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Q1: Respondent details

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Q2: Country or Customs territory

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Q3: Organization

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International Organization: United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

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Q4: Title of case story

The promotion of agrofood quality labels in Tunisia to improve market access for typical products: the case of Harissa

Q5: Case story focus

Trade Facilitation.

Q6: Case story abstract

In September 2013 UNIDO launched the "Project on market access for Tunisian agrofood and typical products" (French acronym PAMPAT), with the aim of having high quality products of regional origin available in global markets. The project includes three value chains, namely Harissa, cactus prickly pears and Djebba figs. This case study focuses on Harissa.

Since its launching, the project has assisted the Tunisian Ministry of Industry and the public-private Tunisian Group for Canned Food Products (GICA) to set-up the certification and control system of the voluntary labelling standard "Food Quality Label Tunisia".

Within this framework, UNIDO has provided technical assistance to harissa companies to set-up the required traceability system along the supply chain and comply with the product specifications. During the production season of 2016, seven companies accounting for 40% of total industrial harissa production in Tunisia started producing "Food Quality Label" harissa and defined with the support of GICA a collective marketing approach to position the Tunisian flagship product. Thanks to the PAMPAT project and the involvement of several public institutions, the new label is being presented in several countries and new market opportunities have been identified.

Q7: Who provided funding?

Bilateral donor

Q8: Project/Programme type

Single country

Q9: Your text case story

In Tunisia the protection and promotion of traditional agrofood products of regional origin has become a national policy and the flagship product of Tunisia, Harissa, the traditional spicy chilli paste, is now protected by a quality label.

The production of harissa dates back to the seventeenth century and today the vast majority of Tunisian dishes includes harissa among their main ingredients. It is estimated that the harissa value chain, which covers chilli pepper farmers, collection centres, small-scale producers and industrial companies, creates employment for around 25,000 people. Industrial companies make up for the lion share of Tunisian production and Harissa has become the second most important export product of the canned food sector, both in terms of value and quantity.

Hence, product awareness goes beyond the Tunisian borders and harissa is already known in a growing number of countries. But success has also attracted foreign imitators, which call their hot sauces "harissa" even when their preparations have little similarities with the original Tunisian recipe. To protect the harissa as a product of Tunisian soil, the Tunisian Ministry of Industry launched the idea of the "Food Quality Label Tunisia" and submitted a request to UNIDO to assist in its implementation.

In September 2013 UNIDO launched the "Project on market access for Tunisian agrofood and typical products" (French acronym PAMPAT). The PAMPAT project is financed by the Swiss State Secretariat of Economic Affairs (SECO) and has an overall budget of 5 millions CHF.

Since its launching, the project has assisted the Tunisian Ministry of Industry and the public-private Tunisian Group for Canned Food Products (GICA) to set-up the certification and control system of the voluntary labelling standard "Food Quality Label Tunisia". Industrial companies interested in certifying their harissa production, which must be made of freshly picked chilli peppers, need to apply stringent product specifications and undergo a double check, both from the managing body of the label GICA and an external certification institute.

UNIDO has also provided technical assistance to harissa companies to set-up the required traceability system along the supply chain and comply with the product specifications. The latter were published in December 2014 by decision of the Minister of Industry. During the production season of 2015, five companies accounting for one third of total industrial harissa production in Tunisia started producing "Food Quality Label" harissa. In 2016 the number of certified companies went up to 7 and production volumes of labelled harissa more than tripled. These initiatives work towards facilitating the smooth flow of quality products between borders.

With UNIDO and public support, the "Food Quality Label" companies have already started promoting together their certified harissa. Also, thanks to the PAMPAT project and the involvement of several public institutions such as the Ministry of Industry, GICA, the Tunisian export promotion agency and the Foreign investment promotion institute, the new label is being presented collectively in several countries.

