



Tunisia ICT Competitiveness Project Newsletter

Issue 02, November 19-30, 2012

PROJECT VOICES

FROM THE ICT TEAM

The Business and Technology Convention (CAT) discussed in this issue presented a rare opportunity for the Project's ICT team, which provides consulting and mentoring services to the Microsoft partner companies that exhibited at CAT as part of our broader commitment to bolster investment competitiveness of the ICT industry.

The trade show was a welcome chance to see our clients in action, in front of potential clients and investors. We had the opportunity to watch the creators of ten SMEs proudly introduce their products to the public, as their presentations became sharper and more confident with each new visitor to the booth. Their energy and strong dedication are a daily motivation in our own work to help these firms train their staff and identify and reach new markets.

The ICT team currently assists nearly 50 client companies, which together plan on hiring an estimated 700 new employees during 2012 and 2013. Our consulting services include strategic business planning, facilitating access to investment capital, and enabling our clients to attend local and international events promoting trade and investment like CAT. The ICT team uses a hands-on, four-step participatory consulting process requiring direct client involvement, which helps us to boost client-company revenues, profits, and job creation.

USAID Project and Microsoft Co-sponsor SMEs to Participate at the Business and Technology Convention

Hundreds of people crowded around computer screens to watch demonstrations of a social networking game hosted on Facebook, software applications for mobile phones, and smart software designed to conserve electrical energy for homes and businesses.

These were some of the services offered by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who were able to participate in the recent Business and Technology Convention (CAT) through co-sponsorship provided by the USAID ICT Competitiveness Project and Microsoft Tunisia. The event, held in Tunis on November 28-30, was Tunisia's largest post-revolution international trade and investment show attended by over 600 local and international companies and potential investors.

The exhibit space jointly supported by the USAID Project and Microsoft gave opportunity for 10 SME companies to meet potential investors, explore new business opportunities, and build international market linkages.

Participating firms were selected from Microsoft's Programme de Parrainage de Startups (SME sponsorship program), representing highest-potential enterprises from the pool of over 300 companies that Microsoft assists in Tunisia. The USAID Project and Microsoft have formed a strategic partnership to develop and nurture these firms.

Leaders of firms exhibiting at the convention spoke enthusiastically about new horizons opened by their participation. "CAT is a very important step for our company, our first exposure



Right: Members of the Project ICT team and participating firms brief visitors to the exhibition booth during the Business and Technology Convention, Tunisia's largest post-revolution international trade and investment show.

to the world,” said one participant. “Potential clients and investors from Tunisia, Europe, and the Middle East have seen and liked our product. This confirms that we are on the right track, doing the right things.”

Tunisian Minister of Industry Mr. Mohamed Lamine Chakhari, accompanied by Mr. Mohamed Bridaa, CEO of Microsoft Tunisia, visited the exhibit space shared by the USAID ICT Competitiveness Project and Microsoft.

Speaking at the convention, the men and women heading participating companies demonstrated a business savvy and deep commitment to strive toward further success for their enterprises and their teams.

Discussing his motivation to dedicate his life to launching an ICT startup, one MS partner said, “For me it’s not about money, but the challenge of building a great team to turn a big idea into a

Right:

Representatives of two exhibiting companies present their products to potential customers and investors.



business offering innovative products – and perhaps inspiring others to do the same.”

For many, participation in the convention was a stepping stone to further business pursuits. “Our team has really big dreams,” said the

developer of an online networking game that is rapidly attracting followers.

“In five years we want to be players the United States, European and Asian gaming marketplace,” he said. “CAT is our first big step toward global market penetration.”

Project Highlights

- The U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia Jacob Walles awarded achievement certificates at the 2012 Microsoft Annual Start-up Awards Program held on 26 November at the Microsoft Innovation Center, to recognize 10 high-achieving ICT startup companies. At the event, Mr. Alaya Bettaieb, Secretary of State to the Minister of Investment and International Cooperation, praised the USAID ICT Competitiveness Project for stimulating ICT entrepreneurship, industry development, and job creation.
- Two companies in Sousse, Proxym-IT and Aptiv-IT, identified a total of 25 job candidates to participate in one or both types of workforce training programs assisted by the Project: business English and workplace success skills. Classes are expected to start on December 3.
- The Project met with the IFC to discuss the need for a revised

investment code and its key features: simplification, and elimination of preferences and tax incentives.

- The Project is completing an analysis of Tunisian labor markets and graduate unemployment, especially as it affects ICT graduates. The analysis is based on data from the National Institute of Statistics, the Ministry of Employment, and the Ministry of Planning. Final analysis will be released in January 2013.
- The Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies expressed interest in working with the Project on the development of a revised Telecommunications Code. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for the week of December 3.
- The Project met with Mr. Moez Chakchouk, Chairman and CEO of the Tunisian Internet Agency, who expressed interest in pilot projects,

including the possibility of equipping a location such as Sidi Bouzid, home of the Tunisian revolution, with a WiFi mesh network (an emerging technology that spreads Internet connection across large areas through the use of radio nodes). Mr. Chakchouk expressed particular enthusiasm about the possibility of a civil-society group managing the network as an exercise in good governance.

- The Project met with Mr. Khaled Sellami, Director of the e-Government Unit of the Government of Tunisia, to present an evaluation of the e-procurement system; propose work on the organization, roles, and responsibilities of the e-Government Unit; and discuss areas of future collaboration.
- The Project provided extensive advice to two IT firms, DigitalMania and Cynapses, on preparing presentations to prospective investors.

The USAID Tunisia ICT Competitiveness Project is implemented by Sibley International, with subcontractor The Pragma Corporation.

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. Government.