In early 2017, at only 24 years old, Zaineb Ben Belgacem launched her first company in Gafsa. ‘Carbotech’ is an ambitious business specialized in coal design and manufacturing, which already provides employment to ten people, including qualified employees for business administration and workers trained in coal production machinery.

Located in the industrial zone of Laguila, the company produces four types of coal from raw materials available in the region of Gafsa, such as coal for heating households, ‘powdered coal’ for green waste processors that use it as raw material, ‘coal briquettes’ for hammams and barbecues, and ‘activated charcoal’ for the manufacture of filters and medicines.

It is particularly in the niche of activated carbon that Zaineb wishes to develop rapidly, knowing that it is still not widely used in Tunisia. Activated charcoal is in fact used extensively by chemical groups for the manufacture of digestive medicine and the extraction of toxins. It is also used for the manufacture of make-up.

Zaineb began the development of her project in 2014 and has been supported since 2016 by the Mashrou3i program implemented by UNIDO with the support of its partners, USAID, the Italian Development Cooperation and the HP Foundation. During this time she prepared a solid business plan and received business coaching from UNIDO experts for the preparation of the launch of her business.

To ensure that she was ready to run a business of this size and to start in the best conditions, Zaineb also decided to take part in a HP LIFE face-to-face workshop, to not only improve her management skills, but to also gain marketing and communications skills to help her achieve her goals.

“I did the HP LIFE face-to-face training session on financial studies, marketing research and product marketing techniques that will help me a lot in the beginning,” said Zaineb, “In addition to the entrepreneurship training I hope to receive in-depth marketing assistance from Mashrou3i, especially in digital and product marketing, because my true objective is to expand my business by accessing the international market.”
Yamina Ferchichi’s love for art and decoration began very early, but it was at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Tunis, where she specialized in weaving, that she discovered her passion.

In 2011, with the troubles of the revolution, she decided not to finish her masters degree. Instead she returned to her home town of Kef and began to start planning the launch of her own business, FRACTAL DESIGN, which manufactures art and decoration objects.

Aware of the importance of the historical and cultural heritage of her region, she was determined to add value to this heritage by introducing modern design and technology.

In 2014, Yamina was invited to a training course by the business incubator in Kef to raise awareness of entrepreneurship opportunities. This is where she was selected to benefit from the Mashrou3i program organized in the region by UNIDO with the support of its partners, USAID, the Italian Development Cooperation and the HP Foundation.

“The HP LIFE face-to-face workshop really inspired me,” said Yamina. “There I met a community of aspiring entrepreneurs determined and motivated like me to launch their projects. We were required to work hard and I learned a lot from the trainers and the other training participants. I particularly liked the modules on marketing – especially learning about the differences between direct and indirect sales and developing a business model.”

“I also gained further support through the Mashrou3i programme in 2015,” adds Yamina. “I was selected to participate in the Mashrou3i business coaching where I realized my business plan, which helped me gain funding to establish my project.”

With her rapid mastery of the design and the digital manufacture of MDF wood, Yamina has already gained two types of clients in Kef: B2C direct sales of products to customers and B2B subcontracting services to Kef carpenters.

Her main aim now is to develop direct sales in a show room in Kef, interior design stores in Tunis and online. In a years time she hopes her business will achieve the financial stability to increase her current number of employees from two to six people.
Wahib Hafnaoui never thought that with his diploma in hand - a degree in computer technology specialized in multimedia and development - that one year later, at twenty five years old, he would launch his own company, 3D IMPRESSA. The business offers the design and printing of models, prostheses, mechanical parts, moulds and prototypes in 3D.

He currently employs three people from Sidi Bouzid: two computer specialists and a graphic designer.

The entrepreneurial adventure for Wahib began with the need to find an innovative idea for his end of studies project where he had to present a business plan. He got the idea while watching a television show on new technologies and 3D printing.

“I was impressed by this idea,” Wahib said, “I did some research on the Internet and immediately found that the idea was innovative in my region of Sidi Bouzid and was achievable. I always wanted to be an entrepreneur and do management studies but since I was unable to afford to study outside of Sidi Bouzid I opted for technological studies.”

