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

EVALUATION REPORT

**UDF-15-662-TUN: Building Public Participation, Trust and Transparency in Local
Governance in Tunisia**

Date: 04 March 2020

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Acknowledgements

The evaluator thanks the leadership and project staff at Action Associative, especially Kouraich Jaouahdou and Olfa Karrou, for their availability, insights and assistance, as well as all the elected council members, municipal, staff, and civil society representatives who kindly accepted meetings and provided valuable comments, critiques and recommendation for the development of this evaluation.

Disclaimer

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 serves as an evaluation of the project “*Oeil sur le Budget* [Eyes on the Budget]: Building Public Participation, Trust and Transparency in Local Governance in Tunisia,” implemented by Action Associative (AA) between April 1, 2017 and November 30, 2018, after being granted a 2-month extension (total project duration: 20 months). The project benefitted from a UNDEF grant of USD 242,000 to carry out activities related to establishing sustainable and trust-based participatory governance mechanisms at the local level, addressing issues building and strengthening democracy at the local level. Working with seven municipalities in Tunisia (first four, later extended to seven), the project focused on establishing, sensitizing, and operationalizing participatory budget mechanisms at the municipal level through a multi-pronged strategy targeting citizens, communities, local civil society, appointed, and later elected (post-May 2018 local elections) municipal and municipal cadres. It did so by encouraging citizen to become directly involved in the formulation of municipal budgets in order to sponsor and suggest new projects, thus creating participatory relationships between citizens and their local representatives. The project focuses strongly on participatory and transparent mechanisms: budgetary decisions are made at public fora in which citizens discuss and vote on proposed infrastructure projects to be implemented by the municipality. Municipal representatives sign accords and make categories of public funding available for public discussion and negotiation. CSOs are key in this process as they collaborate on implementation.

The project was implemented in the communes of Ariana, Gremda, Kairouan, Mahdia, Monastir, Sidi Bouzid, and Tabarka.

In essence, the project spanned two phases: a pre-electoral period as well as a post-electoral period, encompassing two sets of beneficiaries at the local governance level. The first were municipal officials nominated in the post-revolutionary appointment system (2011-2018) called special delegations, the second were first-time elected members of municipal councils, following the 2018 municipal elections. Because of contextual delays in passing a local electoral law in Tunisia’s legislature and multiple postponements of scheduling local elections, this project extended its implementation period by two months and also expanded its geographic scope to include three additional municipalities. This effective adaptability to Tunisia’s unpredictable and often contentious context around elections was an early testimony to the project’s sustainability, as well as its replicability and effectiveness.

The project design directly addressed issues relating to democracy-building at the local level in Tunisia’s process of political transition and democratic consolidation. Decentralization and financial de-concentration, in particular, were key political issues demanded from the onset of the 2011 transition. Those discussions continued as parliamentary debates, leading to the creation of seven Constitutional Commissions to negotiate decentralization during Tunisia’s Constitution-drafting process (2011-2014). The principle of decentralization was included in the 2014 Constitution, and further buttressed by the April 2018 decentralization law and May 2018 municipal elections. The heart of those debates focused around the question of financial decentralization: historically most citizens were left out of financial decision-making at the municipal level. Under the dictatorship of late Zine Abedine Ben Ali (1987-2011), and previously the corporatist and centralized state structure of Habib

Bourguiba (1956-1987), municipalities were under the control of the Ministry of Interior and the ruling party. As such, citizen-local elite relations were defined by control and selective, often unequal, social service delivery. The post-revolutionary decentralization process sought to bring participatory democracy to the local level for the first time in Tunisia's modern independent history. As such, the project implemented by Action Associative contributed directly to this ambitious effort by empowering citizens and their communities through an inclusive and participatory process around public finance decisions to build trusting and sustainable relationships between citizens and elected officials at the local level. AA designed a project based on its previous work in participatory budget mechanisms as a strategy to experience and engage in democratic practice. Working with implementing partners ATIDE and Kolna Tounes, the project strategy centered on a participatory approach in order to overcome the widely held public perception that local governance equals bad and corrupt governance. Under dictatorship, this was especially related to infrastructure projects and service delivery at the local level.

The project's expected results were to put into place participatory budget mechanisms at the commune level to establish and strengthen citizens' engagement in independent decision-making and build trust between citizens and local authorities in the build-up, during, and after Tunisia's first democratic elections, held in May 2018. It too sought to strengthen the capacity of first appointed and later elected local officials, as well as enhance the role of local civil society in democratic processes. The project's inclusive and multi-tiered beneficiary strategy targeted elected officials, elected delegates, CSOs, and focused specifically on the inclusion of youth and women.

With respect to achievements, the project has superb results. All target indicators were met, and sustainable participatory budget mechanisms were implemented in the targeted communities. The project was extremely well designed, and previously tested through other donor funds. It smoothly adapted to structural hold-ups, particularly delays in passing laws pertaining to local governance, as well as long delays in scheduling municipal elections.

