



**POST PROJECT EVALUATION
FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND**

EVALUATION REPORT

**UDF-14-606-TUN: Support for Civil Society and Constitutional
Processes in Decentralization and Governance**

Date: 24 February 2020

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Acknowledgements

The evaluator wishes to thank staff of Lab'ESS, especially Yousri Helal and Rachid Abidi, as well as all of the individuals who made themselves available for interviews and meetings.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDEF or any of the institutions referred to in the report

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I. Overall Assessment

This report is the evaluation of the “Support for Civil Society and Constitutional Processes in Decentralization and Governance (Mab3adhna)” project implemented by Développement Sans Frontières Tunisie – Lab’ESS. The project was initially set to be implemented from 1 August 2016 to 30 July 2018, but a nine-month no-cost extension was granted, and the project effectively ended on 30 April 2019.

Through this project, Lab’ESS sought to strengthen the capacities of local civil society organizations (CSOs) in the regions of Jendouba, Gafsa and Tozeur to better mobilize citizens and facilitate dialogue between civil society and public authorities on local issues. The goal was to establish a culture of citizenship and collaboration between different actors (CSOs and local authorities) in order to solve local issues and jointly put in place development projects.

The project’s overall development goal was to “contribute to the democratic transition in Tunisia through the capacity development of civil society and strengthen the sustainability of its interactions with local government.” The specific objective was to facilitate dialogue and citizen mobilization between civil society and public authorities in the regions of Jendouba, Gafsa and Tozeur. The project’s expected results were to reinforce the capacities of local civil society in order to mobilize citizens in projects addressing local issues of public interest. In addition, the project aimed at strengthening the role of these CSOs in the resolution of local issues as well as setting up local development projects in partnership with local authorities. The project was co-financed by the French Agency for Development (USD 51,000). The UNDEF budget was USD 220,000 (inclusive of the M&E portion retained by UNDEF), and the total project budget was USD 271,000.

The project was partially relevant. The project aimed at addressing relevant needs at the local level but failed to adapt to the changing context in a timely manner. The rhythm of trainings and workshops was inadequate to keep the motivation of all stakeholders and transform the acquired knowledge into practical applications in the project.

In terms of achievements, the project has had mixed results. While most target indicators were met, in terms of numbers of CSOs trained and activities executed, the project’s effectiveness was compromised by the organization’s internal issues and design of the project. The one-year gap in implementation and the organization’s change in strategic direction were the two most challenging aspects that affected the effectiveness of the project. The follow-up in the regions was insufficient to ensure the achievement of the project’s objectives.

The effectiveness of other components of the project was positive albeit limited. The local initiatives would have benefited from additional consultations and tweaking to fit the scope of the project and its expected results. Nevertheless, the process seemed to provide a useful introduction to participative democracy to all stakeholders, including newly elected councilpersons. The project helped enhance the capacity of dozens of participants on

participative democracy. It created a platform where local issues were addressed constructively but was unable to reach resolution of any of these issues. Dialogue between citizens and public authorities was facilitated, though sustainability was a challenge. A consulting firm was recruited and was essential to ensure the inclusion of relevant content and information to the activities and to ensure that quality knowledge was transferred to the participants. The outputs produced (the training materials and guides) were useful to some participants beyond the scope of the project. Local initiatives were rolled out at different speeds; while two are still struggling to be implemented, one has received further funding from other donors.

The project was not an efficient use of donor funds. The achieved results fail to satisfyingly justify the total direct project expenses of 166,507 USD. There were missed opportunities in the course of the project to improve the efficiency of the project, especially with a 9-month no-cost extension and an unspent amount of 33,493 USD.

The project had a positive impact on some participants but was unable to generate a catalytic effect. Many representatives of CSOs interviewed mentioned using the skills acquired during the 5-day training to build new projects and request funding from donors. However, the impact was limited to specific beneficiaries and unable to be disseminated to the general public.

The project was partially sustainable. The lack of long-term vision due to the organization's strategy shift was detrimental to the sustainability of the project's activities. However, two of the three local projects seem to still be ongoing, one of which received further funding.

UNDEF's support had added-value to the organization but to a lesser degree to the scope of the project. Tunisia has witnessed an increase in donor interest in local governance before, during and after the municipal elections, and there are larger and more comprehensive nationwide programs funding local initiatives of engaging citizens and CSOs with municipalities.

Key recommendations are mostly related to improving Lab'ESS internal processes and project and financial management skills. The organization is relatively new and has already gone through a deep revision of its vision and mission statements, as well as its strategic direction.

While there was a genuine commitment to successfully navigate this project's activities, it is critical for Lab'ESS to have a better grasp on the impact and sustainability of its actions toward project beneficiaries and to develop an exit strategy prior to the implementation of activities.

