SME coaching as a job generator
# Table of Contents

1 Introduction ........................................ 4  
2 Executive Summary ................................. 6  
3 Objective ........................................... 8  
4 Detailed Description ................................. 9  
   Process Presentation ................................. 10  
   Operational Structure ................................. 12  
   Phase 1. Business Leads Generation ............... 14  
   Phase 2. Needs Assessment .......................... 16  
   Phase 3. Collaboration Agreement Design ......... 20  
   Phase 4. Implementation .............................. 23  
   Phase 5. Follow-up .................................. 26  
5 Conclusions ......................................... 28  
6 Cases .................................................. 30  
7 Annexes .............................................. 34  

Syrian employee at Raneem Faisal’s Teenah textile company  
Irbid, Jordan
1 Introduction

SPARK’s Local Employment in Africa for Development (LEAD) Programme has been operational since 2016. The three-year Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs-funded programme creates jobs in Libya, Tunisia, and Somalia and thereby tackles irregular migration and radicalisation.

The programme aims to create jobs for youth (18-35) by supporting them to launch their own businesses or by assisting existing businesses to grow and expand. The focus of the programme is to provide existing SMEs and young entrepreneurs with the technical skills and capacity to grow by facilitating access to markets, technical skills and finance. The LEAD programme also seeks to foster a culture of entrepreneurship by engaging with relevant actors and stakeholders as a way of strengthening existing entrepreneurship structures, as well as working with academic institutions to instil knowledge of entrepreneurship in education.

The overall objective of the LEAD programme is to support Libyan, Tunisian and Somali youth to become financially independent. The programme focuses on economic sectors with growth potential in regions where youth unemployment levels are high. Through the development of business ideas, the provision of training and coaching, and supporting access to finance, the LEAD programme aims to establish a total of 109 new businesses and to support 254 SMEs that have high potential for growth and job creation, all of which will culminate in the creation of 3,220 jobs. Having gender equality as one of its main focuses, the LEAD programme has so far created 1,964 jobs, out of which 825 were filled by women (over 40%).

Being a large multi-country and multi-activity intervention, the LEAD programme has so far successfully managed to interconnect its many components and make them available to all beneficiaries. Therefore, it often happened that young employees, future entrepreneurs or SMEs have progressed and complemented their knowledge, skills and opportunities by making the best use of more than one growing opportunity this programme has to offer.

The major component of the LEAD programme aims to create sustainable youth employment in growth sectors through supporting existing SMEs (70%) and new entrepreneurs (30%). Provision of support services to existing SMEs with growing potential has been identified as an area almost entirely uncovered by other youth employment initiatives. Upon initial success in Tunisia when 6 supported companies hired 73 people as a result of SPARKs assistance in 2017, SPARK recruited an SME specialist to identify and assess the needs of local companies in efforts to support job creation. This involved identifying suitable businesses (2 years plus) and then ascertaining the main obstacles they face by understanding the business model, evaluating performance against cash flow, sales, and customer portfolio. SPARK cost shares with participating businesses in order to encourage their expansion and job creation. To date, the technical assistance provided by SPARK has resulted in the creation of 282 new jobs by the end of 2018, with a further 170 jobs expected to be created throughout 2019 through this component only.

This innovative intervention, in addition to being cost-effective and efficient in delivery of results (it takes only 6 months from initial assessment to job creation; with average cost per job between 200 and 500 euro) has proven its long-term effects on both increased employability and employment of youth as well as growth of targeted SMEs and their market expansion.

With the aim of capturing this success and making it a standardised and replicable service in support to employment and economic development of underserved areas, SPARK has designed this manual so that the service can be replicated in other target countries.
This manual is designed to present a model of innovative practice in tackling youth unemployment in transition and developing economies. The manual focuses on the major component of the LEAD programme implemented by SPARK and its partners in Tunisia – generating jobs by supporting growth of existing SMEs.

From the beginning of the programme in 2016, SPARK piloted and refined the practice of mapping SMEs with potential to grow; identifying their impediments to growth; targeting the right type of assistance they need; matching that assistance with external expertise; and creating a direct link between growth and job generation.

The manual aims to capture this process and make it operational by dividing it into 5 major components, aligned in time as phases. It is important to observe that some elements do intersect and overlap. Therefore, a number of crucial moments demanding special attention has been examined and highlighted.