Key recommendations are derived from inputs by and discussions with the grantee as well as interviewed beneficiaries. Recommendations focus on substantive areas of success as well as possibilities for expansion. Communication, advocacy, and outreach need to be a priority for the launch and continuity of projects that seek to overcome citizen mistrust. Civil society has to be involved at all levels and represent different areas of expertise. In-depth subject knowledge (in this case decentralization and participatory budget mechanisms) as well as previous experience to improve project design allows for effective adaptability in changing and complex political and legal circumstances, as experienced in the implementation timeline of this project. Finally, more difficult geographic localities including newly created municipalities or communes where citizen trust is extremely low, can be included in the targeted project designs.

The central lessons learned from this project derive directly from the recommendations, as these can be applied to other projects in these issue areas or serve as success stories for selection of new proposals: (1) Projects based on in-depth knowledge of the development issues and context (in this case decentralization) and economical strategies and designs should be prioritized for funding purposes; (2) Projects that work on issues of building

citizen-trust as broader democratization initiatives need to allocate large programmatic and budgetary portions to effective communication, advocacy, outreach, and sensitization campaigns; (3) Projects based on a symbiotic relationship with beneficiaries (rather than purely instructive or instructional) increase potential for ownership, adaptation, as well as sustainability.



Action Associative target municipalities for the UNDEF-funded project *Oeil sur le Budget*

I. PROJECT CONTEXT AND STRATEGY

a. Development Context

Since Tunisia's 2011 Revolution, which ended the twenty-seven-year rule of Zine Abedine Ben Ali and marked a historical rupture from effective single-party rule in Tunisia since independence 1956, democratization has been underway, buttressed by multiple reform initiatives. Of these, political decentralization and strengthening local participatory democracy have been at the crux of the democratization process: societal control in the form of political and economic centralization was the defining formula of the ancient regime. While decentralization and democracy-building at the local level have become priorities in Tunisia's process of political consolidation since the ratification of the 2014 Constitution and passing of the Local Collectivities Code by Parliament just a few days before the May 2018 municipal elections, citizen demands for decentralization and financial de-concentration, in particular, were key political issues demanded from the onset of the 2011 transition.

In the early years of Tunisia's political transition, the National Constituent Assembly (NCA, 2011-2014) created seven Constitutional Commissions to negotiate decentralization during the Constitution-drafting, voting and ratification process (2011-2014). The legal framework for political decentralization is defined by Chapter VII "Local Government," (Articles 131-142), as well as Chapter I "General Principles" (Articles 14-15) of the 2014 Constitution and the April 2018 Decentralization Law (*Code des Collectivités Locales* - Local Collectivities Law or CCL), while the territorial management of local governance was restructured with the creation of 86 new municipalities (from 264 to 350) and, finally, the holding of municipal elections in May 2018, replacing special delegations that were appointed following the 2011 revolution. The heart of these debates focused on the question of financial decentralization: historically citizens were left out of the local political process (both because of the absence of democratic local elections as well as the absence of participation, i.e. through civil society organs) and financial decision-making at the municipal level. Under the previous political regime, municipalities were placed under the

KEY EVENTS

January 14, 2011

2011 Tunisian revolution; onset of democratization

October 23, 2011

National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections with principle mandate to draft a new Constitution

January 26, 2014

Tunisian Constitution is adopted; (Chapter VII Local Government); Articles 131-142)

March 18, 2016

Creation of the new Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment

April 2018

Passing of Local Government Code by Parliament (392 articles, *Code des Collectivités Locales*)

May 6, 2018

First free and fair municipal elections

control of the Ministry of Interior and the ruling party.

As such, citizen-local elite relations were defined by control and selective, often unequal, social service delivery. The post-revolutionary decentralization process sought to bring participatory democracy to the local level for the first time in Tunisia's modern independent history. The project implemented by Action Associative (AA) and funded by UNDEF contributes directly to this ambitious effort and addresses core issues within the decentralization process, by empowering citizens and their communities through an inclusive and participatory process around public finance decisions. While the Tunisian Constitution of 2014 clearly stipulates the legal framework for decentralization and guarantees the power of local authorities, the operationalization of this legal framework requires assistance, both from international donors as well as local civil society. The ultimate goal of the project is to introduce and build political trust between citizens and elected officials at the local level and to establish sustainable participatory democratic processes at the local level.

