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Beyond business creation: Evaluating entrepreneurial support through professional networking and entrepreneurial difficulties

Mohamed Amine ZIANE, *(PhD Candidate)*
Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences of Tangier
Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, Morocco

Moustapha HAMZAOUI, *(Full Professor)*
Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences of Tangier
Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, Morocco

Correspondence address:	Mohamed Amine ZIANE, Faculty of legal, economic and social Sciences of Tangier,Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, Tangier, Morocco Email: Phone:+212 772204853
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Beyond Business Creation: Evaluating Entrepreneurial Support Through Professional Networking and Entrepreneurial Difficulties

Abstract:

This empirical study addresses the limited evidence on intermediate relational and practical outcomes of public entrepreneurial support in Morocco. It examines whether participation in structured programmes, mainly FORSA and the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), is associated with professional networking and selected difficulties experienced during and after business creation. The study draws on cross sectional questionnaire data from 108 active entrepreneurs recruited from several Moroccan regions, with a majority located in Casablanca-Settat. The analysis combined exploratory chi square tests with adjusted binary logistic regressions for the three outcomes retained after initial screening. Age, gender and firm size were controlled for in the networking and legal difficulties models, while a parsimonious specification was used for entrepreneurial isolation because only 22 positive cases were observed. Participation in support was positively associated with professional networking (OR = 3.917) and negatively associated with legal difficulties during business creation (OR = .203). A negative association with post creation entrepreneurial isolation was also observed in the parsimonious model (OR = .294), but this estimate was fragile; Firth penalised logistic regression produced a similar result (OR = .324). The findings concern associations rather than causal programme effects. They suggest that public support may perform relational, informational and advisory functions that are not fully captured by conventional indicators of firm survival or growth. By distinguishing networking, creation-stage legal difficulties and post creation isolation, the study provides a more differentiated basis for evaluating entrepreneurial support in Morocco.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial support, Business incubation, Professional networking, Entrepreneurial difficulties, Social Capital Theory
JEL Classification: L26, M13.
Paper type: Empirical research paper; exploratory study.

Résumé : :

Cette étude empirique répond au manque de données sur les résultats intermédiaires, relationnels et pratiques, de l'accompagnement entrepreneurial public au Maroc. Elle examine si la participation à des programmes structurés, principalement FORSA et l'Initiative nationale pour le développement humain (INDH), est associée au réseautage professionnel et à certaines difficultés rencontrées pendant et après la création d'entreprise. L'étude repose sur des données transversales recueillies par questionnaire auprès de 108 entrepreneurs en activité, recrutés dans plusieurs régions marocaines, dont la majorité se situe à Casablanca-Settat. L'analyse combine des tests exploratoires du khi deux et des régressions logistiques binaires ajustées pour les trois variables de résultat retenues après une première sélection. L'âge, le sexe et la taille de l'entreprise sont contrôlés dans les modèles relatifs au réseautage et aux difficultés juridiques, tandis qu'une spécification parcimonieuse est utilisée pour l'isolement entrepreneurial, compte tenu des seuls 22 cas positifs observés. La participation à l'accompagnement est positivement associée au réseautage professionnel (OR = 3,917) et négativement associée aux difficultés juridiques lors de la création d'entreprise (OR = 0,203). Une association négative avec l'isolement entrepreneurial après la création est également observée dans le modèle parcimonieux (OR = 0,294), mais cette estimation demeure fragile ; la régression logistique pénalisée de Firth produit un résultat similaire (OR = 0,324). Ces résultats traduisent des associations et non des effets causaux des programmes. Ils suggèrent que l'accompagnement public peut remplir des fonctions relationnelles, informationnelles et de conseil que les indicateurs conventionnels de survie ou de croissance des entreprises ne saisissent pas pleinement. En distinguant le réseautage, les difficultés juridiques à la création et l'isolement après la création, l'étude fournit une base plus différenciée pour évaluer l'accompagnement entrepreneurial au Maroc.

Mots-clés : Accompagnement entrepreneurial, incubation d'entreprises, réseautage professionnel, difficultés entrepreneuriales, théorie du capital social.
Classification JEL : L26, M13.
Type d'article : Article de recherche empirique ; étude exploratoire.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a driver of economic growth, innovation and job creation and therefore plays an important role in sustainable development (Bosma et al., 2018; van Stel et al., 2005). In uncertain economic environments, entrepreneurship policies are also expected to contribute to employment, innovation and regional resilience (Hoffmann et al., 2024; Bergholz et al., 2024).

