



The Challenge

Tunisia is often cited as a positive example for gender equality in the Arab world. And indeed, the country has a legal and policy framework that aims to promote gender equality and support female entrepreneurship. Alas, the actual reality for women in (not only) the business world is a different one: they often struggle to cope with access to finance, trainings and professional networks. They are required to make an enormous effort of balancing their professional development with deeply rooted socio-cultural expectations, that sees the majority and family and domestic tasks in their responsibility. This applies to many countries in a similar way, but the Tunisian case is somewhat unique: there is the widespread perception – despite various statistics and development indices speaking a different language – of a very good level of gender equality in the business world, justified by the occasional women in high positions or the favourable legal context. Hence, there is no critical reflection of structural imbalances or need for change. Gender equality and women economic empowerment is – although widely welcomed – not systematically addressed and significant barriers remain. As a result, the numbers speak for themselves: only 2.7% of companies in Tunisia are owned by women, only 8.5% of top-level management is female.

Within the world of export and trade, already challenging for any Tunisian company due to structural barriers, women entrepreneurs are significantly disadvantaged and therefore only constitute for a small minority of exporting companies in Tunisia.

Application GIZ Gender Competition 2023 Tunisia: Women United for Export



Being a homemaker, housekeeper, and a business manager all at once: this is the daily life of a female entrepreneur. I must juggle between my personal life as a mother and my professional life as an entrepreneur. Often, I find myself facing male suppliers, investors, and bankers to whom I must prove my worth as a business leader. Alas: Trust is a rare commodity, and I must work twice as hard than a man, often putting our family life on hold.

Zayneb Abdel Kefi - Owner "Ozzy Company"



The traditional stereotype biases against women in Tunisian society have often under-mined my self-confidence and, in turn, restricted my business opportunities and credibility as an entrepreneur. As a leader in the field of exports, I've had to confront these challenges head-on.

Dhouha Azri - Owner "Thagamuta company"



As a female entrepreneur leading my business, I often experience a sense of insecurity when contemplating international expansion. I continually seek a supportive community that shares a common vision and can embark on these journeys together, ensuring our safety and unity.

Mongia Agroubi - Owner "Coaching Academy"



Women United for Export in brief

The project "Promotion of Export Activities in New Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa" (PEMA), a bilateral project financed by BMZ, is active in the export sector in Tunisia. During the first phase of the project (2018-2020), a new concept was introduced: the creation of consortia to help companies to export to Sub-Saharan Africa. Consortia are groups of companies that form a formalised membership-based organisation which then enables them to tackle new markets in Sub-Saharan-Africa together. They organise joint training sessions, go on market development missions and jointly represent each other. As a result, they are lowering the cost for business development. The consortia concept has proven extremely successful with measurable impact for companies, but participation of women entrepreneurs was low. For the second phase of the PEMA project (2021-2024), it was therefore decided to replicate the concept, this time targeting only women-led companies. "Women United for Export" is one of many activities of the project, which has a GG-1 marker.

80

Women-led companies selected

52

Companies decided to join the consortia

4

Sectoral consortia launched



Partners



The activity is done jointly with the Tunisian Export Promotion Agency, the Tunisian Ministry for Trade and Export Development and the National Chamber of Women-led companies.

In 2022, the consortia were linked up with the COMESA Women in Business Chapter, an organisation covering the whole eastern part of the African continent. For 2024, the project teams aims to connect the consortia with international initiatives on Women in Trade, in particular in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), where gender plays an important role.

RIGOROUS IMPACT EVALUATION

The activity is academically accompanied from start to finish by a team of researchers from Technical University Berlin and Mediterranean School of Business Tunis in the spirit of a "rigorous impact evaluation". In addition to the 80 companies as beneficiary group, 80 comparable companies were selected as a control group; both groups are surveyed as part of the base, mid- and end-line. This ensures that the results/impact measured are in fact caused triggered by the project's intervention and not by external factors. The midline was carried out at the beginning of 2023, the endline is planned for summer 2024.



