

## CREACT4MED Mapping: Best Practices

Application Number: BP\_104

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Email Address	adel@afkar.tn
Title of the Best Practice	Afkar
Name of the Applicant	Adel Benzine
Is the BP a registered legal entity?	Yes
Website	<a href="https://afkar.co/">https://afkar.co/</a>
Country	Tunisia
Subsector	Arts and culture (cultural heritage, visual arts, performing arts, leisure and recreation, crafts); Media (publishing, digital media, film and video, music); Design (software, advertising, architecture, interior design, graphic design, industrial design, fashion);
Category	a) Cultural and creative entrepreneurship
Year of establishment and duration	2019 (ongoing)
Target group of the BP	The beneficiaries can be divided in three main groups: 1) Social innovators: projects in the ideation phase that creatively address a problem, not exclusive to the use of new technology. 2) Content creators: support to actors in the creative industries 3) Civil society: support to innovators in civil society to enhance their sustainability, including assistance in the development of income-generating activities and sustainable fundraising strategies.  Afkar operates regional innovation hubs in seven regions across Tunisia.
1. Best Practice Characteristics	
Problem Statement	We started Afkar in 2019 with the aim to help the ecosystem thrive and to flood the startup support organisations with a qualified deal flow.
Mission Statement & Value proposition	At Afkar we believe that incubation is a privilege, a dedicated period to methodically refine and propel your project forward with the right resources at your disposal. Our incubation program serves as a robust support system, offering diverse avenues for testing hypotheses and translating action plans into tangible outcomes. Our main goal is to empower entrepreneurs to launch their projects confidently on solid ground. Throughout the program, participants undergo a transformative journey, developing their proof of concept, prototypes, and securing initial customers. By the program's end, entrepreneurs emerge with projects ready for the next stage, prepared to join a customized acceleration program tailored to their needs.

	<p>Over six months, participants immerse themselves in a collaborative environment, supported by a friendly community and diverse learning experiences. They mainly focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Crafting their unique value proposition</li> <li>– Experimenting, testing, and validating their hypotheses</li> <li>– Building a robust Business Plan</li> <li>– Developing a solid Proof of Concept and Minimum Viable Product (MVP)</li> <li>– Enhancing your brand identity and visibility</li> </ul>
<p>Results and growth</p>	<p>Afkar was born as an initiative from Wasabi, a company dedicated to production, events, and entrepreneurship support, with a mission to empower communities through open discourse. Since its inception, Afkar has undergone a transformative journey, embracing various formats to cater to the diverse needs of change-makers across society. Among these formats are Talks, which serve as platforms for inspiring discussions and high-level debates aimed at driving social transformation. The Fellows program is designed to nurture creativity and freedom of expression among pioneering individuals from North Africa. Also, Afkar's Videos feature uplifting content from individuals who contribute to positive change in their communities.</p> <p>Through these initiatives, Afkar has demonstrated its commitment to fostering dialogue, amplifying voices, and catalyzing meaningful change. Each format reflects Afkar's dedication to supporting change agents at all levels of society, reinforcing its role as a catalyst for social progress and innovation.</p> <p>Afkar Incubator is the last of this family of initiatives, which has the goal of supporting the new social change leaders. Since its inception it has achieved significant milestones, completing 13 cohorts and supporting over 509 entrepreneurs across 323 projects. Additionally, the program has connected 176 experts with incubees, offering valuable guidance and advice. As a result, Afkar's efforts have led to the establishment of 139 new entities, contributing to the growth and dynamism of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.</p>
<p>Strategy to be financially sustainable</p>	<p>Afkar has a grant-based business model, relying on donations from third parties to operate. This model was a conscious choice from the inception of the incubator, to prevent taking any fees from the entrepreneurs.</p> <p>In Tunisia in particular, two alternative funding mechanisms are state incubators or the corporate sector. However, these are often unstable and unreliable long term.</p>