Major factors affecting efficient delivery of results have been clearly marked and thoroughly explained in order to emphasise their essential role in creating a resilient and adaptable structure. These practical features and instructions have been presented in the form of lessons learned and recommendations to any similar future endeavour.

Having its tendency to offer practical guidance to those interested in replicating this model, the manual is written from the implementation point of view. Hence, attention is devoted to samples, forms, illustrations and operational tips enabling easier and effective mobilisation of resources on the ground.

Last but not least, the importance of monitoring and evaluation has been made visible in all described phases. The direct link between M&E, efficient delivery of outputs and sustainability of results could not be overstressed in interventions of this level of complexity. Therefore, the manual Conclusions once again reiterate major strengths and features most relevant for effectiveness, in order not to be avoided in any similar follow-up or new action.

Finally, the language of the manual responds to its objective, purpose and targeted audience. Therefore, it has been made easy to read by using everyday practical language and illustrated through examples, cases and stories coming from those who have implemented and/or benefited from the concrete actions of the programme.
3 Objective

The objective of the manual is to provide guidance to all service providers involved in strengthening capacities of SMEs as a tool of economic growth in developing regions. More specifically, this manual is here to present and disseminate a functional and replicable model of providing targeted assistance to SMEs with the specific purpose to generate jobs and increase rates and quality of employment.

Recognising the relevance of this type of intervention, its broad applicability, cost-effectiveness and adaptability is the main purpose of this manual.

Based on SPARK’s actual experience, the manual is here to offer valuable examples of best practices; overcome challenges; and recommendations coming out of concrete solutions piloted in the field.

Based on a model designed and tested by SPARK in Tunisia, the manual is aimed at practitioners active in promoting employment be they private business; government; or civil society sector.

In addition to guiding those who are interested in implementing similar interventions, it aims to inspire donors, international organisations, national decision-makers and all those who contribute to policy development to enlist this approach among measures supporting economic growth; youth empowerment; regional development; equality and social cohesion.

And last but not least, this manual is here to support SPARK employees in their everyday work, standardisation of practices and even more efficient delivery of results.

4 Detailed description

The following segment of the manual explains the process of providing coaching to SMEs in a form of targeted technical assistance leading to job generation. It outlines steps, timeframe and division of responsibilities among actors and their link to expected results. The particular attention is being paid to potentially challenging elements; hence, a set of recommendations is offered based on best practices identified during implementation.

For easier understanding, the process has been divided into 5 interlinked and mutually dependant phases. Each phase is presented by its content; function; timeframe; and deliverables. The aspects of monitoring and quality assurance have been made an integral part of each phase.
Process Presentation

Enhancing Business/Job creation: Process

**Business lead generation**
1. Identify business leads
2. Request SPARK assistance
3. Conduct needs assessment
4. Design the TOR/Action plan
5. Identify consultant

**Needs assessment**
6. Conduct needs assessment
7. Identify consultant
8. Collect relevant information
9. Verify and approve deliverables
10. Submit to RPM/SPARK HO
11. Submit to RPM/SPARK HO
12. Implement the technical assistance
13. Collect deliverables
14. Verify and approve deliverables

**Collaboration agreement design**
15. Verify jobs creation & track hired data
16. Final field review
17. Review and feedback

**Implementation**
18. Website
19. Website

**Evaluation**
20. Monitoring & Evaluation

---

SPARK

Enterprise

Consultant or Business service Provider

RPM/SPARK HO
Operational structure

There are 3 major actors leading the process forward - SPARK, SMEs, and expert consultants (technical assistance providers). Each actor assumes its role within each phase, as follows:

**SPARK** designs, implements and monitors all activities; bears responsibility for overall programme success and delivery of results. SPARK identifies scope, subject and timeframe of technical assistance provided to SMEs and facilitates delivery of outputs (KPIs) according to a tailored action plans. It defines and maintains contractual relations between SMEs and consultants; and assures the quality of assistance provided. In addition, SPARK invests in follow-up activities; maintains records; evaluations; dissemination materials; and reports.

**SMEs** prepare and provide initial application information in assessment form; participate in needs assessment and help design adequate technical assistance; provide stimulative working environment for efficient delivery of KPIs according to the action plan; organise and support implementation of all elements of assistance; make sure all business rules, regulations and procedures are respected; maintain open and responsive communication with SPARK and consultants; evaluate consultants’ performance; keep records of job hires and follow programme requirements.