Business incubators and other structured support programmes have become widely used mechanisms for assisting the creation and development of new ventures. Their role extends beyond physical workspace to mentoring, coaching, technical assistance, access to resources and opportunities for interaction. The nature of these services has evolved across successive generations of incubation models (Bruneel et al., 2012), while mentoring and structured incubation can support entrepreneurial learning and venture development (Assenova, 2020; Mian et al., 2016). Networking and cooperation are also central features of some incubator environments (Bøllingtoft, 2012).

Research on business incubation has traditionally examined outcomes such as venture survival, growth, learning and post incubation viability (Hackett & Dilts, 2004; Assenova, 2020; Tritoasmoro et al., 2024). Reviews of the field nevertheless show that incubation is heterogeneous and that its effects depend on programme design and context (Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014; Mian et al., 2016). Alongside firm-level performance, intermediate outcomes experienced directly by entrepreneurs may therefore provide a complementary perspective on programme contribution.

This distinction is important because support can be associated with different mechanisms at different stages of venture development. During creation, entrepreneurs must understand legal requirements, interact with public administrations and mobilise specialised knowledge. After creation, the central challenge may shift towards maintaining access to advice, peers and opportunities while assuming increasing managerial responsibility. Professional networking, legal difficulties and entrepreneurial isolation therefore represent analytically distinct outcomes. They should not be combined into a single scale, and an improvement in one outcome does not necessarily imply an improvement in the others.

This issue is relevant in Morocco, where entrepreneurs may face administrative, legal, financial and managerial constraints. Recent Moroccan research also emphasises the importance of access to networks and external resources, while identifying administrative and fiscal constraints in the entrepreneurial environment (Belbouli & Touhami, 2024; Elmaymouni et al., 2024). Structured programmes such as FORSA and the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) are intended to provide forms of support that extend beyond financing. Nevertheless, evidence concerning their association with professional networking and entrepreneurial difficulties, remains limited.

The Moroccan setting also requires caution when transferring conclusions from studies of incubators conducted in other institutional environments. Public programmes differ in their target populations, selection procedures, duration and service content. Moreover, the same label of entrepreneurial support may encompass financial assistance, training, mentoring or referral to external actors. The present study therefore does not assume that all programmes operate identically. Instead, it examines whether reported participation in structured public support is associated with outcomes that correspond to plausible relational and advisory functions.

Accordingly, this study asks: To what extent is participation in structured public entrepreneurial support associated with professional networking, legal difficulties during business creation and entrepreneurial isolation after creation? It uses cross-sectional survey data from a multi-regional sample of Moroccan entrepreneurs, the majority of whom were

located in Casablanca-Settat. The analysis examines associations and does not identify causal programme effects.

The study makes three contributions. First, it considers intermediate outcomes alongside conventional firm level indicators. Second, it distinguishes between difficulties experienced during creation and those reported after creation. Third, it provides exploratory evidence from the Moroccan context. The next section develops the theoretical framework and hypotheses, followed by the methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

2.1. Entrepreneurial support and professional networking

Professional networking refers to relationships that entrepreneurs establish and mobilise to access information, advice and opportunities. In this study, it is measured through reported membership in an entrepreneurial network. This indicator captures relational integration but does not measure network size, structure or quality. Social Capital Theory views entrepreneurial activity as embedded in relationships that provide access to resources (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Entrepreneurs use social and professional ties to obtain information, legitimacy and opportunities (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Anderson & Miller, 2003). By connecting beneficiaries with peers, mentors, advisers and institutional actors, support organisations may facilitate entry into professional networks. Research on incubation similarly identifies networking and cooperation as central support functions (Bøllingtoft, 2012). Therefore:

H1. Participation in structured entrepreneurial support is positively associated with professional networking, measured by reported membership in an entrepreneurial network.

2.2. Entrepreneurial support and legal difficulties

Legal difficulties refer here to problems respondents reported in meeting legal requirements during business creation. Entry procedures can impose costs, require time and demand knowledge of the regulatory environment (Djankov et al., 2002). Moroccan evidence also points to administrative and fiscal constraints surrounding entrepreneurship (Belbouli & Touhami, 2024). Support organisations may reduce informational obstacles by providing orientation, advice or access to specialised expertise. Incubators have progressively complemented physical resources with broader advisory and knowledge based services (Bruneel et al., 2012), while support for entrepreneurs facing difficulties may require differentiated expertise, including legal assistance (Philippart, 2017). The present study does not identify the specific services received by each beneficiary; the expected relationship is therefore formulated cautiously:

H2a. Participation in structured entrepreneurial support is negatively associated with legal difficulties reported during business creation.