One of the most important lessons learned in this project was the need to thoroughly revise the activities and budget following a long break in implementation through consultations with all project stakeholders such as participants, beneficiaries, local authorities and the donor. Other lessons learned included instilling the feeling of ownership of the project within project participants and improving communication mechanisms between the capital-based implementing NGO and its local partners in the regions.

II. Project Context

(i) *Development Context*

Since the peaceful revolution that ended the Ben Ali regime and restored democracy in 2011, Tunisia has had a vibrant growth in its civil society and in reclaiming the public space. The culture of citizenship had been weakened by decades of hyper-centralization and a complete absence of freedom of speech. The central power had limited the access of citizens to information and tools to develop local initiatives. Citizens have long been oppressed and deprived of their participation in decisions as they lack tools to communicate and understand the function of public authorities, as well as tools to participate and to hold their representatives accountable.

With what is considered the most successful experience of change in the region, Tunisian youth are still starting to understand the scope of the opportunities at hand in the public sphere. Youth-led and grassroots initiatives emerged across the country and support from like-minded institutions provided the space for youth to experiment further with their newly-discovered freedoms. Challenges along the way continue to complicate the full transition, such as a difficult economic environment with constant high rates of unemployment and growing inequalities, and a stalling truth and reconciliation process.

As for public participation, the new constitution of 2014 made a commitment to decentralization. As it continued to be fleshed out, with new public policies and legal frameworks, interim bodies for local governance during the transition process were established. The first-ever democratic municipal elections took place in May of 2018. The creation of 350 new municipalities is no small feat which brings its own set of challenges.

Most Tunisians have never had local democratic representation at the municipal level, therefore their knowledge as both voters and newly elected municipal council members is limited. In addition, only 35.6% of registered voters went to the polls, indicating an initial lack of enthusiasm, perhaps due to the lack of knowledge about the importance of local government. A greater challenge is becoming visible with time as dozens of elected officials have already resigned¹ due to the inability to find solutions in governing with different political factions at the local level.

Since 2011, CSOs have had a central role in monitoring the progress of the democratic transition and in advocating for policies and practices that are respectful of international human rights

¹ The electoral law used for the municipal elections was based on a low-threshold proportional system. Many elected officials found themselves in minority situations and early tensions with other members of their council may have discouraged them from pursuing their duties.

standards. With new municipalities in place, CSOs are finally able to engage at the local level. The commitment towards decentralization and the continuous work being done toward this goal continues to be an impetus for CSOs to engage on local issues.

It is important to note that this project was designed before the decentralization framework was fully developed, and that the municipal elections were held during the course of the project. As such, there were a number of unknown factors related to the type of local government and the mechanism for engagement in the project's implementation that should have been acknowledged in the initial project description. The unpredictable nature of the decentralization process made it challenging for UNDEF and the grantee to reflect on the means to better support it in the design phase of the project, although the establishment of municipalities was known to be the end result.

(ii) Project Objective and Intervention Rationale

According to the project document, the project "Support for Civil Society and Constitutional Processes in Decentralization and Governance" aimed to:

- Strengthen the capacity of local CSOs in order to mobilize citizens towards projects addressing local issues of public interest, and
- Support the strengthened CSOs in their growing role to resolve pre-identified local issues in the 3 regions in collaboration with local authorities through concrete projects.

Project participants included the members of the 18 participating CSOs, their target constituencies (30 citizens and 6 representatives), and the representatives of 6 local authorities engaged in the project (1 or 2 representatives per municipality). An emphasis was made on youth, women, and unemployed people to participate in the project.

The project contained two main components. The first aimed at identifying and strengthening the capacities of local CSOs. After an initial process of identifying and selecting 18 CSOs (6 per region), an internal workshop for Lab'ESS was organized to develop training modules that corresponded to the expectations of project participants. Three trainings were conceived of in this phase of the project: a 5-day training on proposal writing, fundraising, NGO governance, communications, and monitoring and evaluation; a focused training on citizen mobilization for 18 individuals (one per selected CSO); and a training of trainers for three "resource" persons per region to help them accompany and advise the selected CSOs on the implementation of the projects. In this component, a consultation² day was organized in each region to gather citizens and selected CSOs to discuss and identify the main local issues and to prepare for the following phase of advocacy with local authorities.

² Otherwise described as "concertation" days in the project document written in French.

The second component included two additional trainings on advocacy, public administration, and engagement with local government. A workshop in each region aimed to initiate the work with local actors and was followed by two dialogue events per region in order to finalize the selection of the issue to be addressed. Three capitalization seminars and an interregional conference would then follow, in order to highlight the good practices identified so far and to present the results of the dialogue events. Finally, an action would be developed and implemented to address a selected issue in each region with some financial support from the project.