**Consultants/External experts** participate in the design of technical assistance; deliver technical assistance precisely in accordance with the ToR; keep efficient and timely communication with both SPARK and SME; closely monitor and guide delivery by action plans; maintain records and performance reports; participate in progress and ad-hoc meetings; prepare tools and supporting formats necessary for execution of tasks.
In practical terms, during this phase SPARK seeks qualified and interested companies showing adequate growing potential that may benefit from this type of assistance. There are no restrictions in terms of SME’s area of business as economic criteria (job generation) lead the selection.

In order to identify companies, SPARK investigates the market including, desk research; contacts with business networks and associations; referrals; recommendations from local partners; staff; exchange with experts and business consultants; etc. Also, the programme is publicised and well known among SMEs and they are encouraged to contact SPARK directly and inquire about options to participate.

The final matching takes place after series of meetings, analyses of SMEs needs and positive assessment of impact that particular technical assistance is likely to have on SMEs ability to create jobs.

Note
It is highly advisable to establish a strong link with the entrepreneurs and SMEs in order to obtain solid and reliable information about the company, its previous actions, position in the market, general organisational culture, work ethics, etc. This link has to be maintained throughout the process, but it is absolutely crucial in the beginning when input information are collected determining all elements of future cooperation.

There are several crucial Selection Criteria that govern investigation and decision on SMEs to be taken into further examination:

- **Business Criteria:** The main criteria to consider is the SME’s potential to create new jobs and generate growth if assisted
- **Geographical criteria:** Priority is given to SMEs located in interior and deprived regions of the country or the underserved regions of the main towns
- **Innovation criteria:** It is considered an advantage if the company is developing certain expertise (product/service), addressing a new market/niche
- **Social Impact Criteria:** gender and youth impact are to be prioritised through SMEs hiring more female than male (such as pharmaceuticals); or hiring more youth (electronics /BPO)

- **Cost Per Job Criteria:** The scope of technical assistance has been capped to under 500 Euro/job (as average); this is mainly to contain the cost of the TA according to the job generation potential for each case.

There are also Disqualification Criteria that lead to immediate exclusion of an SME at stage of selection:

- The SME receives assistance from another assistance projects (EBRD/ USAID/ Tunisian Upgrading Program) for the same action
- SME’s financial viability has been jeopardised
- SME is not open to share evidence of its business records

The Phase 1 is completed when mutual understanding is achieved accompanied by preliminary and informal agreement on the model of cooperation and expected outcomes. This is where the SME submits formal application containing general information on solvency and initial areas of interest. It is to be duly noted that Phase 1 is simply the beginning of actual selection process, serving as eligibility and administrative check for entering the next stage. The statistics so far shows that on average 50-60% of SMEs identified in the first phase actually make it to receiving assistance. This rigorous selection is completed through a series of meetings, exchange and assessment tools applied during the next phase of the process – the needs assessment.
The purpose of this phase is to further examine and ensure compatibility between an SME and SPARK’s programme. In practical terms, SPARK performs a SWOT analyses with the SME, as a first step. This is where the SME’s capacities and position in the market become clear. Also, potential interventions in order to eliminate weaknesses are jointly examined as first outline of future technical assistance. It is important to note that there is no “catalogue” of offered expertise prepared in advance as a given; each technical assistance is identified and designed individually, according to SME’s needs, SPARK’s standards; market situation and its potential to generate growth in a particular working environment.

Phase 2.
Needs Assessment

Please note that this phase can take from a couple of weeks to even five months, depending on the complexity of SME’s needs and its market situation. It is important to plan and allow for as much time and effort as this stage requires, since we cannot overemphasize the importance of determining the right expertise for overall success of the programme. To do so, various communication channels may be used: from a number of face-to-face meetings (group or individual) with the company’s decision makers; on-line exchange; shared information and documents; group and individual tasks and assignments; evaluation sessions; to staff retreats; facilitated discussions; meetings with experts; design of questionnaires and polls; and other tools and formats adapted to particular SME’s background.

In order to make sure that the targeted TA is actually the most needed one, a deep assessment must be done in order to have a clear vision on how SPARK can assist and what is the action leading to best impact. In most cases, it is something an SME could not have done without assistance; but in some cases it is even something an SME would do on its own but perhaps at a slower pace.