2.3. Entrepreneurial support and entrepreneurial isolation

Entrepreneurial isolation refers to a perceived lack of relationships or support with which to share the responsibilities and difficulties of business activity. It should be distinguished from objective physical isolation. Accompaniment may help entrepreneurs move from isolation towards relational and institutional legitimacy by creating opportunities for interaction with peers and advisers; however, this benefit is not automatic and depends on the quality of the relationship and the entrepreneur's engagement (Messeghem & Sammut, 2010). Regular interaction may provide informational and relational support after business creation. Because isolation is measured here with a single binary item, neither its intensity n the source of support can be evaluated. Therefore:

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H2b. Participation in structured entrepreneurial support is negatively associated with entrepreneurial isolation reported during the post-creation phase.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and participants

The study adopted a quantitative, cross sectional and exploratory design. Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered to entrepreneurs operating active businesses. Participants came from several Moroccan regions, with Casablanca-Settat representing the majority of observations. Consequently, the study is not presented as a survey limited to Casablanca or as a nationally representative sample.

A purposive, non-probability recruitment strategy was used. Participants were identified through several WhatsApp groups that included both supported and non-supported entrepreneurs. They were then contacted individually via private WhatsApp messages using their telephone numbers and invited to complete the questionnaire. Eligibility criteria and the questionnaire were the same. The analytical sample included all 108 eligible respondents with complete information for the variables analysed. No a priori statistical power calculation was used to determine this sample size.

Participation was voluntary and the information was collected for academic research. Names, email addresses, telephone numbers and other directly identifying information were excluded from the analytical dataset, and results are reported only in aggregate form.

Observed subgroup comparisons did not indicate statistically significant differences in age ($p = .729$), firm size ($p = .558$), business age ($p = .435$), gender ($p = 1.000$) or sector ($p = .621$).

3.2. Questionnaire and variables

The questionnaire was adapted from Mégret's (2021) doctoral thesis and supplemented by relevant literature to fit the objectives and Moroccan context of the study. Some questions were reformulated; the resulting questionnaire should therefore not be considered as previously validated instrument. No formal pilot test or expert validation was conducted. The retained outcomes are separate binary indicators referring to conceptually distinct experiences rather than items intended to form a single reflective scale. A global Cronbach's alpha would therefore not provide an appropriate assessment of their reliability.

Entrepreneurial support was coded 0 for non-supported entrepreneurs and 1 for entrepreneurs who had participated in a structured public support programme. The measure identifies participation but does not capture programme content, duration, intensity or service use.

Three binary dependent variables were retained. Professional networking indicates reported membership in an entrepreneurial network (0 = no; 1 = yes). Legal difficulties indicate whether the respondent reported legal difficulties during business creation (0 = no; 1 = yes). Entrepreneurial isolation indicates whether isolation was reported after creation (0 = no; 1 = yes). Age, gender and firm size were included as controls in the networking and legal-difficulties models. Because only 22 respondents reported isolation, the primary isolation model included support and age only. A fuller specification including support, age, gender and firm size was estimated as a sensitivity analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive statistics characterised the sample. Second, chi-square tests screened the questionnaire outcomes for bivariate associations with support, with Phi or Cramer's V describing association strength. Professional networking, legal difficulties and entrepreneurial isolation met the nominal $p < .05$ criterion and were

retained for regression. Because screening and estimation used the same data and no familywise adjustment was applied, all inferential results are treated as exploratory.

Third, binary logistic regression estimated adjusted associations. Results are reported as coefficients, standard errors, odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals. Model fit was examined using the omnibus test, Hosmer-Lemeshow test, Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 and area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC). Variance inflation factors (VIFs) were examined for multicollinearity. Standardised residuals, leverage and Cook's distance were inspected, and leave-one-out analyses assessed whether individual observations changed the direction of the support coefficient. For the isolation outcome, Firth penalised logistic regression was used as a sensitivity analysis because the number of events was limited (Firth, 1993; Heinze & Schemper, 2002). Descriptive analyses, chi-square tests and conventional binary logistic regressions were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics. Supplementary diagnostic analyses and Firth penalised logistic regressions were implemented in Python using NumPy and SciPy.

