mentoring relationship significantly increases the chances of sustainable growth and success, on both a personal and business level. However, the benefits go far beyond supporting entrepreneurship, as mentoring also enables and facilitates the development of different leadership models.

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Website - [www.mowgli.org.uk](http://www.mowgli.org.uk);

Facebook - [www.facebook.com/mowglifoundation](http://www.facebook.com/mowglifoundation);

Twitter - @mowglitweets; Youtube - [www.youtube.com/mowglifoundation](http://www.youtube.com/mowglifoundation)

- Initiatives to support entrepreneurs in the region have doubled in the past decade, with over 65% of these coming from the private sector
- But only 17% of MENA entrepreneurs have received any kind of business training, compared with 33% in emerging markets (Source: Arabia Monitor)