



Tunisia

Leveraging Trade Liberalization as a Means of Poverty Reduction

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Mohamed Chemingui, Senior Economist and Chief of Regional Integration, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

More winners in trade negotiations

The research, co-authored by Mohamed Chemingui and Chokri Thabet, focused on the potential impact of agricultural policy reform in Tunisia on poverty in rural areas, which were taking place in the context of the free trade negotiations between the European Union and Tunisia. In 2000, the Tunisian Government was exploring the option of including agricultural and food products as part of the free trade agreement and seemed ready to open Tunisia's markets, without any evaluation of the impact this would have on rural households. Initiating a new approach that integrated social analysis with economic reform, the research aimed to bridge this information gap, focusing on the impact that food-related trade reforms would have on poverty-related indicators, including income, food prices, food security and migration.

With their research, Chemingui and his team were able to influence the negotiation process between Tunisia and the EU by preventing the implementation of the agreement without a proper common framework governing it. Combining the study results with other related analyses, it became clear that without implementing appropriate policies on both sides (EU and Tunisia), the welfare losses for rural households in Tunisia would be severe, particularly in terms of unemployment and poverty rates.

Mohamed Chemingui is a senior economist and chief of the regional integration section at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA). In 2001, just as GDN was emerging as a new global research network, he received a medal for his research on trade reforms in Tunisia and their link to rural poverty. At the time, he was working at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Montpellier, France, as a Post-Doctoral Fellow.



Chemingui notes: “Our research has been able to prove that a trade agreement is only good if correctly designed and fair. Any trade reform will produce winners and losers. The core issue is really to design an agreement such that it will improve the number of winners and reduce the potential adjustment costs. We were able to influence the negotiations and at the same time [to give] more time to the upgrading of the sector.” Following the success of the research, Chemingui and his team were asked to re-evaluate the inclusion of agricultural products in the free trade agreement (FTA) every four to five years; the results were used by the government to facilitate negotiations with the EU. Now, almost 18 years later, the process is still ongoing and Chemingui sees a lot of progress: “I am confident that in one or two years we will have a mutually beneficial agreement, covering all sectors, including agricultural and food products.”

Scaling up the evaluation approach

Chemingui notes his research has been “a starting point to integrate social implications of economic policy reforms and design mitigation policies and instruments to overcome costs in Tunisia and many other Arab and African countries.” Mr. Chemingui now works as a senior economist and chief of the regional integration section at UNESCWA. In this capacity, he is employing the same approach to assist the Governments of Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan and Egypt in the new trade negotiations launched by the EU for Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs). This entails developing and applying appropriate *ex-ante* evaluation tools that are able to estimate the potential economic and social impacts of this new generation of trade agreements on the Arab countries involved in the Euro-Med Partnership.



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Advantages of a network

Chemingui credits GDN for giving him access to a global research community and for supporting his growth as a researcher. “The funds and network allowed me to diversify my skills and contacts, which directly resulted in new research, projects and consultancy assignments.” The annual GDN conference was beneficial to this process and gave him a boost of confidence. He describes the GDN processes for reviewing and appraising research as among the best in the world and he was honored to receive “the best possible reactions from top ranked economists.” Following the award, Chemingui embarked on an international career, which

led him to the Kuwaiti Scientific Research Institute and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, before ending up at UNESCWA.

GDN aims to create social impact benefiting marginalized communities by supporting policy-oriented research. In Chemingui’s case, the award program was able to support a young talent in his journey to becoming an established expert advising national governments on policies leveraging free trade agreements for poverty reduction. Today, Chemingui is a renowned researcher in his field and has published more than 50 papers in refereed journals and books. He serves as resource person for many international and regional organizations.

Award

Medals for Research on Development, 2001

Sources

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Interviewees

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Images

From first to last:

Representational photo: Pexels.

Mohamed Chemingui. Mohamed Chemingui.

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About the Global Development Awards Competition

The Global Development Awards Competition is an award scheme that identifies talent, supports the career advancement of researchers in developing countries, and funds innovative social development projects, implemented by NGOs, to benefit marginalized groups in the developing world. Since its inception in 2001, the competition has supported more than 340 individuals, research organizations and NGOs with roughly US\$3.8 million worth of awards, placing it as one of the most important global competitions targeting development and research. It currently has three categories of awards: Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development (ORD), Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project (MIDP), and Japan Social Development Fund Award (JSDF). The Medals for Research on Development (MRD), funded every year by a

different pool of donors, were discontinued in 2015. Over the years, the competition has built a community of excellence among researchers and development practitioners. The Global Development Awards Competition receives annual funding from the Ministry of Finance, Government of Japan. The World Bank manages the trust fund that makes these activities possible.

About GDN

The Global Development Network (GDN) is a public international organization that supports high quality, policy-oriented, social science research in developing and transition countries, to promote better lives. It supports researchers with financial resources, global networking, access to information, training, peer review and mentoring. GDN acts on the premise that better research leads to more informed policies and better, more inclusive development. Through its global platform, GDN connects social science researchers with policymakers and development stakeholders across the world. Founded in 1999, GDN is currently headquartered in New Delhi.

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