The event per variable ratios were 12.0 for networking (48 events/four predictors), 8.25 for legal difficulties (33/four) and 11.0 for the primary isolation model (22/two). The fuller isolation sensitivity model had 5.5 events per predictor. These values support a parsimonious primary specification but do not establish that every model is adequately powered. The analyses are explanatory rather than predictive and cannot remove selection bias or establish causality (Cohen, 1988; Hosmer et al., 2013).

4. Results

4.1. Sample characteristics

Table 1. Sample characteristics (N = 108)

Characteristic	Category/statistic	N	%
Entrepreneurial support	Supported	40	37.0
	Non-supported	68	63.0
Gender	Male	69	63.9
	Female	39	36.1
Business sector	Commerce	36	33.3
	Industry	27	25.0
	Services	32	29.6
	Other	13	12.0
Age (years)	Mean ± SD	32.37 ± 7.78	
Firm size	Mean ± SD	2.17 ± 2.51	
Business age (years)	Mean ± SD	3.72 ± 3.08	

Source. Authors' calculations based on survey data.

The sample comprised 108 Moroccan entrepreneurs, of whom 37.0% had received entrepreneurial support. Men represented 63.9% of the respondents. Commerce was the most represented sector (33.3%), followed by services (29.6%), industry (25.0%) and other activities (12.0%). Respondents were, on average, 32.37 years old (SD = 7.78), and their businesses employed an average of 2.17 workers (SD = 2.51).

4.2. Bivariate associations

All tests had one degree of freedom. Percentages represent the proportion reporting each outcome within the corresponding support category.

Professional networking was more frequently reported by supported entrepreneurs than by non-supported entrepreneurs. In contrast, legal difficulties and entrepreneurial isolation were less frequent among supported entrepreneurs. All three associations were statistically significant. The strongest association concerned legal difficulties, followed by professional

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networking and entrepreneurial isolation. No expected cell count was below five. For isolation, Fisher's exact test produced a similar but borderline two sided result (p = .049).

Table 2. Associations between entrepreneurial support and the selected outcomes

Outcome	Supported, n/N (%)	Non-supported, n/N (%)	χ^2	P	Cramér's V
Professional networking	25/40 (62.5%)	23/68 (33.8%)	8.388	.004	.279
Legal difficulties	5/40 (12.5%)	28/68 (41.2%)	9.760	.002	.301
Entrepreneurial isolation	4/40 (10.0%)	18/68 (26.5%)	4.212	.040	.197

Source. Authors' calculations based on survey data.

4.3. Logistic regression results

Table 3. Adjusted associations between entrepreneurial support and the selected outcomes

Outcome	B	SE	P	OR	95% CI
Professional networking	1.365	.448	.002	3.917	[1.629, 9.417]
Legal difficulties	-1.593	.539	.003	.203	[.071, .585]
Entrepreneurial isolation	-1.224	.602	.042	.294	[.090, .957]

Source. Authors' calculations based on survey data

B=logistic regression coefficient; SE=standard error; OR= odds ratio; CI =confidence interval. Support was coded 0 = non-supported and 1 = supported. Models controlled for age, gender and firm size, except isolation, which controlled only for age. All models used N= 108. The isolation estimate requires particular caution because only 22 positive cases were observed; see the Firth analysis in Section 4.4.

Table 4. Model-level fit statistics

Outcome	Omnibus χ^2 (df)	Nagelkerke R^2	H-L p	AUC
Professional networking	17.662 (4)	.202	.233	.748
Legal difficulties	11.042 (4)	.137	.882	.684
Entrepreneurial isolation	7.841 (2)	.110	.566	.695

Source. Authors' calculations based on survey data.

H-L=Hosmer Lemeshow test; AUC= area under the receiver operating characteristic curve. The models included four predictors for networking and legal difficulties and two for isolation.

The omnibus tests were significant for professional networking, $\chi^2(4) = 17.662$, p = .001; legal difficulties, $\chi^2(4) = 11.042$, p = .026; and entrepreneurial isolation, $\chi^2(2) = 7.841$, p = .020. The respective Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 values were .202, .137 and .110. None of the Hosmer Lemeshow tests indicated detectable lack of fit, although this test has limited diagnostic power in a small sample.

