



Rym BELGUEYED - Eco Palme

Gabes

Gabes, in Southern Tunisia, is a region renowned for its traditional production of dates. Rym Belgueyed, saw an opportunity in turning the waste from these date palm plantations into a blooming business.

Before coming up with the idea for Eco Palm, Rym had experienced something many successful entrepreneurs have experienced: failure. After studying Chemistry, she launched an essential oils extraction business which didn't take off. Then, in 2013, while researching new business ideas that had potential to succeed in her region, she had an ah-ha moment.

"I thought about launching a start-up for the manufacture of sawdust," explains Rym. "The idea was interesting but the profit margin was rather low. After doing some more research, I discovered that in Latin America they are producing pallets for transporting goods out of palm-waste."

Rym was able to draw on her previous entrepreneurial experience. She took time setting up her business and developing a compelling business plan. She did market research, asking local companies and people in industry to confirm there was a demand for her products.

And visited a producer in Beja, the only other producer of moulded pallets in Tunisia, to learn more and help her to produce her first prototype and help enable her to secure vital funding from the bank.

In 2017, while waiting for her funding, Rym

discovered the Mashrou3i project, a public-private partnership between USAID, the Italian Cooperation, HP Foundation and UNIDO.

"The support of Mashrou3i experts has been very important in my first steps as entrepreneur," says Rym. "Through Mashrou3i, I received coaching adapted to my needs and also benefited from several trainings in taxation, environmental techniques and marketing and communication."

The same year, she finally obtained a credit of 75,000 Tunisian Dinars from the BFPME (bank of financing for SME's), and additional funds from various organizations including a 50,000 TND Dinars donation from Souk Attanmia and a FOPRODI grant of 72,000 TND. Added to her 30,000 TND of self-financing, this capital enabled her to acquire the machines needed for production such as a press, mixer and shredder.

Eco Palme officially launched in the summer of 2018. Thanks to Mashrou3i's regional expert and expert in financing, Rym has recently obtained an additional fund of 25,000 Tunisian Dinars to meet her needs in glue – an essential ingredient for pallet moulding.

"Entrepreneurial life is not easy on a daily basis, but I am confident about my business. And with the help of Mashrou3i, I hope to get my product certified."

Rym will continue to receive the support of Mashrou3i to assist her in market access, especially in terms of tapping into the European market.