After his studies Wahib decided to pursue the business idea, contacting accredited suppliers in Tunis who sell the equipment and learned about operating the machines through a 7 day certified training, financed with the help of his parents.

With support from local development programmes he developed a solid business plan which won a National Contest in Tunis in January 2017 along with a financial prize and in turn a bank loan to launch his project.

After his success in January, Wahib was contacted by the Business Center in Sidi Bouzid to participate in an HP LIFE awareness raising event where he was selected to take part in the 4 day HP LIFE face-to-face workshop organized by UNIDO with the support of USAID, the Italian Development Cooperation and the HP Foundation.

“Thanks to Mashrou3i I honed my skills for presenting my business to future clients and left the workshop with confidence about the future of my business,” said Wahib, “advertising and marketing are no longer abstract things for me but concrete tools.”
Bassem Lamouchi is the head of a computer services company specialized in cloud computing which employs 7 people, including 5 freelancers in Kef and Tunis.

In 2011 he obtained his degree in computer engineering. Throughout his academic career, he has always been involved in freelance activities in order to pay for his professional training. He now has 9 international certifications (Microsoft, Linux, Cloud, CEH ...), financed himself through his first three years of professional work.

“I worked for companies like Telnet and Sesame, and worked hard and developed a lot of skills but was not properly remunerated for my work. That’s why I searched for my first client and convinced him to develop a project, then a second one and that’s how I started working freelance. I established my company at 27 years old and created a legal entity with my first client without worrying about doing any market research. I moved to the Kef business incubator in 2014 and this is where I discovered the HP LIFE training program, organized by UNIDO with its partners USAID, the Italian Development Cooperation and HP Foundation.”

“Mashrou3i was an opportunity for me to discover that I should have done market research before launching my project, and that this was a weak point of my business. Until then I thought that the most important thing in a company is the technical aspect that I mastered perfectly, which represents only 20% of the needs of a company, at the expense of other aspects that were unknown to me, marketing, Commercial, management. What particularly helped me with the HPLIFE modules was that I learned to calculate with a simple and quick method my break-even point.”

Bassem also benefited in 2016 from Mashrou3i support in business coaching and learned how to best manage his business to have more customers.

He has identified the needs of young entrepreneurs in disadvantaged regions, who like him, have a problem of accessing the national or international market.

After months of work he developed a cloud based platform that allows companies to sell their products online and for which he seeks further support from Mashrou3i to develop a marketing strategy.

“Our platform will be free,” ensures Bassem, “it will allow the marketing of products by everyone, indeed anyone registered on our platform can help sell products and earn a percentage of any product sold. I hope that this platform will help new entrepreneurs to sell their products and exchange know-how with other companies.”
“Since I was very young,” says Bilel, “I always wanted to be self-employed and, when my sister got a new job in 2008, I decided to take over her prickly pear seed oil business, with the help of my family.”

In 2010, Bilel graduated as a technician in automation and industrial computing. During several internships in companies like the Manufacture des Tabacs in Kairouan and Tunisie Telecom, he gained a lot of technical skills and felt ready for the entrepreneurial adventure.

While seeking support from the Kairouan business incubator to develop his project he discovered the Mashrou3i program and the HP LIFE e-Learning face-to-face training organized by UNIDO with the support of USAID, the Italian Development Cooperation and HP Foundation.

“Thanks to Mashrou3i,” explains Bilel, “I learned to better structure my project and to master its components by using HP LIFE’s technological tools and free software.”

The training strengthened Bilel’s own capabilities, which enabled him to negotiate new financing with the bank to invest in new equipment and to employ more workers.

Bilel was also determined to get certification for his natural and organic product with the Ecocert label which is recognized in international markets.

Today he is proud to contribute to the economic activity of his region with his business CACTUS KAIROUANAIS.

“My hometown is marginalized by poverty and unemployment, Bilel said, “On the other hand, we have natural resources, such as the prickly pear, that must be identified and exploited to fight poverty and create jobs. My challenge continues today, and I hope to gain further support from Mashrou3i to develop my company, and especially a marketing strategy to access new markets and maybe even sell CACTUS KAIROUANAIS prickly pear seed oil abroad.”