Over the span of two years, the project's planned activities were:

- Launch in each region and selection of 6 NGOs per region to participate in the project
- Internal workshops to design the training modules
- 5-day training on project cycle management in each region
- Community organizing training in each region and production of a guide on "citizen mobilizing"
- Consultation days in each region
- 4-day training of trainers
- Advocacy and public administration training in each region
- 1 workshop and meetings with local government in each region
- 2 dialogue events and follow-up activities in each region
- "Capitalization" seminars in each region
- Inter-regional conference
- 3 joint activities with municipalities

The intended outcomes of the project were:

Outcome 1: The capacities of local CSOs are strengthened in order to mobilize citizens in projects addressing local issues of general interest.

Outcome 2: The strengthened CSOs play an increasingly important role in resolving pre-identified local issues in the three target areas in collaboration with local authorities through joint projects.

(iii) Project Strategy and Approach

The project strategy aspired to be based on a participative approach that aims to create an efficient and sustainable collaboration between citizens and local public authorities. It focused on developing and organizing five different trainings on different elements of civil society mobilization and on building constructive links with local authorities. According to the project document, CSOs would have to be identified and selected before going through project cycle management trainings, community organizing, and lobbying and advocacy. The next phase revolved around CSOs engaging with their relative counterparts in municipalities, to initiate dialogue events and address issues through the design and execution of a joint action plan.

Five phases were developed in the project strategy as follows:

- 1- Identification and selection of local partners, CSOs and local authorities
- 2- Capacity development: trainings of CSOs and training of trainers on citizen mobilization
- 3- Preparation of dialogue: citizen mobilization by CSOs through the organization of consultation days, training of CSOs on the functioning of local authorities and advocacy workshops with local authorities on the role of CSOs.
- 4- Dialogue and joint work between CSOs, local authorities and citizens
- 5- Project monitoring following the dialogue sessions and capitalization through seminars and an interregional conference.

There was one official partner to the project, the “Twiza” association. However, the partnership fell through as Lab’ESS faced an internal crisis that led to a break in the project’s activities for one year (February 2017 to March 2018). As a satellite of a French NGO (Developpement Sans Frontieres), the Lab’ESS team felt that decisions were being made at headquarters without consulting with them. Along with other reasons, it seems that the whole team resigned in protest in the early months of 2017. After a phase of refocusing the organization’s strategy and recruitment of a new executive director (still in place) and other staff, the project’s activities slowly resumed. According to Lab’ESS, there was an effort to reconnect with Twiza. Despite an initial meeting that was perceived as positive by Lab’ESS, there was no further renewal of the partnership. Twiza was unresponsive to requests for information in this evaluation.

As the new team was unable to renew a relationship with the initial partner, a call for expressions of interest was made and a consulting firm specializing in public participation empowerment was selected to support the last component of the activities.

III. Evaluation Methodology

UNDEF’s 2019 operational manual for post-project evaluations was the initial reference document to develop the methodology. The evaluation respected process-oriented criteria such as focusing on lessons learned, forward-looking, and comprehensive view of the project’s results. Information was collected, analyzed, and is presented in this report according to the OECD – DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. An additional criterion was included aimed at analyzing UNDEF’s added-value. The post-project evaluation also aimed at linking evidence-based findings to recommendations.

The international expert designated to conduct the evaluation prepared a preliminary planning note (Launch Note) in September 2019. The note was based on a review of the following project documentation:

- Project document;
- Mid-term progress narrative and financial reports;
- Milestone verification reports;

- UNDEF Senior Programme Management Officer mission note; and
- Email correspondence between UNDEF Senior Programme Management Officer and the grantee.

The evaluator and the grantee then proceeded to hold introductory Skype conversations to develop a schedule of interviews that would take place during a field mission to Tunisia from 28 October to 1 November. During the field mission, the evaluator interviewed the grantee's current staff, participants in the project activities, partner organizations, government representatives, and one UNDP representative. The full list of people interviewed is presented in Annex 3.

As mentioned in the launch note, the evaluation adopted a transparent, inclusive, participatory and results-based approach to collect, analyze and report on findings and recommendations. It assessed the rationale and justification for the project as well as the outputs, outcomes and impacts achieved. The evaluator also assessed the sustainability of the intervention including mechanisms and strategies put in place to ensure that the benefits continue beyond the end of the UNDEF grant. The formulation of questions during the interviews and meetings included a gender-mainstreamed approach at all times, both in terms of project participants and topics of focus and outputs.

Given the turn-over of staff and break in project implementation, the new team spent considerable time locating and patching together information related to the project. The new team collected information, scanning all relevant documents and archiving them accurately. This is extremely valuable and indicates commitment to proper organization.