**Note**
As a most common case, SMEs will communicate several different needs they recognise in practical work as obstacles to growth (from unlocking markets to overcoming critical internal issues such as internal governance or management practices). As a rule, SMEs’ management provides a list of needs (in Trainings-Certifications-Access to finance). In order to really target the most important ones, we try to understand which one is directly linked to potential buyer (for example); it can be a pending order waiting for a certain standard to be applied or a client requirement that the company does not have. Staring from concrete issues and by addressing them we can generate added value to SMEs, i.e. increase of sales and jobs.

How do we perform an impact assessment?
The impact assessment has been incorporated in the process of developing assistance packages and formalizing SMEs agreements: once an SME applies for assistance, the business advisor (SPARK) conducts growth diagnostics with it and, based on this analysis, assist in developing a collaboration agreement, a documented approach to addressing the top impediments to growth. Through this process, SPARK and SMEs have evidence-driven, formalized plans, with a timeline for increased hiring.

Once the technical assistance area is agreed upon, SPARK and the SME management jointly design the action plan by listing mandatory activities and expected deliverables and estimating quantity of work and time necessary to complete the assignment. The Action Plan, after being approved by all parties, becomes the basis for the creation of Terms of Reference for the future Consultant/Expert.

SPARK maintains and regularly updates its list of Pool of Experts, gathered through previous cooperation and published calls. Also, new experts are identified and selected according to current needs. In addition to examining their references, SPARK also regularly evaluates their work in order to hire those with highest scores. This practice has also been made part of the LEAD programme, and SMEs are required to fill in an a posteriori evaluation forms evidencing their satisfaction with service provided and its provider.

There are 3 different ways of selecting consultants for the assignment:

1. SPARK matches the technical assistance identified to the right consultant
2. The company (SME) chooses itself the right consultant
3. The Consultant contacts SPARK to assist a company (SME)

For each TA, a short list of 3 consultants is created according to their references and previous evaluation scores (if any). They all receive a brief description of the SME and the assistance required and are invited to submit technical and financial proposal for the assignment.

The consultants’ proposals are selected according to following criteria:

- Daily rates (average applied in Tunisia with some exception when the expertise is considered as rare. SPARK has developed a clear guidance on expert fees per technical assistance area)
- Level of effort: can be negotiated and depends on the size of company, activities, location, etc.
- The expertise: years of experience, including to projects implemented, referees, etc.
- University degrees and certifications obtained.
- Afterwards, a 25 – 45 minute interview is scheduled in order to examine the CV and validate supporting documents. SPARK’s final choice is submitted to the company to obtain its approval.

The Phase 2 is completed with the selection of expert/consultancy provider. This means that the SME has been examined and analysed from the point of view of the missing expertise necessary for stimulating expansion and growth. The SME responded to findings of this examination by proposing a set of interventions, activities and deliverables (an action plan) to be completed in the period to come. The next logical step is to match the necessary expertise with an available consultant capable of providing assistance according to the designed action plan. Hence the Phase 3 begins after we have agreed on what we are going to achieve (expected deliverables), who is going to do it (consultant) and how and when the process will be completed (Action Plan).
Phase 3.
Collaboration Agreement Design

This is a phase in which the identified consultancy assignment is transformed into technical assistance. All activities in this phase revolve around developing and concluding a Collaboration Agreement between SPARK, the SME (Company) and the Consultant. Although it appears to be rather technical, the main purpose of this phase is to establish preconditions governing and guaranteeing delivery of programme results. It sets roles and obligations of all 3 sides involved; specifies deliverables (KPIs); states percentages of cost share/payment terms; elaborates on activity details; connects deliverables with timeline; and stipulates other provisions. This is where true commitment gets its obligatory form.

In practical terms, SPARK drafts the Collaboration Agreement by collecting relevant information (context; company profile; project rationale) and aligning them to provisions already defined through other outputs (needs assessment; Action Plan; consultant Terms of Reference; project documents). As the SME has already participated in design of the main outputs in previous phases, it is expected that a sense of joint ownership is preserved in this phase, too.

The elements of shared responsibilities are built in all implementation stages. Therefore, the mechanism of cost-sharing is here to confirm commitment of the SME to duly participate and support the assistance offered, as well as to deliver its contractual obligations (hiring precisely defined number of new employees linked to the assistance) by the set date. The percentage of cost share is variable, depending on the size of the company; type and scope of offered assistance; expected number of new workers. Also, some exceptions are possible, where more favourable ratios are offered to new, innovative companies led by young people; women entrepreneurs; etc. Normally, the percentage of cost-share ranges from 10 to 50%.