**2. Impact (please complete at least 3 of the 6 sub-sections)**

Economic significance	Provide details on the economic significance of the BP, including, if applicable: - Annual turnover of the BP's operations/selling - Number of exports - Economic impact of the activity - Spillover effects on the economy
Replicability and upscaling	<p>During the completion of three cohorts, external programs from various regions joined Afkar for six months to replicate their program, using it as a model. This initiative aided in enhancing the accessibility of their program.</p> <p>One of our core missions is to assist the champions within our portfolio in expanding internationally. Given that Tunisia represents a small market with limited opportunities, we guide entrepreneurs in assessing the viability of expansion, including the creation of franchises. We evaluate potential markets of value to them. Additionally, there has been a growing level of support from institutions seeking to aid in the expansion of our incubators.</p>
Employment generation	Provide details on the BP's capacity to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, productive employment and decent work, including: - Number of jobs created - Number of professional opportunities for young people and women generated
Inclusiveness	Contribution to societal inclusiveness, including details on: (The involvement of vulnerable communities: women, migrant workers, young workers, describe efforts to achieve objective such as: gender equality, empower women and girls, and/ or education for all). Specify where the best practice is implemented: rural or urban.
Social impact	<p>Afkar's goal is to be a catalyst for social change. Our incubation approach puts at the center the support of innovators that not only have the potential to promote positive change, but also share the values of our program.</p> <p>By providing aspiring entrepreneurs with the support, resources and mentorship they need to develop their projects, the incubator generates employment opportunities and contributes to the economic development of diverse communities. The reduction of social and economic inequalities that stems from Afkar's impact is further enhanced by our provision to startups of funding, investment opportunities, and other essential resources such as workspace and mentorship. As a result, we help bridge the gap between entrepreneurs and investors, assisting startups in overcoming financial barriers and accelerating their growth.</p>

<p>Innovation</p>	<p>Afkar Incubator nurtures startups at the forefront of technological innovation. We support entrepreneurs working on technologies such as artificial intelligence and information technology, driving technological advancement and enhancing the region's competitiveness in the global economy. Since innovation and economic growth go hand in hand, by fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship Afkar also stimulates economic activity and generates wealth, which is essential to building a vibrant, prosperous economy that can continue to invest on innovative technologies and solutions.</p> <p>Furthermore, we contribute to creating an environment where collaboration and knowledge exchange are encouraged by bringing together entrepreneurs, mentors, investors and industry experts from diverse sectors and backgrounds. The discussions, exchange of ideas and collaboration opportunities that stem from this community enhances and accelerates the pace of innovation.</p>
<p>Environmental sustainability</p>	<p>Describe the BP's contribution to environmental sustainability, including details of any actions taken to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combat climate change and its impacts</li> <li>- Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns</li> <li>- Ensure sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Challenges and lessons learned</b></p>	
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>While Afkar has been instrumental in shaping legislation such as the 2018 Tunisian Startup Act, there are still significant barriers at the national level that impede our ability to extend support to entrepreneurs in all regions. Despite recent approvals of government initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship, the absence of a comprehensive framework in certain areas limits our activities when it comes to assisting our incubees.</p> <p>Another obstacle is funding, as the resources available are often insufficient. This creates an added difficulty to conduct activities such as an alumni program, since cohorts are quite large. At the moment we are following up on our alumni through alternative tools like forms. Added to that, from a monetary and financial perspective the cost of capital in Tunisia is quite high.</p> <p>Added to that, there are some difficulties in trying to adapt our programs to a larger population, avoiding a one-size-fits-all program that is not tailored to the entrepreneurs' unique needs. We have noticed that often women entrepreneurs have a different level of entrepreneurship culture, which could potentially be remedied by including new mentors and experts in our team. Another measure that could help address this gap would be to translate our contents into Arabic and the local language.</p>
<p>Lessons learned</p>	<p>Here are some of the most valuable lessons we have learned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is wise to avoid products or services that rely on user-based business models, especially given the current</li> </ul>

	<p>economic climate in Tunisia. They may not serve the economy effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Given that around 50% of Tunisia’s economy operates informally, it is better not to rush into establishing a legal entity at the outset of your organization, initiative, or company. Instead, it is best to first gauge the market and then make decisions based on the insights gathered.</li><li>– When considering the business model to adopt, it is essential to think deeply. Grant-based models might not offer long-term sustainability. It is worth exploring opportunities within the corporate sector.</li></ul>
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