In the framework of the PAMPAT project, since August 2015 the "Food Quality Label" has already been promoted in several tradefairs and events in many different countries such as the U.S.A. (Fancy Food Show New York 2016), Germany (ANUGA Cologne 2015, International Street Food Festival Cologne 2016), Russia (World Food Moscow 2016), France (SIAL Paris 2016, European Tradefair Strasbourg 2016) Italy (EXPO Milan 2016), Spain (Alimentaria Barcelona 2016) and Switzerland (Swiss Competition of Local Food Products 2015). Promotion of the "Food Quality Label" has contributed to improve the export competitiveness of the labelled companies, ultimately allowing them to access global markets.

In parallel with the organization of promotional events, efforts have been made to develop promotional tools for the harissa label including: a specific website in French and English (<http://www.tunisian-harissa.com>), a recipe book with harissa prepared by a famous Tunisian TV chef (English, French, Russian, German), preparation of a promotional video, keys, brochures, etc. As a result of the promotional activities, harissa label is exported to at least five international markets such as Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Canada. A potential area of expansion is the e-commerce of Quality Labeled Tunisian harissa products to increase the outreach of this product. Seminars and awareness trainings for the beneficiaries have been held in 2016 for this purpose.

In view of the results, three additional harissa companies have already informed the Ministry of Industry and GICA of their interest to comply with the voluntary labelling standard during the upcoming production seasons. As certified harissa production will rise, an increasing number of farmers will benefit of higher prices for their premium quality peppers that are necessary as per product specifications to produce certified harissa. In 2015 and 2016 farmers producing chillies for the labelled harissa received up to 25% higher prices.

In 2016 over 70 farmers and collection centres were directly supported by UNIDO and GICA to be able to comply with the requirements related to quality and traceability of chilli peppers for "Food Quality Label" harissa.

Besides UNIDO's targeted support around the "Food Quality Label Tunisia", within the harissa value chain, the PAMPAT project has also assisted a cooperative of 164 rural women (the only female cooperative in Tunisia) to become operational, supporting the economic empowerment of women. Currently, UNIDO is supporting the cooperative

in gaining access to niche markets by producing high-quality traditional harissa made of sun-dried chilli peppers according to an ancestral recipe. While in 2014 the cooperative's members were producing harissa at home for family consumption, today they have professionalized production and have started exporting to the Swiss market under the cooperative's registered trademark "ERRIM".

Q10: Lessons learnt

- Collective labels are important to implement quality standards among producers and to set up collective promotion strategies in an integrated way. Thanks to the compliance with the code of practice and the respect of traceability, producers can create a basis for trust and understanding. At the same time, compliance with the same standards results in an improved inter-cooperation and a smoother dialogue among firms and therefore the definition of common action plans and strategies becomes easier.
 - The establishment of Public-Private Partnerships as a way to foster market access of traditional products. The Harissa Food Quality Label example clearly shows the importance of strengthening the cooperation between the interprofessional body (GICA) and the national Ministry responsible for the agro-industrial label. Thanks to this partnership, Harissa companies have been supported to comply with the Food Quality Label standards and they have also been prioritized in the trade fairs participation and promotion organized by the Interprofessional body.
 - Territorial collective labels are a powerful tool for promoting the targeted sector and the value chain as a whole, and facilitate the interaction among different actors within the value chain. The final product is sold in higher end markets thanks to the label and producers at the bottom level of the value chain also have a positive economic effect for ensuring the respect of the raw material traceability. In the Harissa case, in 2015, farmers growing chillies for the labelled harissa experienced a price increase of 17 per cent, compared to sales of standard chilli peppers. This has further increased in 2016, reaching +25%;
 - The set-up of a national quality support policy is necessary to ensure a broader impact and a better positioning of quality label products. Harissa was the first product to obtain the "Food Quality Label" in Tunisia, but the scope of this national label is wider. Labelled "sardines in olive oil" are already available on the market and several other foods are expected to join the "Food Quality Label" product range.
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