One challenge to the evaluation was that the meetings that were proposed and agreed upon prior to the evaluator's field visit were not actually set up or confirmed by the grantee. Despite this setback, a day visit to the city of Tabarka was organized and yielded relevant conversations with some participants in a large focus group. Although it was interesting to hear their perspectives, the municipal council members who attended the focus group were not from the municipality that was targeted for the regional project, leaving interesting information from the last stages of the project implementation out of the focus group discussion. Other meetings had to take place over the phone or Skype.

IV. Evaluation Findings

(i) Relevance

The project started in August 2016, before the electoral law for municipal elections was put in place (rules were framed in the organic law n° 2017-7 of February 14, 2017). The elections followed more than a year later, in May 2018. CSOs, political parties and others worked during

the elections to raise awareness on participative democracy and local governance. Despite low turnout, progress toward localizing democratic processes has continued, as citizens start to understand how municipal decisions can influence their lives.

In this context, the objectives and activities of the project were partially relevant. The project related to UNDEF's own goals and suited the context's needs. However, the design of the project, its gaps in implementation and its timeliness vis-à-vis local elections hindered the relevance of the initiatives.

CSOs at the heart of the project and partnership strategy

The project was initially designed to target 6 CSOs per region as the main beneficiaries. However, since the first activity, the number of CSOs attending trainings largely exceeded this number. Although there may have been some retention, different CSOs attended different trainings. While this could be seen as a positive element, noting the relevance of the topics covered that were interesting to a larger number of CSOs than initially planned for, there were shortfalls in the project as there were limited opportunities to consolidate and strengthen the acquired knowledge into more practical applications.

Many interviewed persons who attended the initial trainings, from 2016 and early 2017, seemed to have little recollection of the content and appeared to have had no further interaction with Lab'ESS. While positive feedback was shared for the content that was remembered, the extent of participant capacity to absorb and apply the learnings was unclear. Those who were no longer in touch with Lab'ESS were unaware of the project's progress, indicating that Lab'ESS may not have reached out to all attendees of former trainings following their break in activities.

It also seemed that Lab'ESS relied on some of the local CSOs to organize the information days and launch the project in the regions. One of those CSOs also led the local activities in their region. This indicates that this CSO could have been pre-identified as a partner in the implementation of the project. However, no effort was made to consolidate a partnership in order to strengthen the relevance of their engagement in the project. Given the reliance on this CSO, a Memorandum of Understanding could have given them more ownership over the project and improved the relevance of the capacity development element and activities in their region.

Aside from hiring a consulting firm for the second part of the project, the partnership strategy was not reviewed or evaluated during the course of the project. When the project implementation resumed, new participants were invited and provided positive feedback on their experience. In this phase, which coincided with the first few months following the municipal elections, activities were becoming more tangible, with dialogue sessions with municipal representatives and citizens. The relevance was therefore adequate but could have been stronger if the same beneficiaries remained through the course of the project.

Strategic change at Lab'ESS and in-house expertise

The expertise that was brought in by the consultancy firm was a determining factor in maintaining the relevance of the activities. As Lab'ESS rebranded and changed its strategy, implementing projects from a previous strategy was no easy task. The organization no longer had in-house expertise on democratization and good governance.

The phase that integrated this external expertise to ensure the success of the project could have included a consultation with decision-makers and stakeholders in the planning of the remaining activities. In fact, it appears unlikely that they were consulted for the project design, and this missed opportunity may have impacted the relevance of the project. Nevertheless, evaluations following some activities showed a positive level of satisfaction by participants.

Risks and assumptions

Risk anticipations developed in the project document were not inclusive of internal factors that brought forward the crisis that Lab'ESS endured during the course of the project. French volunteers sent by the umbrella NGO (DSF France) were often young, inexperienced and superseded their Tunisian colleagues, creating unhealthy internal dynamics that led to the resignation of the Tunisian team. Risks anticipated were also not fully reflective of the context, as discussions around municipal elections were already ongoing as early as 2015. The project document did not mention the opportunity of witnessing municipal elections and in general was elusive on the context relating to the policy debates on local governance and participative democracy.

Taking gender into account

Although there was no particular gender mainstreaming strategy in place, the project seemed to succeed in ensuring a gender balance in most activities. In fact, women seemed to be more active in the course of the project than men. In the Jendouba governorate, the three resource persons that attended the training of trainers and led the activities locally were women.

(ii) Effectiveness

The implementation of the project was effective in that a majority of target indicators and outcomes were achieved. However, the project's overall effectiveness was partial due to challenges and changes in the implementation.

Enhanced capacities of local CSOs

33 CSOs were invited to attend the information sessions to launch the project in August 2016 in the three regions: 12 CSOs in Gafsa, 8 in Tozeur, and 13 in Jendouba.

