

Exploiting markets in sub-Saharan Africa

New export opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses in Tunisia

The challenge

More than a decade after the Arab Spring, Tunisia is suffering from high unemployment and low economic growth. The country is involving the private sector in its attempts to stimulate growth and hopes to improve its international competitiveness. Tunisia has a relatively small domestic market and therefore relies heavily on its exports of goods and services. However, these exports are concentrated in a limited geographical area and are not very diversified. In 2018, the Mediterranean region accounted for approximately three quarters of all Tunisian exports, while sub-Saharan Africa represented just 3%. sub-Saharan countries have achieved remarkable growth rates in recent years. The Tunisian government is aware of the potential and has prioritised the region as a potential export market. Tunisian companies have a clear market advantage in some sectors, with competitive goods and high-quality services.

Since Tunisia's adhesion to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in January 2020, Tunisian exports have enjoyed tariff-free access to 15 African countries. The ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ZLECAF) in 2020 has offered further scope to increase trade between Tunisia and sub-Saharan Africa with an anticipated reduction in trade barriers over the coming years. Ensuring that these free trade agreements meet the needs of the Tunisian private sector means involving these businesses in the negotiations and in the implementation of the agreement.

Our approach

The project «Promotion of export activities to new markets in sub-Saharan Africa» (PEMA II) project builds on the results achieved during its first phase (2018 to 2020) and continues to support Tunisian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), enabling them to exploit the commercial potential of markets in sub-Saharan Africa.

The project offers a range of services and support measures to companies in collaboration with its partner, the Tunisian Export Promotion Center (CEPEX). With an emphasis on business partnerships, such as consortia, that enable businesses to work together in exploring new markets, digital approaches and networking formats, and the promotion of public-private dialogue the project proposes an array of coordinated measures.

Project title	Promotion of export activities to new markets in sub-Saharan Africa (PEMA II)
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for economic cooperation and development (BMZ)
Country	Tunisia
Objective	Tunisian small and medium-sized enterprises are increasingly in a position to exploit the business potential of new markets in sub-Saharan Africa.
Implemented by	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Partner	Ministry of Commerce and Export Development
Duration	01/2021 - 12/2024

With this support, companies will be in a better position to tackle the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. The measures have been designed



to meet the needs of businesses and targets the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. The project targets Tunisian SMEs, with a particular focus on companies managed by women, which are under-represented and do not generally operate in the export field.

Four sectoral export consortia were supported in devising individual strategies to develop exports to sub-Saharan Africa. The consortia



- **Tunisia Building Partner** (construction)



- **Taste Tunisia** (agrifood)



- **Tunisia Health Alliance** (health)



- **Get'IT** (information and communication technology)

are currently very active in sub-Saharan-Africa and are fully exploiting the potential of these markets. They are also supported by the project team in implementing their action plans.



Photo left: the four chairwomen of the women's business consortia on the day of the G.I.E. launch event.

Photo right: Participants in the E-commerce and Digital Marketing training held at CEPEX



Photo left: Members of the Taste Tunisia consortium on a mission in Cameroon

Photo right: Members of the Tunisia Building Partners consortium on a mission in Kenya

To support Tunisia’s gender policy and promote women entrepreneurs in the Tunisian export ecosystem, the project, in cooperation with CEPEX, created four new consortia for companies run solely by women. After more than a year of coaching and support, the 4 consortia were formalized in March 2023 under the legal status of «Economic Interest Groups» («Groupement d’intérêt économique»). The four consortia,

117 companies supported as part of the e-commerce training claim to have started at least one export activity towards African markets. 55% already had an expression of interest of a potential customer in sub-Saharan Africa.

As part of the creation of consortia of women-run businesses, participating entrepreneurs were able to increase their regular contacts by 55%. They state to have increased the quality of their contacts by 6.5% and they have also improved their management practices by 5.5% (all in comparison to the control group).

The four consortia supported during the first phase of the project, Tunisia Building Partner, Taste Tunisia, Tunisia Health Alliance and Get’IT were able to identify more than 2310 opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa and created more than 215 export projects in 2022 alone. They have also succeeded in creating 129 additional jobs to conquer new markets in Africa, of which 49% (64) are women. As a result of their work, the consortia were able to increase their turnover in 2022 compared to 2021: Taste Tunisia (+90% turnover), Tunisia Health Alliance (+21% turnover), Tunisia Building Partners (+25%) and Get’It (+25%).



- **WE Raise** (agri-food sector)



- **WE Create** (handicrafts and cosmetics)



- **WE Value** (services)



- **WE TIC** (information and communication technologies)

now comprise 48 Tunisian companies ready to face the markets in sub-Saharan Africa.

In partnership with CEPEX, the project also supported 117 Tunisian companies in their digital transformation. Companies have been trained in e-commerce and digital marketing and supported by students trained on the same topics. The project continues to support these companies by supporting them in the development of their e-commerce websites and the development of their digital marketing.

The project also supports its partner CEPEX in its restructuring and digital transformation for example with the creation of a new web portal to digitize services and automate exchanges between CEPEX and Tunisian exporters. The project also supported its partner in training on international trade analysis tools.

Finally, together with the project «Support to Trade Agreements with Africa (Appui aux accords commerciaux avec l’Afrique AACA)», the project is supporting the Tunisian government in the negotiation and implementation of the AfCFTA.

The Impact

Since 2021, more than 537 companies from all over Tunisia have benefited from various types of export support to improve their export capacities to sub-Saharan Africa. As part of the activities “e-commerce” and “Creation of consortia managed by women” training, 87 companies (76%) confirmed an improvement in their export capacities. 66% of the



An example from the field

In September 2022, the project organized the first edition of the «COMESA Tunisia Business Women Days» event in collaboration with the AACA project (Support for Trade Agreements with Africa) under the high patronage of the Head of the Tunisian Government. and in partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Export Development and the National Chamber of Women Business Leaders «CNFCE»

This event brought together 380 face-to-face participants, including 11 from sub-Saharan African countries, and 3,500 virtual participants.

In order to highlight the important role of women in trade in Africa, particularly within COMESA, 250 entrepreneurs participated in the conference which was moderated by 27 panelists. The project and its partners also organized a B2B session where 60 meetings were held as well as an exhibition space which brought together 45 exhibitors.

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