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GFI Newsletter: Empowering Workers

Tunisia Inclusive Labor Initiative (TILI) update

As the leader of a regional movement that has resulted in the toppling of several autocratic rulers in the Arab world, Tunisia is still working to achieve its expectations of a democratically inclusive government. Recently, Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki spoke of his goal to lift two million Tunisians out of poverty and has called for a new economic model. He has not, however, offered a specific plan. Despite the promise of an improved economic situation for average Tunisians, the government has struggled to identify and combat the roots of the problem, one of which is informal labor.

In the past few months, increased international attention has been directed toward Tunisia's informal sector. The African Development Bank (ADB) has funded several studies on informal labor by the Center for Research and Social Studies (CRES), one of GFI's TILI partners; and the president of the Institute for Democracy and Labor, Hernando de Soto, has released a book on informality in Tunisia. Additionally, research by Stanford University and others is helping to raise awareness of the current problems facing Tunisia's economy—with special attention to informality.

This increased attention to Tunisia's current economic situation reveals that the Tunisian government, local CSOs, and international organizations are all starting to grasp the serious implications that informal labor has for the country's political and economic development.

GFI's TILI program, which aims to help informal Tunisian workers access decent work and government protections through the creation of a more inclusive legal and economic framework, has successfully completed its second quarter of activities. We have formed partnerships with the Tunisian government and international and local organizations, completed dozens of in-depth interviews with government officials, finalized the first-ever questionnaire on informality in Tunisia, and begun the surveying of 1,200 informal workers and employers.

In its first phase TILI has gained the recognition and support of key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Employment and CRES, the research wing of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In addition to these partnerships, TILI has begun forming the TILI Advisory Committee that will provide support, networks, and recommendations for the advancement and success of the program. on informality in Tunisia, and begun the surveying of 1,200 informal workers and employers. Of the eight to twelve projected members, the committee has seven so far from UTICA, UNDP, the ILO, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, the Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Development.

TILI has actively built strong partnership with six local CSOs in El Kef, Sfax, Kasserine, and Mednine. Most of these CSOs have had few opportunities to discuss informality, despite the fact that the majority of their beneficiaries are informal workers. All six, however, have become passionate about the issue. They will come together for the first time in late May for training on NGO governance and coalition building by another of our program partners, Partners for Democratic Change (PDC).

A report outlining the major tax systems in Tunisia as well as current barriers and opportunities in the legal framework for formalizing enterprises and workers was completed in April. These findings will be discussed in detail with government representatives during roundtables in Phase Two along with information gathered from dozens of interviews with officials on data collection, understanding of informality, policies and programs addressing informal workers, and possible areas of collaboration.

One of the most significant accomplishments of TILI's Phase One is the surveying of 1,200 informal workers and employers throughout Tunisia. This is the first survey in Tunisia ever conducted on informality. Data from the survey will provide important insights into the realities of the informal sector and serve as the basis for the multi-stakeholder discussions on formalization that will take place in Phase Two.

As Phase One comes to a close, TILI has a much clearer understanding of Tunisia's informal population and of the legislative and bureaucratic processes hindering formalization. GFI applauds the amazing work of our TILI program staff and partners.

Investing in women producers

Oxfam International has just released a report based on its research of collective action among women smallholder producers in Ethiopia, Mali, and Tanzania. ***Women's Collective Action: Unlocking the Potential of Agricultural Markets*** highlights the benefits of collective action and points to the challenges that remain for women producers and the development organizations working to economically empower them.

Through our projects with smallholder producers in Guatemala and our partnership with the Self Employed Women's Association, which has successfully brought together women textile and salt producers on a large scale in India, GFI has seen firsthand the powerful positive effect of collective action on livelihoods for even the poorest of workers. **Oxfam's** report details the following benefits for women producers who are members of agricultural collectives:

- Higher productivity and product quality because of group members' access to training and improved technology
- Increased income because of improved productivity and quality; women who are members of cooperatives in the countries studied earned anywhere from 70% to 80% more than those who are not affiliated
- Improved access to credit and to market information

Despite the economic benefits and some incremental increases in empowerment that women have realized with their collective action, the report notes the continuing barriers to women's market access and full social and economic empowerment. These barriers include time constraints imposed by household and family responsibilities, limited mobility outside the home or village, and social and legal norms that restrict women's land or asset ownership and decision-making power.

The report concludes with specific recommendations for policy makers—including interventions that address women's property rights—and for development organizations—including support for informal groups as the places where women can "build their capacity for future effective participation and leadership in formal organizations" and support for "gender-responsive group leadership that can ensure...ongoing equitable outcomes for women members."

[Read the full report.](#)

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