



Reviving Tradition, Boosting Employment

In Tunisia, young women managed to set up their own small enterprises that produce and sell *Al margoum*, a traditional embroidery of Berber origin that was on the verge of disappearing.

The Governorate of Tataouine, a province in the south-east of Tunisia, is especially poor, and its women and young people are marginalized. These conditions prompted IFAD and the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) to launch a programme to boost employment through the local development of farm and off-farm activities. One particularly innovative project created job opportunities for the young women in the village of Guermassa by reviving a traditional Berber handicraft called *Al margoum* (embroidery). The project started from a participatory needs assessment and ultimately led to the creation of 39 small enterprises led by women – along with some employment spin-offs. A series of marketing obstacles that immediately emerged were successfully overcome through the prompt reaction of the project team.

Country:
Tunisia

Direct Beneficiaries:
Poor rural women

Results:

- 39 women trained on the traditional technique of *Al margoum* received work cards that allowed them to apply for loans and establish their own home-based small enterprises.
- The project created new professions in the village: 20 young women were employed in a needlework centre; three young men and one young woman were trained as tourist guides; and other young people established a rest house and restaurant for tourists, and a shop to sell the *Al margoum* products.

Main Lessons:

- A variety of infrastructures are essential to the success of any economic activity: in this case, a specialized market for traditional craftwork, and comfortable roads to facilitate access for tourists.
- Key marketing issues should be addressed at the project design stage, and project implementation should be flexible enough to allow for minor marketing-related adjustments.
- Traditional handicrafts can be an option for diversifying employment opportunities among marginalized young women.



BASIC INFO

Sources:

A Case Study of PRODESUD Programme in Tunisia (IFAD/IDRC/KariaNet Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Thematic Workshop, 2007)

Project Name:

Agropastoral Development and Local Initiatives Promotion Programme in the South-East

Project Starting Date:

2003

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WEB PAGES

IFAD operations in NENA and CEN:

<http://www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/pn/index.htm>

IFAD learning notes:

<http://www.ifad.org/rural/learningnotes/index.htm>

KariaNet:

<http://www.karianet.org/>

IFAD case studies:

<http://rpr.ifad.org/node/490> (username and password: "guest")

Background

The Governorate of Tataouine was created in 1981 in the desert area of southern Tunisia. Its 150,000 inhabitants – 44 per cent of whom live in rural areas – are among the poorest in the country and, unlike the rest of Tunisia, women and young people are victims of marginalization. The area has some solid basic infrastructures: 96 per cent of households are connected to the electricity network and 91 per cent to the water distribution system. However, the road network is underdeveloped or deteriorated, making access to mountainous villages quite difficult.

In 2003, IFAD and OFID launched the Agropastoral Development and Local Initiatives Promotion Programme in the South-East (PRODESUD), which strives to improve the living conditions of farmers, livestock breeders and women, with a special focus on promoting the creation of small-scale activities in farming and other sectors such as handicrafts and ecotourism.

Resuming a Tradition

An interesting project within this programme was carried out in Guermassa, a mountainous village of 1,152 inhabitants located 20 km away from Tataouine. Guermassa is renowned for a traditional Berber handicraft called *Al margoum* (embroidery), but women and girls of recent generations have not taken up the skill because of changing lifestyles and because industrial manufacturers were dominating the market. A participatory needs assessment identified *Al margoum* as an opportunity to create job opportunities for the young women of Guermassa.

The initiative was implemented along the following stages:

- The project team organized two open workshops, attended by more than 30 women each. Two women who were skilled in *Al margoum* familiarized participants with the

various products that could be made, such as traditional shawls, rugs and blankets.

- The project team organized an informative day attended by 40 young women. They were introduced to an array of training activities they could join.
- After overcoming a series of obstacles related to the training location and equipment, and the trainers' contracts, the training programme was launched. A total of 41 women attended.
- The 11-month training ended with an exam supervised by the Department of Traditional Industries. All but two women passed the exam.

The women who passed received work cards that allowed them to establish their own enterprises by taking loans from developmental associations or the Tunisian Solidarity Bank, or by using the self-finance mechanism provided by the Fund for Advancement of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprises.

The Marketing Dimension

The newly established small enterprises started production immediately. Some women expanded their activity to cover nearby areas and focused on preparing brides' trousseaus. However, a series of marketing problems soon emerged: craftworks accumulated and competition intensified, so that only ten women managed to easily market their products; Guermassa received only a limited number of tourists; and unoriginal and less expensive pieces of fabric started to appear in the market, and tourists could not distinguish the imitations from the originals.

The project team reacted to these marketing challenges in many innovative ways. The team: 1) trained young women in product design so that they could diversify their production offerings, particularly towards small, easy-to-carry products;

2) helped women participate in the Al-Karm Fair in Tunis; 3) entered into partnership with the Tataouine municipality to establish a market for traditional industries that included 30 stores for rent in a very strategic location in downtown (two of the stores were used to showcase and sell *Al margoum* products); 4) improved the roads to Guermassa in order to facilitate access for tourists; 5) arranged for Guermassa to be listed in the tourist guide that was distributed to all tourists; 6) established a quality mark for original *Al margoum* products; and 7) launched an internet site about Guermassa to promote *Al margoum* products.

Replication and Scaling Up

The impact of the *Al margoum* project was not limited to the creation of income-generating activities for 39 women. The project team also encouraged young people to establish a rest house and restaurant for tourists, and a shop for selling the traditional products that the women made. The team helped establish a needlework centre for the benefit of 20 young women, and it trained three young men and one young woman as tourist guides.

The creation of these new professions, along with the interventions that improved the marketability of the *Al margoum* products, vastly improved the possibility of successfully replicating and scaling up these types of activities.

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