The planned single five-day training was split into two separate trainings, and topics were distributed without a clear rationale. The first three-day training focused on project development, fundraising and internal communication. It gathered 9 CSOs in Tozeur, another 9 in Gafsa, and 8 in Jendouba. The second two-day training included external communication and

monitoring and evaluation and gathered 6 CSOs in Tozeur, 11 in Gafsa, and 9 in Jendouba. The project document had planned for additional topics such as a review of NGO governance, NGO law, and advocacy but these were not included in the implementation. It seems that meetings with local authorities took place to introduce the project, but there were no supporting documents to this end.

Instead of following the project's initial plans, an additional three one-day trainings were organized shortly thereafter on advocacy, citizen mobilization and functioning of authorities and gathered 6 CSOs in Tozeur, 6 to 10 CSOs in Gafsa (depending on the day) and 11 CSOs in Jendouba. Discrepancies from the initial plan included minimizing the citizen mobilization training and the addition of the two other topics from the second component.

As designed, the citizen mobilization training aimed to be focused on the 18 targeted CSOs and to train 18 facilitators in total (one per CSO) to lead in the organizing of the dialogue sessions and implementation of local projects. However, the training was implemented as any other and had no further links with following activities, especially with the gap in implementation.

The consultation days seemed to be the last activities organized by the previous Lab'ESS team in February 2017. Four citizens had been selected to follow-up on the identified issues and help organize activities such as the dialogues. However, with the break in activities, there was no follow-up on this component with the selected citizens.



Election of citizens in the Gafsa consultation days (25 February)

Increased role of CSOs in resolving local issues

Activities resumed in March of 2018 with the training of trainers and the recruitment of the consultant in May 2018. The consultant was contracted with developing modules and ensuring the implementation of all the remaining activities: training on local authorities (which was tweaked to focus on participative democracy), dialogue spaces with local authorities (to co-organize and facilitate), regional capitalization seminars and the inter-regional conference.

Dialogue spaces took place over two days and concluded in agreeing to address one issue in each region: In Jendouba, access to water in remote areas; in Gafsa, a tool to follow-up on public infrastructure projects; and in Tozeur, improving solid waste management. The consultant acted as a facilitator between CSOs and local authorities and applied specific tools to create synergies and reach consensus.

Following this activity, one CSO per region was selected to produce a concept note, along with a budget, to address the identified issue during the dialogue spaces. Surveys were conducted

but documents reviewed indicated low-quality planning and execution. However, surveys seemed designed only to validate the results of the dialogue session, whereas a more scientific method would have aimed to conduct a survey first and then validate the results through a dialogue session.



Facebook caption of the invitation to the capitalization seminar in Tozeur

Capitalization seminars were then organized to share lessons learned and to give the opportunity for the CSOs to present their projects. The inter-regional capitalization seminar took place in the capital, Tunis, in January 2019. All main participants and stakeholders were invited to Tunis and the gathering was shaped as a project closing ceremony, where updates and lessons learned from each region were shared and discussed.

As such, the role of CSOs through the project's activities in addressing local issues was enhanced. However, in only one case was the CSO able to play a determining role in resolving local issues: in Gafsa, there was a clear improvement in

resuming long-delayed public infrastructure projects as a direct result of the project.

Local projects

There was a general consensus that the amount allocated for local projects (3750 Tunisian Dinars or approximately 1300 USD at the time of writing) was insufficient to conduct impactful initiatives. It also appeared that the previous team at Lab'ESS had deliberately misinformed the participating CSOs in guaranteeing access to additional funding at the end of the process. This made it difficult to rebuild trust with the new Lab'ESS team and re-motivate the three main CSOs who were tasked with developing the local initiatives.

Besides the amount that was allocated, in-kind support was provided to these CSOs in the form of coaching on proposal writing. However, there seemed to be intermittent follow-up after the activities were agreed upon. A representative from one of the CSOs clarified that there was no verification that their activities took place. Another representative had a different experience and said that she still reaches out to Lab'ESS to ask for any information on new calls for proposals from donors. In any case, the initiatives as they were developed were not operational at the closing of this project.

(iii) Efficiency

The budget allowed for the activities to take place but was not fully sufficient for the project to meet its objectives. Budget lines were mostly respected but there were challenges for a reasonable relationship between the projects' inputs and its outputs.

Financial management structure and supporting documents

Lab'ESS has seen significant improvement in their financial management structure. The organization still lacks a financial procedures manual, but their bookkeeping and accounting seems to be more organized than in 2016 and 2017. While this made a financial review of the last stages of the project easier, it was complicated to assess the accuracy of the financial reporting across the project's duration.