After controlling for age, gender and firm size, supported entrepreneurs had 3.92 times the odds of reporting professional networking compared with non-supported entrepreneurs (B= 1.365, SE= .448, OR = 3.917, 95% CI [1.629, 9.417], p= .002). Age was negatively associated with networking (OR= .913, 95% CI [.855, .975], p = .006), whereas gender (OR = .954, p = .915) and firm size (OR= 1.014, p= .872) were not statistically significant. At the .50 cut-off, the model correctly classified 68.5% of observations, with 54.2% sensitivity and 80.0% specificity, compared with a majority-class baseline of 55.6%.

Entrepreneurial support was negatively associated with legal difficulties after controlling for age, gender and firm size (B= -1.593, SE= .539, OR = .203, 95% CI [.071, .585], p = .003). Supported entrepreneurs therefore had 79.7% lower odds of reporting legal difficulties than non-supported entrepreneurs. Age (OR = 1.007, p = .814), gender (OR = .839, p = .712) and firm size (OR = 1.022, p = .793) were not statistically significant. Although the model classified 68.5% of observations correctly, its sensitivity was 0% and its specificity was

98.7%; its classification performance at the .50 cut-off was therefore poor and slightly below the 69.4% majority-class baseline.

In the parsimonious isolation model, entrepreneurial support remained negatively associated with entrepreneurial isolation after controlling for age (B = -1.224, SE = .602, OR = .294, 95% CI [.090, .957], p = .042). Supported entrepreneurs had 70.6% lower odds of reporting isolation. Age was not statistically significant (OR = 1.055, 95% CI [.996, 1.118], p = .071). Although the model classified 80.6% of observations correctly, its sensitivity was only 4.5% and its specificity was 100%. Predicting absence of isolation for every respondent would already classify 79.6% correctly. The model therefore has little practical classification value, and the association should be regarded as fragile and exploratory.

4.4. Robustness and diagnostic analyses

The AUC values were .748 for networking, .684 for legal difficulties and .695 for isolation. Discrimination was acceptable for the networking model but remained limited for the legal-difficulties and isolation models. Adding entrepreneurial support increased Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 by .111, .132 and .067, respectively; these changes describe improvement in pseudoR^2 and should not be interpreted as percentages of variance explained.

Multicollinearity was negligible (VIFs: support = 1.005, age = 1.061, gender = 1.040 and firm size = 1.062). The largest Cook's distances were .169 for networking, .133 for legal difficulties and .113 for isolation, all below 1. Leave one out estimates retained the direction of the support association: ORs ranged from 3.720 to 4.535 for networking, .159 to .212 for legal difficulties and .214 to .315 for isolation.

For isolation, Firth penalised logistic regression confirmed the direction and approximate magnitude of the parsimonious estimate (OR = .324, 95% profile CI [.094, .929], penalised likelihood ratio p = .035). The fuller sensitivity model also retained a negative association (conventional OR = .280, 95% CI [.085, .926], p = .037; Firth OR = .315, 95% profile CI [.091, .904], p = .031). These analyses reduce concern about small-sample bias but do not remove the limitations of the cross sectional design.

Overall, the exploratory results were directionally consistent with H1, H2a and H2b. However, because the outcomes were retained after bivariate screening in the same sample, the findings do not constitute independent confirmatory evidence. Evidence concerning entrepreneurial isolation is especially weak because of the small number of cases, the borderline significance level and the model's very low sensitivity.

5. Discussion

The findings answer the research question in a differentiated manner. Participation in structured public entrepreneurial support was positively associated with membership in an entrepreneurial network and negatively associated with legal difficulties during business creation. A negative association with post-creation isolation was also observed, but the evidence for this outcome was less stable. The results therefore suggest distinct relational and informational functions of support rather than a uniform programme effect across entrepreneurial outcomes.

The networking result was consistent with H1. Supported entrepreneurs had 3.917 times the adjusted odds of reporting membership in an entrepreneurial network. This association is compatible with Social Capital Theory, which views relationships as channels through which entrepreneurs may access information, advice and opportunities (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). It also accords with studies describing incubators as environments for networking and cooperation (Bøllingtoft, 2012; Bruneel et al., 2012) and with Moroccan evidence linking social capital to access to external resources (Elmaymouni et al., 2024). However, the measure captures network membership, not the strength of

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relationships or the resources actually obtained. The result therefore supports a relational interpretation without demonstrating that participation generated valuable social capital for every entrepreneur.

