



## Tunisia: Empowering women through the induced effects of investments for economic diversification

### 1. PROJECT SUMMARY

The “Support Programme for the Development of Underprivileged Areas” (AZD) was launched in 2012 in a difficult economic, social and political conjuncture, following the Tunisian revolution.

Its intervention targets five disadvantaged governorates of the interior of the country, namely Siliana, Kef, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, and Gafsa. The programme has set up and is running a number of different technical assistance projects to support decent work creation: building infrastructure, training and integration of young and unskilled women into the labour market and providing them self-employment opportunities, and local economic development initiatives.

One of the most important target groups of the project are women due, on the one hand, to the still significant gender gap, and, on the other, the importance of gender equality for economic development.

The participatory and integrated approach, promoting the involvement of all local actors, has yielded concrete and sustainable results: the programme has created a total of more than 152,000 work days in infrastructure projects and the supply of materials; a total of 50 SMEs are involved, including 10 which have been newly created; a total of 120 youth have been trained and certified; and 10 cooperatives now employ 200 rural women who have been trained and certified in processing agricultural products. These livelihoods in the processing of agricultural products are a result of the economic diversification that has taken place thanks to the infrastructure component, as the benefits of irrigation infrastructure have flowed from the farmers of the fruit and vegetables to those who process the produce.

### 2. GENDER COUNTRY CONTEXT

With provisions for equality of opportunity and non-discrimination between men and women in the Constitution and Labour Code, Tunisia has a legal framework that provides an enabling environment for women to participate in the economy. However, in practice, women continue to face socio-cultural barriers and inequalities in opportunities, access to resources, as well as job quality.<sup>1</sup>

While Tunisia experienced a significant increase in the female participation rate until 2000, it has since then stagnated at a relatively low level, and was 24% in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to certain segments of the economy, a relatively promising picture emerges: for example, the latest World Bank *Enterprise Survey* showed that Tunisia outperformed other MENA countries in terms of women’s entrepreneurship.



<sup>1</sup> Rim Ben Ayed Mouelhi and Mohamed Goaid, *Women in the Tunisian Labor Market*, Working Paper 1160, Economic Research Forum, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> ILO modelled estimate from ILOSTAT ([www.ilo.org/ilostat](http://www.ilo.org/ilostat), accessed January 2019).

**Table 1: World Bank Enterprise Survey, Tunisia (2013)**

	Tunisia	Middle East & North Africa	All Countries
PERCENT OF FIRMS WITH FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN OWNERSHIP	49.5	23.3	35.1
PERCENT OF FIRMS WITH A FEMALE TOP MANAGER	8.5	5.4	18.6
PROPORTION OF PERMANENT FULL-TIME WORKERS THAT ARE FEMALE (%)	30.5	17.6	32.2

However, there are significant inequalities among women depending on the sectors they are engaged in, the areas they come from, and other socio-economic factors. The AZD project conducted a survey and found that the situation of rural women is very different from that of urban women: 32% of rural women are illiterate, their primary sector of employment remains agriculture, and only 19% have an own income. In the disadvantaged governorates where the project operates, women's share in the active population is under 30% in all cases and as low as 15% in one of the governorates (Kasserine).<sup>3</sup>

**Box 1: Situation of rural women in Tunisia: Findings of an AZD survey**

- 35% of women in Tunisia live in rural areas
- Agriculture remains the first employment sector for rural women
- 32% of rural women are illiterate
- 67% of rural women declare that they are housewives
- 19% of rural women have an own income
- Rural women travel on average 4 km to go to a dispensary

Source: AZD survey conducted in 2016 for a three-month period.

### 3. ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

Unlike some of the other ILO-supported EIP programmes, in the case of the Tunisia AZD programme, given the cultural barriers to women's participation in infrastructure-related work, the project adopted an incremental strategy that initially focuses on alternatives that are culturally more acceptable, yet result in economic empowerment that is gradually expected to lead to transformational social change.

It has tried, where possible, to include women in the infrastructure works component of the programme. While women workers are not engaged in works, women engineers have successfully been included in the programme's infrastructure development activities.

As its key means for supporting employment creation for women, the programme has invested heavily in initiatives to support the formation of women-led SMEs and cooperatives within local economic development frameworks by identifying and capitalizing on livelihood opportunities arising from the infrastructure investments.



