

## Raja HAMDİ - Managing Director of Business Center

Sidi Bouzid

Located in the central west of Tunisia, Sidi Bouzid is a region with a productive agricultural sector, but despite its wealth, employment opportunities for young people in industry and services remain very limited, especially for women.

Raja Hamdi became the Managing Director of the Sidi Bouzid Business Center in 2014. The organization is focused on entrepreneurship development and sustainability through assistance and support to Tunisia's young entrepreneurs.

With a Master's Degree in IT from the Faculty of Sciences of Gafsa, Raja previously worked as a consultant in the private sector and was headhunted by the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to work on a Public-Private Partnership Project for the valorization of organic waste in Sidi Bouzid.

Born and raised in Sidi Bouzid, the 30-year-old is dynamic and passionate about promoting entrepreneurship and opportunities for youth in the region. As a regional partner of the Mashrou3i program, which is implemented by UNIDO and funded by USAID, the Italian Cooperation and the HP Foundation, the Sidi Bouzid Business Centre is working to better connect young entrepreneurs with UNIDO experts to receive coaching and technical support, as well as HP LIFE entrepreneurial training necessary for the creation of projects.

"We began our partnership with UNIDO and its Mashrou3i program the same year I became the director of the Business Centre. We worked together on the Business Plan Competition, which provided support to 10 start-ups. These 10

companies benefited from coaching from UNIDO experts in order to diagnose their needs and to carry out financial studies and market research." As a result, 9 of these companies are now operating today allowing the creation of 25 jobs. The systematic follow-up of these 10 start-ups by the Business Center has also enabled them to gain further assistance from various administrative and financial structures helping them to realize their projects.

"This partnership is also valued for the entrepreneurial training and support provided by the Mashrou3i program to young entrepreneurs in the launch phase of their company. Several young entrepreneurs from the Business Center received the HP LIFE training and others attended HP LIFE regional group coaching workshops to help them finalize their business plans."

The partnership has also benefited existing companies, providing them with technical assistance to grow and generate much needed jobs in the region.

"We identified 10 companies with high employment potential, of which 3 have been selected to receive technical assistance from UNIDO experts in financing, marketing strategy and market access. Thanks to the Mashrou3i program, these companies will create 42 jobs."

For Raja Hamdi, the future of the partnership with Mashrou3i remains promising. "We are in a pioneering region where many niches are still to be developed, in agro-industry, services, etc. Today we can develop better support for entrepreneurs and generate jobs by harnessing the wealth of the region."