Note
Collaboration Agreement Design actually establishes link between SMEs needs and new hires. This is where commitment and joint ownership among all parties: an SME, SPARK, and consultant are confirmed. The common vision - strengthened with cost-sharing arrangement - aligns incentives so that all parties aim to create as many jobs as possible. This approach also helps local businesses understand the important role they play in reducing unemployment.

The Collaboration Agreement institutes control and verification mechanisms and turns them into contractual obligations. As hiring mostly happens at the end of technical assistance, instruments should be in place that allow for follow up and monitoring. The SMEs are obliged to submit and sign a Hired Data Form listing expected vs. actual hiring data (including name, position, contract type and contact details).

Note
It is important to maintain the position and not the person. The actual hired person can be changed for various reasons; it is important that a need for this position is created and its necessity is recognised by employer on a long-term basis.

According to current programme statistics, the data show that over 40 different positions have been created as result of Cooperation Agreements signed and executed so far. The positions range from basic to high-ranked; but also from specialised and subject-specific to general business development and administration jobs. It goes without saying that actual positions differ from case to case, depending on company type; its level of development and organisational structure; but mostly on identified need that became the focus of intervention implemented as technical assistance.

Given the importance of this phase, additional attention is placed on review and approval of the Collaboration Agreement by SPARK’s Headquarters, mainly by examining the value proposition within the agreement that must clearly highlight the causality TA/Job generation impact. Their official approval is sought in order to make sure the Agreement is signed respecting requirements of the project documentation; donor rules; SPARK’s internal rules and regulations; compliance with other projects; and financial plans.
Phase 4. Implementation

The purpose of this phase is to execute all previously developed plans and translate them into reality. This means applying the identified expertise in a concrete business setting and making it a regular practice of an SME to be carried out independently by its own employees.

Led by all jointly designed strategic documents, the Consultant enters the actual working environment and guides the SME and its team towards envisaged results. This phase usually takes 3-4 months, depending on the scope and type of technical assistance. The practical methods of implementation vary from one TA to another, given different subject areas; SME's size; location; complexity of deliverables; etc. However, mechanisms guiding the process and ensuring its effectiveness have been made a standard in all TAs provided. The selected consultant enters the SME and makes a detailed operational plan with the management. Activities to be implemented, as said, are different, but their type, participants and schedule needs to be cleared with SME and complementary to its other regular business activities. In many cases, the right timing is proven as crucial for efficient achievement of results.

Note

Make sure to constitute a solid and trustful relationship with external experts and maintain it all the way through implementation, at each stage. Regular and open communication with them needs to be prioritised in order to secure timely and effective service provision. This way, close monitoring and introduction of corrective measures (where necessary) minimise risk of failure.

One of the most important elements for achieving long-term impact of the assistance is to enable independent application of newly acquired skills and knowledge by the SME’s employees. Therefore, every TA as a rule contains capacity building elements, be that staff training; organising internal processes and procedures; developing strategic documents; and sometimes even all of that. It is important to make this principle understood by both
Consultant and the SME’s management from the very beginning of cooperation – the sustainability of provided service in reality translates into the ability of employees to perform it regularly and independently in their future work.

---

**Note**

In Tunisia, the most expertise in terms of SMEs development is needed in the area of stimulating export. For the local companies, it is very important to expand their business by entering international markets. The first step in order to do so is to get their production certified in order to be able to apply commercial strategies. This entails that they must implement all kind of internationally recognized standards, mostly Quality Management Systems (QMS): 9001 / 22001 / 14001, etc. Therefore, technical assistance is provided using methods such as trainings, coaching, capacity buildings and efficient process implementation.

The Collaboration Agreement has specified in detail what needs to be done; the level of effort; and deadlines. In addition, it has clearly defined operational deliverables (such as reports; document formats; mandatory evidence). This is done in order to make sure both SME and Consultant share the same working documents at all times – the room for individual interpretations and misunderstanding is thus rather limited. In addition, regular (after each activity) and coherent reporting system allows for transparency, enables close monitoring by SPARK and quick corrective measures, should the need be. This way, a very efficient validation and verification flow has been secured making monitoring part of each phase but at the same time not compromising efficiency of implementation. Verification is also part of financial monitoring – this is how the payments are approved and timely executed.