3 ILO, *Project Document "Programme d'appui au développement des zones défavorisées, Composante 1: Création d'emplois et accompagnement à la réinsertion en complétant les dispositifs de l'Etat"*, ILO, November 2011.

Activities carried out in order to harness the economic diversification impact of infrastructure investments for the benefit of women include:

- Conducting a social survey to enable the project team to identify the profile of women beneficiaries (rural illiterate or poorly educated women whose mobility is very limited).
- Identifying specialist trainers with a good knowledge of the interior of the country, having worked with rural women and being able to adapt the training curriculum to the profile of women.
- Implementing training programmes on vocational and business skills. For example, the ILO's *GET Ahead* training programme for business management skills for women was adapted to the Tunisian context, introduced through a training of trainers programme and institutionalized through a memorandum of agreement with relevant government and non-government entities, and rolled out to 330 women beneficiaries.
- The provision of intensive, multi-dimensional support to specific business initiatives: a total of seven businesses (one in chicken and livestock raising, two in dairy and cheese making, two in vegetable and fruit processing and two in aromatic and medicinal plants) were provided a range of support measures, including technical training and certification, the provision of equipment, facilitating applications for sanitary and organic certifications, and marketing assistance.
- Validating the learning through the national system of vocational training in Tunisia and capitalizing the experiences by profession in a revised guide approved by public institutions.



## 4. RESULTS AND IMPACT OF GENDER INITIATIVES

The work of the project to advance women's empowerment and gender equality has led to the following results and impacts:

- It has provided women a sense of empowerment and agency and enabled many of them to engage in productive and profitable work outside of the domestic sphere for the first time.
- It has adapted and institutionalized the *GET Ahead* entrepreneurship training programme for women among key government (including four line ministries) and non-government actors, provided training to an initial 330 women and enabled the training package to be taken up by others supporting women entrepreneurship to strengthen sustainability and achieve broader outreach.
- It has created a total of 110 jobs for women in seven group-based businesses in the field of livestock raising, dairy, vegetable and fruit processing and the use of aromatic and medicinal plants through a total investment of TND 1,135,721 (USD 379,337).
- Through the above projects, it has demonstrated the employment creation potential of strategies based on the use of local resources (materials, agricultural products, local and traditional know-how) and the induced employment impact of infrastructure investments as part of an overall sustainable and inclusive economic growth trajectory.

### Box 2: Example of the induced employment impact of improved irrigation

Kesra, Siliana Governorate:  
SMSA Chisura fruit and vegetable processing business

- Investment: TND 186 000 TND (USD 62,102)
- Support provided: local Sidi Thabet transformation unit rehabilitated; 20 women trained and certified in fruit and vegetable processing; support provided for marketing and certification
- Results and impacts: 2693 kg of fruit and vegetable processed per month; a production capacity of 100,000 jars of jam per year attained; organic certification obtained in 2017; 12 jobs created

Source: ILO, *Programme d'appui aux zones défavorisées: Rapport 2017*, ILO, 2017.

## 5. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project has demonstrated the strength of strategies involving local resource-use as a means of furthering development and wealth-creation, while empowering women and advancing gender equality.

It also shows the potential of infrastructure development to generate indirect, induced or spin-off employment and development outcomes for women, as the infrastructures created lead to livelihood opportunities, such as agricultural processing businesses thanks to initial investments in irrigation infrastructure development.

Factors that helped to achieve these positive results, according to the project team, include: choosing the right institutional partners, having project teams located in the intervention regions, and ensuring in-depth studies and consultations were carried out prior to the launch of the

project. Challenges included the lack of financial and human resources for taking this work further. The recommendations of the project team for other projects operating in similar circumstances and with similar objectives would be to intensify support to cooperatives and to provide specialized support to business groups in market research and marketing their products.

Finally, while it has not seemed feasible for the project to involve women in the public works component as direct workers, the engagement of women engineers by the programme is promising, and, experiences from other regions shows that even rigid stereotypes can be overcome. The project could therefore seek to identify means of involving women in public works in a gradual manner, alongside the entrepreneurship component.



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For more information on the Employment Intensive Employment Programme's work on gender equality and women's empowerment, please visit our website:

[www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/lang--en/index.htm)