For example, the organization's 2016 and 2017 expenses were filed without a clear mention of projects, which hindered the ability to verify that expenses were accurately allocated from the UNDEF project. There was no signed agreement with the DSF France (and therefore no means of verification of deliverables, even if Lab'ESS is the satellite organization) but a review found four wire transfers amounting to almost 21,000 USD. Despite two transfers of funds totaling 3,200 USD, only a draft and unsigned MoU with the initial partner Twiza was found. Finally, some expenses didn't seem to be linked to the project, especially on transportation costs (a trip to Djerba for example was budgeted under the UNDEF project although there were no activities in that region).

The budget revision that was requested and agreed to in December 2017 was produced with limited consideration to the context and (by their own admission) limited consultation of relevant partners. There were obvious missed opportunities as the new team re-energized the project: more funding could have been allocated to the local partners, reallocations could have supported more outreach to citizens, and most importantly, new approaches and revised activities could have been proposed in light of the municipal elections set to take place during the course of the project.

Even after the set-up of the new team, there was limited internal oversight over the burn rate of expenditures. A clear example is the submission to UNDEF of the third financial utilization report (FUR M3) of May 2018 that reported back against the original budget and not the revised budget that was approved at the end of 2017.

Project activities

Despite the amount left unspent (33,493 USD), the project had limited cost-efficiency. The local currency was devalued up to 30% of its initial rate at the signing of the project document, leading to lower expenditure reporting in USD.

Several project stakeholders, including within the Lab'ESS team, had ideas to improve cost-effectiveness. For example, dialogue spaces were seen as too narrow and could have benefited from additional sessions to consolidate synergies. Training sessions and other meetings could have been more cost-efficient had they taken place within the municipalities, for example, or the public youth centers.

As mentioned earlier, the amount allocated to local CSOs was perceived as low and there were challenges in translating local initiatives into concrete results due to this reason. The revised budget approved in December 2017 further reduced that amount from an initial 1,897 USD to 1,500 USD. The project on water access, for example, required considerable funding, making it unrealistic to expect any efficiency on that level.

Internal monitoring and evaluation were also limited to the oversight of the executive director. The high turnover of staff and lengthy gap in the implementation meant that there were little to no proper transitions. The co-funder of the project, the French Agency for Development (AFD) was not involved in any detailed review of the project, as their funding is mainly to the French NGO and covers multiple countries. There was therefore limited engagement from the AFD over the budget of this project.

(iv) Impact

Impact on participants and CSOs

The project had positive impact on most project participants and stakeholders. Many representatives of CSOs interviewed mentioned using the skills acquired during the 5-day training to build new projects and request funding from donors. One representative said that he has been using the materials shared by Lab'ESS to train his own staff and volunteers.

The coaching in the development of concept notes and budgets for local projects was most useful. One of the three CSOs that implemented a local initiative was able to receive funding from a large foreign foundation as a direct result of that support.

However, the challenges that the project faced hindered the chances for higher impact. As the gap in implementation was lengthy, the beneficiaries changed during the course of the project. While the target was the same 6 CSOs from each region, only 3 CSOs from each region participated in all the projects' activities. Trainings were seen as too far apart from each other.

The consultation days did not have the expected impact as they took place between January and February 2017 and as they were not followed-up on thereafter due to the resignation of the previous Lab'ESS team. It would have been judicious to consider repeating this activity as the project resumed, especially to rebuild trust between citizens, CSOs, and Lab'ESS.

Local initiatives

The project was unlikely to have a catalytic impact. The selection of the themes was discussed and agreed on in a short 2-day workshop. This seemed insufficient as more time would have been required to properly address issues and find a consensus between local authorities and the CSOs.

One of the themes that were agreed was also unrealistic to achieve a result in the course of the project: installing water tanks required funds that were not available and skills that were also lacking. This indicates that the facilitators had difficulties in moderating the discussions toward a project that would have followed the SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound). For instance, instead of committing to providing access to water in Jendouba, committing to an advocacy campaign toward the national water company and other central actors would have been more appropriate. The UNDP representative who attended one of the dialogue sessions noted that the activity seemed to be distinct from others or not well linked with the ongoing process of the project. He also noted the lack of understanding of the participants of the whole project process.

Despite these shortfalls, the initiative in Gafsa seemed to have the most impact. Public works that were long delayed resumed, and there is now a tool to monitor the progress of the municipality's work and a mechanism to follow-up with them. The CSO was ultimately able to request and receive additional funding for this project. The initiative in Tozeur also had some impact as it created a platform for citizens to report issues related to solid waste management to the municipality. However, it still lacks funding to be completed.

Local municipal representatives that were interviewed described the project's activities as interesting. The platform with civil society created learning opportunities as they were familiarizing themselves with their new roles as local government councilwomen and men.

