SUCCESS STORY
With E-Government, Tech Firms Thrive

Contract gives Jordanian tech firms new skills and a higher profile

Photo: Studio Simon

With USAID assistance, small Jordanian tech firms like AlliedSoft have been able to more effectively compete regionally and internationally.

"USAID trusted us to manage high-level projects, and now we have the confidence to bid for contracts locally and internationally," said Osamah Yacoub, chief technical officer of AlliedSoft.

In 2002, USAID started an ambitious initiative to help Jordan build an e-government program to improve services using technology. Success would require the cooperation of private companies providing a wide variety of services, from software development to project management. At the same time, Jordan's emerging tech industry was poised to make a breakthrough in regional and international markets.

USAID saw the opportunity to build partnerships that would support Jordan's e-government goals while also strengthening the tech industry. Rather than awarding contracts for every individual task in the e-government program, USAID created an indefinite quantity contract (IQC), which allows firms to pre-qualify for work and then complete task orders as needed. Twenty Jordanian firms bid for the chance to participate in the three-year, $4 million contract, and five were chosen. The firms worked with the Jordanian government on a range of projects, including Web sites, information management systems and training systems — helping the e-government initiative thrive.

As the firms gained experience, they saw their opportunities multiply. "Working under the IQC has helped us develop a specialty in e-government projects," says Fadi Mari, a manager at estarta, which saw the value of its projects more than double between 2002 and 2004. "Because of our work with USAID, we have a good understanding of what governments need."

They also came to recognize the value of collaboration. Osamah Yacoub of AlliedSoft, the smallest IQC firm, says his company's revenues have tripled since 2001. "We saw that together we can deliver projects that individual companies could not handle alone. Now, we bid for projects jointly."

By 2004, the firms chosen for the IQC had become the top five tech companies in Jordan and are now leading the Kingdom's charge into the international tech services market. "USAID helped educate us about program management and quality standards," says Fadi.

"This gave us the confidence to go for bigger projects. It would have been difficult for us to gain visibility even in Jordan, but working with USAID gives us credibility," adds Osamah. "Now we have the confidence to bid for contracts both locally and internationally."