

TRADE-SA-TUNISIA EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT- REPORT BACK ON 1ST WORKSHOP

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WTO Chairs at the North-West University (South Africa) and the University of Tunis (Tunisia) have recently launched a bilateral research project under the auspices of the 'South Africa-Tunisia Science and Technology Collaboration' initiative. The research project is aimed at identifying realistic and sustainable export opportunities between the two countries, with a specific focus on SME (small and medium enterprise) exporters. The project, which is funded by South Africa's NRF (National Research Foundation) and Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research Tunisia's Department of Science and Technology will span a three-year period (2019-2021). It kicked off with a three-day planning workshop for the South African and Tunisian project teams at the NorthWest University in Potchefstroom, from 3-5 December 2019. With the global trade arena experiencing much turbulence and traditional trade relationships becoming increasingly uncertain, many African countries are giving more attention to intra-African trade. Although trade on the continent is still very limited, attitudes are changing, particularly at the policy level. "Over the last few years we have been hearing much more about Africa", said Prof Leila Baghdadi, WTO Chair and head of the Tunisian project team. Tunisia exports are mainly oriented to European markets with rather limited exports to Africa. Tunisia mainly trades with West Africa (about 57% of the country's total African trade). Only 4% of Tunisia's Africa trade is with Southern Africa. "South Africa would be a 'new' market for Tunisia," said Leila. South Africa's main export focus on the African continent are other SACU (Southern African Customs Union) and SADC (Southern African Development Community) member countries, with which South Africa has well-established trade ties. However, the synergies between South Africa and Tunisia could in time translate into a more robust trading relationship. One of the main obstacles to successful trade expansion in Africa is that policymakers and businesses often lack relevant and reliable data on which to base their market selection and/or development decisions. Where data is available, notably in international databases, it is often not readily accessible – especially to SMEs which face financial, knowledge and capacity constraints. "Large companies trading internationally generally have significant human and financial resources to draw on when researching and exporting to markets in various regions. But SMEs often lack the knowledge and/or capacity to effectively identify and pursue export opportunities," said Prof Wilma Viviers, WTO Chair and head of the South African project team. For the purpose of the project, the North-West University's TRADE-DSM® (Decision Support Model) will be used to identify realistic export opportunities for targeted SMEs in each country. The TRADE-DSM® is a market selection tool that uses a sophisticated data-filtering methodology to identify those opportunities that have the best chances of meeting market demand and delivering value. When the TRADE-DSM® is run for a particular country, it reveals a list of product-country combinations with the highest 'untapped' export potential for that country. These results then inform country or sector export strategies for particular markets – with a strategy either being aggressive or defensive, depending on the size, concentration and growth potential of the market in question.

More information is available at <http://wtochairs.org/south-africa/research/trade-sa-tunisia-export-opportunities-project-report-back-1st-workshop>