Fatma Touzri, the regional director of the Ibn Khaldoun association in the North West of Tunisia was one of the most active actors in the project. Together with Sabrine Nayet Al Imam a local activist, she participated in most of the project's activities, was a resource person for the region, and led the local initiative on water access.

In an in-person focus group, Fatma affirmed that the impact of the local initiative was beyond the specific theme that was chosen. In fact, she highlighted the positive impact of the process itself on the new municipality and all stakeholders involved in the project. According to her, this was the first experiences in which participative democracy was truly applied and followed.

As for Sabrine, she was surprised by the level of willingness of the local authorities to support the efforts of civil society. It seemed that a paradigm shift had taken place with participants, opening opportunities for further engagement at all levels.

(v) Sustainability

The sustainability of this project is directly linked to the commitment of the participants to continue applying the principles of democratic development. In itself, it is unlikely that the project created an impetus towards democratic processes.

Short-sighted project design, planning, implementation and monitoring

Despite the positive reviews of the activities themselves, implementation of the project was focused on reaching the targets set out initially, with little regard to a “bigger picture”. As such, there was limited room for flexibility to ensure the most impact, and activities were limited to simply being executed.

For example, the gap in implementation was an opportunity to review and propose bold changes in the project design and budget to address already-identified weaknesses in the project, or to apply new approaches. This is especially relevant in the context of late 2017 by which time municipal elections were already in preparation. Activities to reconvene all participating CSOs to consult with them on proposed courses of action would have been extremely constructive for the sake of impact and sustainability.

As for the local initiatives, their sustainability depends solely on the willingness of other stakeholders to implement, and were unsustainable by themselves at the end of the project. Other activities failed to create avenues by which the project could continue through other means. The seminars did not seem to achieve any specific result beyond sharing the project’s progress with stakeholders, and the inter-regional seminar was unsuccessful in consolidating any opportunity who could deepen the project’s aftermath. One of the panelists invited to inter-regional seminar had little to no recollection of the event.

(vi) UNDEF Added Value

The main added-value of UNDEF to this project seemed to be the flexibility and understanding that was provided to Lab’ESS as the organization was re-establishing their work. An honest discussion about the situation took place and the organization felt sincerely supported. A 9-month extension was provided in two increments of first six and then three months and it was useful for the grantee as activities had not yet concluded.

In addition, the presence of a UN logo on project materials seems to have enhanced the credibility of the project. In terms of visibility, all documents and materials reviewed by the evaluator showed an appropriate use of the UNDEF logo, from PowerPoint presentations disseminated to the participants as manuals to the participants’ registration forms. Stakeholders mentioned the value of UNDEF as a donor that is based in UN Headquarters, as opposed to

other donors linked to foreign governments who may be perceived as instruments of foreign policy agendas.

The UNDP staff member highlighted the need to have thought about synergies with ongoing programs led by UNDP locally and aimed at similar objectives. The sustainability of the project would have been greatly enhanced if it were connected with other projects or organizations running similar projects. When feedback is returned to UNDEF, UNDP should mention any ongoing program with similar activities or objectives, especially when they are implemented in the same geographic areas.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions	Recommendations
Resuming activities without adjusting them to the new context and addressing the concerns of the participants and beneficiaries limited the relevance and effectiveness of the project.	In future projects, Lab'ESS should include a risk mitigation strategy in case of project interruption that also plans for consultations with project participants prior to restarting activities. Lab'ESS should develop a stronger and more regular mechanism to communicate and follow-up with project participants.
The absence of a transition in financial management of the project was challenging both in resuming the project and in following-up on estimated costs.	Lab'ESS should put in place a financial procedures manual and a mechanism for internal financial reviews as soon as possible.
Beyond the impact of creating a time-limited platform for discussions, the project was unable to put in place strong procedures supporting the role of civil society in promoting democracy.	Lab'ESS should ensure that any initiative proposed by local partners follows specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) criteria.
The absence of a long-term vision of the organization's engagement on the topic and in the targeted regions was detrimental to the project's sustainability.	Lab'ESS should develop an appropriate exit strategy before implementation (especially if in regions that are far from the capital). UNDEF should request the development of an exit strategy in projects involving multiple partners in different regions.

VI. Lessons Learned

Projects that suffered from a complete stop in implementation should be thoroughly revised before restarting activities. Any break of more than six months should automatically lead to a deeper exercise of reflection among all project stakeholders. An honest discussion with the donor, and consultation workshops with the participants to revise the timeline of the components or even propose new ones, should be organized. A budget revision should also be inclusive of new contextual changes and address any weakness that had already been identified earlier.