This becomes crucial in all cases that require intervening by SPARK when implementation comes to a pause for unexpected reasons – mostly due to SMEs prioritising ad-hoc and regular business activities over implementation of the TA. In such situations, SPARK usually comes in as facilitator creating pressure and motivating SME (or sometimes Consultant) to find ways to overcome obstacles and compensate for the lost time. It is fair to say that the controlling mechanisms and operational structure have proven their resilience in practice – so far only 1 TA did not achieve envisaged results.

The SME fills in and submits an evaluation of Consultant’s performance containing data on satisfaction with Consultant’s professional work and expertise as well as overall quality of the TA. The purpose of evaluation is two-fold: it will provide insight into Consultant’s work (his/her professional conduct as well as the expertise in the area); also it will help assess the relevance of technical assistance in the context of the SMEs expectations and its ability to perform it without SPARK’s assistance. The findings of this evaluation will make an important segment in the overall evaluation of results, in particular in its segment of lessons learned and future work recommendations.

This phase ends by completion of the Technical Assistance – verification; approval; and payment upon collected deliverables by the Consultant. This is where the Consultant’s work is done and the SME is able to continue to independently use knowledge and tools acquired. During this phase, the need for expanding the team in terms of number; profiles; and positions is created due to newly introduced processes within the SME. The team expansion through new hiring could have already taken place during implementation period. The job generation is in all cases directly or indirectly linked to the TA, for this reason all jobs created after SPARK approval and starting the implementation can be counted. SPARK also performs monitoring visits in order to validate actual job generation results. What happens in the last stage of implementation (hiring) will be presented in the next chapter.
Phase 5. Follow-up

The purpose of this phase is to monitor and ensure delivery of final outcomes — generation of new jobs as set by the Collaboration Agreement. Due to the nature of process, it is clear that most of hiring happens during or at the end of technical assistance.

Hence, the SMEs tend to fulfill its chronologically last obligation sometime closer to the Agreement’s end. Therefore, the Collaboration Agreement predicts a period of 6 months after its approval date in which the SME is obliged to provide the hire data to reach the targeted job generation and/or deliver additional jobs. SPARK performs monitoring visits in order to validate number of hires. This phase is particularly engaging as it encourages and facilitates efficient delivery of new jobs. In practical terms, generation of new jobs linked to technical assistance has been the main goal and subject of every communication between SPARK, SME and Consultant from the day 1 – even before the application process had started. All actors involved were absolutely clear about what is expected as a final outcome and it has been made part of all project documents. Moreover, the exact number of generated jobs has been listed as no. 1 contractual obligation of the SME.

The jobs need to be directly linked to TA (coming out as a result of unlocking new markets, reaching new clients, complying with new customers’ requirements, confirming pending orders, eliminating production bottlenecks’ or launching new products by implementing new business process/procedure/activity introduced or expanded) but there is no specification or any other limitation in terms of type; level; or work department. However, vulnerable or less employable groups are favoured wherever relevant. This, first of all, entails employment of young people who are also the subject to incentives under special contracts offered by the government — in all cases, SPARK tends to recommend this type of contract to SMEs. When it comes to employing women, SPARK offers more favourable terms of financial support to SMEs likely to hire them.

This phase evaluation concentrates around collecting evidence; verifying job creation and tracking hire data. The procedure has been devised as part of contractual obligation including deadlines, formats and documents substantiating provided information. Site visits are also part of the verification.

The outcomes of this phase (being the final outcomes of the programme) are new jobs generated in direct/indirect connection to designed and implemented coaching/technical assistance. The information on number of jobs, types of contracts, positions and names of employees are collected and verified against expected KPI. The site visits offer even more insight into quality of recruitment and sustainability of achieved results. So far (November 2017 – end of December 2018) 282 jobs (out of expected 458 in three years) have been effectively created.
5 Conclusions

As the main purpose of this manual is directed towards its future audience – the practitioners – it is important to additionally underline the programme features identified as the main components safeguarding resilience of its structure.

