

SMITE Meeting Tunis June 2003

Short report by IT Consult of a Meeting at CITET¹/GTZ

GTZ (the German organisation for technical co-operation for developing countries) focuses mainly on the subjects of environment (in particular all water related issues) and sustainable development. They are closely working together with the CITET in Tunisia and also have their offices there.

Amongst their tasks, which have some connection with the aims and objectives of SMITE, are:

- Preparing Tunisian companies for the ISO 14000 (they charge companies for this, but lately got competition from the Ministry, who - through an EU funded activity - offer this service now for free).
- Identification of co-operation opportunities between Tunisian and European companies.
- Presentation and exhibition of innovative products and services.
- Applying a program (developed by GTZ) for energy saving and waste reduction at SMEs. This program is also used by GTZ in many other countries.

Some of the experience made by them over the past may be interesting for the future exploitation of SMITE.

1. Getting SMEs interested in environmental issues

Not surprisingly, it is not easy to get SMEs interested in these issues. For SMEs the business view is the most important one, protecting the environment is not an important concern. Environmental laws exist (like in most South Med countries) but their enforcement is still far below of European standards.

The argument that we also use in SMITE, i.e. emphasising on cost savings through more efficient processes, has apparently been used too often in the past - without fulfilling the promises made.

However, lack of pressure through environmental laws is in some cases replaced by the pressure to get ISO 14000 certified, at least for those companies that mainly export to Europe. From the experience of GTZ/CITET instead of talking about environmental issues or general cost-savings the best argument is the reduction of waste through improved processes. Every company owner immediately understands that wasted material equals wasted money.

¹ Centre International des Technologies de l'Environnement de Tunis, with its mission:

- Developing skills and capacity building in Tunisia and the countries of the region in the field of environmental management and eco-technologies
- Providing technical assistance to industry and promoting cleaner and more environmentally friendly technologies.
- Facilitating the adaptation, transfer and promotion of technologies which are economically more efficient and ecologically more rational.
- Promoting knowledge and making information available on environmental protection, the sustainable management eco-technologies.

2. Analysing production processes at SMEs

The experience by GTZ and CITET when analysing companies was that in the majority of cases it was extremely difficult to obtain relevant data, e.g. on energy and water consumption, the amount of waste produced, etc. In particular SMEs tend to believe that some instrumentation to obtain these data is expensive to install and then time consuming to handle the data. Hence technical advice for the companies is vital.

Another problem in getting data, which is typical for the South Med countries, is the fear that these data may be used by the authorities against the companies. So one has to be extremely careful in assuring confidentiality of the data and demonstrate a clear separation of the analysing organisation (in our case the future SMITE system operator) from governmental institutions². In some other countries (e.g. Syria or Egypt) this fear of the government getting interesting data from private industries through the 'back door' is supposed to be much stronger than in Tunisia. So instead of having SMITE system operators in each country it may actually much better to have just one system operator sitting in Europe with local consultants to talk to the SMEs.

The strong point of SMITE in the view of the GTZ is the Benchmarking. For a company to see how they perform in comparison to their competitors in the country can be a very good argument to attract them for our system (the same comment was made by the Meda representative from the Ministry for Environment in Lebanon). Firstly, comparing with others on a relative scale is much easier to grasp than some absolute figures, and secondly, it can create some competition in trying to be better than the others. So this should be clearly our 'competitive advantage' that needs to be advertised clearly.

² GTZ had attended our awareness meeting and thought it was not good to mention Hotel Bel Azur openly when demonstrating the example. This may have created the impression that all information in the system is openly available, including the names of the companies that provided data.