ENHANCING PUBLIC ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION
TUNISIA

In 2015, with support from the U.S. Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), FSVC and its local partner ATCP launched "Onshor" ("disclose" in Arabic), a program focused on helping the Government of Tunisia disclose data to the public to increase transparency and accountability.

The success and impact of the program have been staggering, with results far exceeding initial expectations. Highlights include FSVC's launch of three portals to host data from the Ministries of Agriculture, Transport and Municipal sectors in Open Data formats (i.e., machine-readable formats that are re-usable). The portals now host more than 720 datasets, which alone greatly exceeds the number of datasets made available by other countries in the Middle East and Africa.

FSVC is also making it easy for Tunisians to request data from their government. To do so, FSVC recently launched Informini.org, an easy-to-use right-to-information platform on which citizens can directly request information from government institutions in Arabic or French. More than 425 requests have been submitted so far, with a 35% response rate from the Government, which is an exceptionally strong result for this type of platform.

Mr. Kamel Morjane (third from left), honoring Onshor for its exceptional contribution to enhancing public access to government information.

Other significant achievements include: 1) the launch of Cabrane.com, a website that enables citizens to monitor progress in the execution of public infrastructure projects; 2) the publication of an Index of Governance of Stated-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), which was recently used by the IMF to "obtain accurate financial and governance-related information on SOEs it could not even obtain during meetings with top-level government officials"; and 3) the organization of a hackathon (coding competition) with business incubators to encourage start-ups to use this newly-available public data to create products and services.

So what? The opportunities presented by government data are endless. So far, FSVC has seen civil society organizations use Onshor-facilitated data to advocate for their various causes. The Municipality of Bouarada was able to collect $28,000 after disclosing a list of businesses that had not paid their municipal taxes. As noted above, FSVC has also helped start-ups identify creative ways to re-use the data to create new products. Above all, open government policies help make governments more transparent, accountable and inclusive, all critical elements in a young democracy such as Tunisia.