Age was negatively associated with networking (OR = .913, 95% CI [.855, .975], p = .006). This finding was not hypothesised, and the questionnaire did not measure the mechanisms that might explain it. Differences in prior contacts, networking practices or engagement with programme activities remain possible explanations, but testing them would require dedicated measures. The age coefficient should therefore be treated as an exploratory result rather than a substantive conclusion about older entrepreneurs.

The legal difficulties result was consistent with H2a. Supported entrepreneurs had lower adjusted odds of reporting legal difficulties (OR = .203). This direction is compatible with the informational and advisory role of support organisations: orientation, referrals and access to specialised knowledge may help entrepreneurs interpret legal requirements during business creation. The interpretation is also consistent with evidence on administrative and fiscal constraints in the Moroccan entrepreneurial environment (Belbouli & Touhami, 2024) and with work emphasising differentiated support when entrepreneurs face complex problems (Philippart, 2017). Nevertheless, the study did not establish which respondents received legal assistance, and the model failed to identify positive cases at the .50 classification threshold. The coefficient indicates an adjusted association; it does not demonstrate that participation itself removed legal difficulties.

The direction of the isolation result was consistent with H2b, but it provides the weakest evidence of the three outcomes. The conventional model yielded OR = .294, and Firth regression produced a similar estimate (OR = .324), which reduces concern that the direction resulted solely from small sample bias. This pattern is compatible with the argument that accompaniment can connect entrepreneurs to support actors and peers and assist their movement from isolation towards legitimacy (Messeghem & Sammut, 2010). However, only 22 respondents reported isolation, model sensitivity was very low, and the binary indicator did not capture its intensity, duration or forms. The finding should therefore be considered provisional rather than evidence of a stable programme effect.

Taken together, the findings refine the theoretical interpretation of entrepreneurial support. Social Capital Theory helps explain the networking association, whereas the results concerning legal difficulties and isolation point to informational and relational mechanisms that operate at different stages of the entrepreneurial process. Because these outcomes were measured separately, improvement in one cannot be assumed to imply improvement in the others. The study's contribution is therefore not to establish the overall effectiveness of FORSA or INDH, but to identify specific intermediate outcomes through which structured support may be evaluated.

The practical implications should follow the same outcome-specific logic. During business creation, programmes could strengthen legal orientation, diagnostic services and referral to specialised advisers. Networking support should facilitate sustained contact with peers, mentors, clients, financiers and experts rather than merely enrol entrepreneurs in a network. After creation, periodic follow-up and peer based support may help reduce isolation. These actions are implications derived from the observed associations and existing theory; they were not evaluated as interventions in this study. Their relevance outside the sampled Moroccan context must also be tested rather than assumed.

Limitations and research priorities

Several limitations define the scope of these findings. The cross-sectional and partly retrospective design does not establish temporal order or causal effects. The non probability sample, different recruitment networks and regional imbalance limit comparability and

generalisability, while the inclusion of active businesses excludes ventures that had already ceased operating. The measures were self reported and binary, and they did not capture outcome intensity, programme content, duration, service use or differences between FORSA, INDH and Intilaka. Finally, the outcomes were screened and estimated in the same sample without adjustment for multiple testing, which increases the risk of sample specific findings.

Future research should first replicate the isolation analysis with a larger sample and a validated multi item measure. Longitudinal or quasi experimental designs using comparable recruitment frames are needed to establish whether support precedes changes in networking and difficulties. Collecting detailed information on programme services, duration, intensity and participant engagement would also allow researchers to distinguish programme participation from the support actually received and to determine which components are associated with each outcome.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that participation in structured public entrepreneurial support is associated with three distinct intermediate outcomes among the surveyed entrepreneurs. Supported respondents had higher adjusted odds of belonging to an entrepreneurial network and lower adjusted odds of reporting legal difficulties during creation. They also reported less post-creation isolation, although this third association remains fragile because it rests on few cases and a model with very low sensitivity. These findings are exploratory associations and do not establish causal effects of FORSA, INDH or any other programme.

The main contribution is to show why programme evaluation should distinguish relational access, creation stage difficulties and post-creation isolation instead of treating support as having one general effect. The results justify closer attention to sustained networking opportunities, practical legal guidance and continued contact after business creation. Confirming these implications will require larger and more comparable samples, validated measures and designs capable of addressing selection and temporal order.

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