In more practical terms, these are the elements that should not be avoided in designing and implementation of any intervention inspired by this manual:

- Make sure you have all the elements in consideration when selecting an SME to be supported – including general market information
- Be particularly attentive to identifying the right need to be addressed by expert assistance (as SMEs tend to communicate more than 1 need)
- Put additional effort in building an open and trustworthy relationship with an SME – this will help getting right set of accurate and relevant information crucial for determining right kind of support
- Promote and support creation of sense of joint ownership – make an SME part of planning and execution in all stages of work; give them room to influence and participate in decision-making (creating action plans; choosing consultants; identification of KPIs)
- Cost-sharing is a win-win mechanism in support of commitment, joint ownership and efficient delivery
- Do not work with SMEs tending not to disclose or even providing false business data
- Invest time in selecting and evaluating experts/consultants
- Create a positive atmosphere between SME and consultant; make field visits your duty
- Make clear that sustainability of jobs is what we aim for – introduce mechanisms of monitoring and follow-up after the assistance is completed
- Translate all agreements into legally binding forms and connect them to programme documents
- Create clear and easy to follow standardised communication and exchange forms; it will prevent misinterpretation but also help collect unified and comparable M&E data
- Invest time to follow-up and collect data necessary for monitoring and evaluation; introduce evidence-based corrections
- Time devoted to M&E is actually time saved; make sure that M&E has been made part of all phases of work
- Support and promote participation of successful SMEs in other LEAD programme components (internships; access to finance; etc.)

As the main purpose of this manual is directed towards its future audience – the practitioners – it is important to additionally underline the programme features identified as the main components safeguarding resilience of its structure.
6 Cases

Case 1

Soprotic

Founded in 1991 in the governorate of Manouba, Soprotic manufactures leather shoes exclusively for the export markets in Europe and the Middle-East countries, where it faces strong competition.

SPARK and SOPROTIC jointly designed a technical collaboration effort to help the company improve management system and implement a new export strategy while strengthening its product portfolio and raising quality levels.

Mr. Lassad SLAMA, SOPROTIC founder and general manager, explained: “We have a market penetration problem, we are not enough visible and our corporate identity is too weak. We began with a diagnosis. We found many problems. But with the support of SPARK and the working group we put together an action plan and chose several priorities to working on: new brand strategy, export KPI, and enhancing the productivity of our commercial team.”

The technical collaboration effort enhanced SOPROTIC’s competitiveness by optimizing is commercial capabilities, retaining its actual main clients and rising its visibility in new export targeted markets.

Mr. Lassad SLAMA stressed the long-term impact of the technical collaboration, “We worked most of all on our business sustainability. I should train the team to continue the work done, and improve our day to day working methods.”

As a result of SPARK and SOPROTIC’s technical collaboration effort, SOPROTIC created 15 new jobs to respond to new demand.

Case 2

Medicasud

Medicasud Industrie is a medical device manufacturing company employing 75 persons.

The company’s operations were initiated in 2014 by producing surgical masks, dressings and several medical devices to address hospitals and private clinics’ needs. Manufactured products cover mainly personal hygiene, medical clothing, sterile disposable drapes and sets addressing surgical specialties. Based on its local but good quality products, competitive prices, together with reliable and effective servicing offers to customers, MEDICASUD INDUSTRIE reached 60% market shares. However, current big accounts are now asking for certifications, the market size is a limit for a sustainable growth but access to export is also conditioned by certifications. In order to consolidate current big accounts and to access significant export markets (Algeria, South Africa, Europe) overcoming certification obstacle became a priority.

SPARK and the company management through an ongoing discussion process have developed a plan to assist MEDICASUD INDUSTRIE to update its multiple Quality Management System in compliance with ISO 13485: 2016 requirements in order the sustain its business and unlock new high-add value markets mainly in sub-Saharan countries.

Mustapha Mnioui, one of the company’s managers and in charge of MEDICASUD business development said: “This certification is an absolute must have in our industry, with the full implementation of the new process and certification awarded, our company can be one of the African export champions and will be able to compete with the big European and Asian companies. Thanks to SPARK support this will be achieved in a short term deadlines.”

As a result of SPARK and MEDICASUD’s technical collaboration effort, the company was able to hire 84 new employees to respond to new demand, out of which 81 were women.
7 Annexes

1 Information Form
2 Collaboration Agreement
3 Hiring data form
4 Consultant evaluation form

Contact

Stichting SPARK
Van Diemenstraat 70
1013 CN Amsterdam

Email spark@spark-online.org
Phone +31 (0)20 753 0311

www.spark-online.org