Women United for Export Creation Process

Technical implementation

- Call for Applications for four sectoral export consortia for women owned companies
- Out of 179 eligible companies, random selection of 80 participating companies and assignment to four consortia based on sector

- Introduction of concept of export consortia, advantages to the companies
- Introduction of option for legal and organisational set-up
- Decision for legal set-up by the companies

- Definition of export strategies of each consortium
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Formalisation into a legal unit "economic interest group"

- Big event to present the consortia to the public
- Festive signature of legal formalisation documents in the presence of the whole ecosystem

- Definition of export target markets, market development activities and timeline
- Financing (local subsidies) by GIZ for implementation of Action Plans

- Bootcamp "How to export to Africa".
- Consortia explore markets independently, but supported by the project
- Activities include trips to Sub-Saharan-Africa, but also trainings for member companies



Unique feminist aspects

- Only sectors with many women businesses + with good potential eligible for Call for Applications
- Adaption of selection criteria to reality of women businesses in Tunisia

- Series of Success stories of established women entrepreneurs to act as role models
- Sessions on challenges for women in Tunisia and on women doing business in Sub-Saharan-Africa
- Development of a Diversity Charta

- «Vision féminine» : women empowerment is key in legal status documents
- Only companies owned by women can become members also in the future
- Governance of consortia reflects gender equality and commitment of member companies to apply feminist values in their companies

- Label of the event "first women export consortia in Tunisia"
- Hashtag #United_Women_Export used by all participants in social networks
- Joint branding: all four consortia names start with "WE" for Women Empowerment

- Definition of Key Performance Indicators not only for economic performance but also for women empowerment within the consortia and member companies

- Provision of networking opportunities with women-focused organisations in Sub-Saharan-Africa
- Preferred access to missions by Tunisian Export Promotion Agency and other partner institutions
- Training on Sexual harassment in the context of business in / with Africa



Impact

Short to mid-term (results of mid-line)

Out of 80 women led-companies who started the process, 52 decided to eventually join the consortia
Participating women entrepreneurs are...

- ...feeling 5 times more empowered than control group (measuring belief in one's own abilities, sense of initiative, control over businesses in comparison with control group)
- ...have increased the control over their business activities by 5%
- ... have 5% more confidence in themselves than the control group
- ...have a 5% higher knowledge on business practice than control group
- ...are less likely asking their male family members for advice in their business decisions (reduction by 13%)

Mid- and long-term (expected)

- Taking part in a consortium provides women entrepreneurs with solutions to various socio-cultural barriers, they can now travel together with other women, they can benefit from networking opportunities, an increased visibility, opportunities for additional training and knowledge exchange, but also learning from others when it comes to questions how to balance family and work life.
- A significant increase of export business of the participating companies is expected, as already the mid-term results were showing increased profits, export readiness and investment among participating women entrepreneurs (will be measured in the endline).
- The four women consortia – being the first of their kind in Tunisia – are receiving a lot of attention, which helps to promote women economic empowerment overall. For other women entrepreneurs, they act as a visible role model in what is possible, and for supporting institutions, they create awareness on the need to further promote women entrepreneurs, a group which has long been neglected within the Tunisian Export support system.
- With the women consortia, GIZ Tunisia developed a gender-transformative approach that is standardised and replicable and can be used also in other countries.



CEPEX is incorporating a gender perspective into our organization's strategic objectives and budgeting processes. As part of this ongoing effort, CEPEX is taking steps to promote our women consortia and provide them with more national recognition and international visibility through dedicated events and preferred access to missions abroad.

M. Mourad Ben Hassine – CEPEX CEO (Implementing partner of PEMA project)



I followed with great interest and satisfaction the process of creating the women's GIE "WERAISE", our consortium "TASTE TUNISIA" appreciates this initiative and shows its support for cooperation within the framework of advice, exchange of information on target markets and in joint participation in B2B and specialized exhibitions and fairs.

Fayçal Hebiri – Executive Director « Taste Tunisia» (Consortium created during first project phase with mostly male participants)



Now, as a member of such a creative group of women specializing in crafting and the arts, we are continually inspired by the incredible female empowerment that surrounds me. We share our challenges and collaborate to produce innovative products and explore opportunities in the international markets.

Members of the Consortium WeCreate

Additional information

- [Creation of Tunisian consortia managed by women - YouTube](#)
- [Dîner de réseautage – COMESA Tunisia Business Women Days - YouTube](#)
- [Women Consortia meet the German Embassy - Facebook](#)
- [WETIC in Kenya - LinkedIn](#)
- [The four consortia at the Intra-African Trade Fair in Cairo - LinkedIn](#)