Projects implemented in remote regions by a capital-based NGO should have stronger mechanisms of communication and follow-up. The organization had implemented some light activities in the region but needed to develop clearer communication channels with all project participants, especially in the final stages. Whether it be by having a local focal person or additional in-person visits, there was a need to ensure that project activities were ongoing and to contribute to solving problems as they arose.

Similarly, instilling a feeling of ownership over the process to local partners is insufficient if not coupled by regular support. There was no real transfer of ownership of the process until the final stage of the project and the implementation of local initiatives. Instead, ownership should be instilled at the earliest stages of the project to enhance the commitment of all partners.

VII. Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation Questions

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse? ▪ To what extent were decision makers (local municipal council members and CSOs) involved in the project design and planning? ▪ To what extent the intervention as designed enhanced public dialogue on democracy issues? Did the project reach beyond those that were already engaged on the issue?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this? ▪ Did the project have an effective way to measure the progress and achievement of objectives? ▪ Were the outputs adequate tools to engage on public participation?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? Are there examples of leveraging other resources or partners in joint activity during the project? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives? ▪ How was the co-funding element managed with the French Agency for Development?

<p style="text-align: center;">Impact</p>	<p>To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples? ▪ What was the impact of the concertation days between CSOs and citizens in each region and led by trained facilitators? Were they able to integrate the skills gained in the trainings? ▪ Was the project able to convince local authorities to recognize the role of CSOs in local development? ▪ To what extent were local and national decision-makers engaged in the project and in achieving the objectives? ▪ Did the project have an efficient way to measure the impact of communication and advocacy actions? ▪ To what extent was the general public sensitized to the principles of participative democracy after the execution of the local projects? ▪ What was the impact of the changes in the action plan in the project implementation? ▪ <u>Include concrete justifications of the results.</u>
<p style="text-align: center;">Sustainability</p>	<p>To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)? ▪ Were the capacity development activities implemented in a way that insured a durable impact on direct beneficiaries? Were the new competencies strengthened throughout the project? ▪ Is there evidence that the acquired competences had a spill-over effect beyond the project? Were the projects set up by beneficiaries sustainable? ▪ Are the targeted CSOs and citizens still engaged with their local government counterparts in putting in place projects and activities that are adapted to their needs and respond to the principles of participative democracy?
<p style="text-align: center;">UNDEF value added</p>	<p>To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues? ▪ Visibility: were all documents that were printed and distributed during the course of the project include UNDEF? Were all activities organized during the project indicate UNDEF as the funder?

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

Background documents

- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Tunisia's municipal elections*: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76299>
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *Elections in Tunisia, 2018 Municipal Elections: Frequently Asked Questions*: https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2018_ifes_tunisia_municipal_elections_faqs_english_final.pdf

Project documentation - UDF-14-TUN-606

- Project document
- Reports: mid-term progress report, final narrative and financial reports
- Milestone verification narrative and financial reports
- Supporting documents from the grantee: participants' registration forms, internal summaries, photos, consultancy reports, social media posts.

Project outputs

- PowerPoint Presentations for trainings (that were disseminated as guides)
- Contracts with the three local partners
- Capitalization guide

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed

Lab'ESS staff	
Rachid Labidi	Executive Director
Yousri Helal	Operations Manager
Ramzi Ben Farhar	Finance Manager
Main project partners	
Med Khales Soltane	President of the Association Mostakbelna, Tozeur
Jamel Fattah	Program Coordinator at Association Irada, Gafsa
Ali Dellaad	Vice-President of Ibn Khaldoun Association, Jendouba
Fatma Touzri	Regional Director of Ibn Khaldoun Association, Jendouba
Participants	
Daou Ben Salah	President of the League Ennafir for Development, Gafsa
Khawla Tej	Program Coordinator at Impact Foundation, Gafsa
Wided Saidy	President of the Association to Protect the Medina of Tozeur, Tozeur
Abla Baccouni	Tunisian Association for Youth and the Future, Gafsa
Awatef Dhiri	Municipal Council Member of Gafsa
Nafissa Besghaier	Municipal Council Member of Nafta, Gafsa
Sabrine Nayet Al Imam	Civil Society Activist and project resource person, Jendouba
Sayda Rizaki	Municipal Council Member of Ain Sobh Nadhour, Jendouba
Sanaa Jemai	Municipal Council Member of Tabarka and Member of the Women's Association in Tabarka, Jendouba
Salma Dhouafi	Agricultural specialist and advisor at the Ministry of Agriculture in Tabarka, Jendouba
Najwa Askari	Municipal Council Member of Aib Sobh Nadhour, Jendouba
Other stakeholders	
Zied Boussem	Pandora Consulting
Helene Willart	French Agency for Development
Wafa Madder	UNDP
Med Hedi Ben Ali	UNDP

Annex 4: Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DSF	Développement Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program