



## Olfa DHOUBI - Olpha Soap

Kairouan

On the outskirts of Kairouan, where cattle farms and olive groves pepper the landscape, Olfa is busy addressing a box filled with her soap and cosmetic products to be shipped to Qatar.

A few years ago, the world of cosmetics was only a dream for her. So, when she got the chance to export her soap to Qatar, Olfa immediately seized the opportunity and invested in the creation of her company, Olpha Soap.

The organic sector is a booming industry and becoming a strong source of job creation in the region of Kairouan. Rich in natural resources, such as olives, prickly pears and eucalyptus, new business projects are starting up every year in the region.

“The viability of a cosmetics brand in Tunisia depends on its ability to export to foreign markets, and you need the organic certification,” explains Olfa. “There are some markets that are an exception, such as Qatar, which is why I decided to focus on exporting to this market first.”

After studying law, Olfa started to entertain the idea of starting a business by completing her end-of-studies project in cosmetics. Aware that her project idea had high potential, she enrolled in a training in cosmetics in Qatar. There, she learnt the inner workings of cosmetic production and especially how to analyze the demand of this market.

Back to Kairouan in 2016, she received support from the project Mashrou3i, organized by UNIDO and funded by USAID, the Italian Cooperation and HP Foundation. “After completing the online courses, I took part in an HP LIFE group coaching session”, she explains. “Led by Mr. Jalel Amri, the training was crucial for my project. I was coached and guided in the development of my action plan and the expert supported me to finalize my business plan.”

With full-confidence, in 2017 Olfa submitted her business plan to the Tunisian Bank of Solidarity (BTS) to obtain funds. While waiting for the loan agreement, Olfa was busy making tests for her products, step by step refining the variety of scents and combinations of ingredients.

“It takes over 6 months to reach the maturity of a solid soap that can be ready for use,” explains Olfa. “The very first range I launched was an Aleppo soap, made from virgin olive oil. Then, I developed several soaps based on the essential oils of lavender, cypress, eucalyptus, rosemary and rose water.”

Through the Mashrou3i program, Olfa also received several trainings that enabled her to improve her technical skills in cosmetics production, but also in sales in terms of market access, as well as in administrative management.

Two years following the official launch of her brand, Olfa has expanded her range of products to include clay-based beauty masks and already exports most of her production to Qatar. With a team of three people, one for sales and two for production, she also sells some of her products to beauty centres and hotels in Kairouan and in the coastal regions of the country.

“My best-selling product right now is black soap, a traditional Tunisian product used for hammam care,” says Olfa. “I plan to launch new beauty products, including a range of hand creams, which I am currently testing. I hope to recruit three additional employees by my side, to increase production and help increase sales.”

The road to success is long but Olfa is already on the right track. With the support of Mashrou3i she is obtaining the organic certification, which will open the gates to the European market and help her grow her business.