In addition to Tunisia's development context, AA operates within a keen understanding of the legal and structural context of the country's decentralization process – a process which has been highly contentious since the 2011 uprisings because of competing notions of what decentralization should entail. In particular, the contour for a decentralization process in Tunisia is *not new*, though prior discussions focused on administrative de-concentration, not local decision-making. Both the CFAD (*Centre de Formation et d'Appui à la Décentralisation*) as well as the Tunisian Common Loan Fund CPSCS (*Caisse des prêts et de soutien des collectivités locales*) pre-date both the 2014 Constitution as well as the 2011 Revolution, however, both were previously placed under the tutelage of the Ministry of the Interior (MoI). With the 2016 creation of the Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment, these critical structures were moved from the MoI to the new Ministry, and supported by a number of other new structures including the High Council of Local Government housed outside of the capital, the High Court of Local Finance, as well as the Instance of Development of Exploration and Support for the Decentralization Process, IPAPD, and the creation of regional and administrative tribunals as stipulated in the Local Government Code (CCL).

Timeline of Re-organization of Local Authority

January 14, 2011- May 6, 2018

Pre-2011 municipal councils dissolved and replaced with appointed special delegations by transitional authorities

2014-2018

Creation of 86 new municipalities – from 264 to 350 total by 2018

May 6, 2018

First democratic municipal elections

Summer 2018

Elected municipal authorities and councils take office

Action Associative's mission in Tunisia's democratization process dates to its establishment in 2012, thus preceding the decentralization wave in Tunisia that followed the passing of the 2014 Constitution. The organization began focusing specifically on decentralization in 2013 when it started implementing the participatory budget mechanism in the first 4

municipalities in Tunisia. In 2015 AA was even invited by CFAD to draft a guide on decentralization, a guide for public institutions on participatory budget mechanisms, as well as to partake in meetings at the CFAD on training facilitators of inclusive and participatory mechanisms. AA's deep understanding of the evolution and history of the decentralization process in Tunisia, its involvement in the operationalization of legal texts and codes, and its understanding of the constitutionally-mandated implementation of participatory mechanisms at the local level through trainings and the involvement of civil society, renders it an outstanding implementor for a local governance project. AA, as both an implementor but also an important CSO in Tunisia, has a unique ability to sensitize its targeted beneficiaries (citizens, other CSOs and local officials as well as cadres). It understands the role CSOs need to play in implementing participatory mechanisms at the local level – many of these are either unaware of their legally-mandated role in the local governance process (that municipal councils have to work with participatory mechanisms) or lack the capacity (and contextual comprehension) to become key players in the process.

b. The project objective and intervention rationale

Implemented in partnership with ATIDE and Kolna Tunis, AA's USD 220,000 project, "*Oeil sur le Budget* [Eyes on the Budget]: *Building Public Participation, Trust and Transparency in Local Governance in Tunisia*," seeks to address a critical problem in Tunisia's on-going process of decentralization and building democracy at the local level: how can citizens be convinced to participate in a local democratic process that was previously equated with mistrust, corruption and non-democratic political control? How can citizen trust be built and improved and how can local political participation be encouraged, operationalized and sustained?

The project strategy centers on a participatory approach in order to overcome the widely held public perception that local governance equals bad and corrupt governance. Under Tunisia's dictatorship prior to 2011, this was especially related to development, infrastructure and social service delivery projects at the local level. Building on its previous work in participatory budget mechanisms as a strategy to experience and engage in democratic practice, Action Associative worked to:

- Engage in comprehensive outreach and sensitization campaigns to explain to citizens as well as local officials how participatory processes can be operated and how these are stipulated by various new legal frameworks post-2014;
- Increase municipality commitment to participatory budget processes by opening the budget category related to basic infrastructure projects for citizen participation, and signing promissory agreements or charters of agreements;
- Strengthen the capacity of local authorities, citizens, and local CSOs through engagement in participatory budget exercises, and through transparent and accountable communication channels, especially pertaining to municipal budgets and municipal finances;
- Work with municipalities to hold citizen fora in which citizens can propose and vote on priority projects before these are vetted by municipal technical experts;

- Build and improve trust between citizens and communes because of citizen engagement in decision-making through voting, and the sustainability of participatory budgetary practices in the future because of established best-practices.
- Ensure municipal accountability through the election by citizens of neighborhood representatives. These representatives are in charge of follow-up (monitoring) and evaluating the implementation of the vetted projects. Gender parity was implemented in this electoral process.

c. Project strategy and approach

Over its course of implementation, the project promoted reform around a three-pronged rationale on which the strategies and activities were based: (1) changing a long-standing history of mistrust and corruption that has defined citizen-municipality relationships for multiple decades and that would serve as a basis for building democracy; (2) changing the procedures around transparency and communication about the decentralization to sensitize communities to participatory processes as well as for municipalities to understand the essence of citizens' involvement (even before this was stipulated by law). This served as a mechanism of democracy, as a basis to sign agreement charters with municipalities, and to build a precedent for future municipal cadres and elected local officials; (3) changing the prospects for sustainability of participatory mechanisms by sensitizing citizens, gaining municipal commitments as tested by the project's implementation timeline spanning the pre- and post-municipal election phases.

The most difficult project objective was around the nebulous category of political trust. The project's most critical structural contribution was its emphasis on overcoming inherent and decade-long mistrust in local governance and re-introducing the municipal space as one of participation, transparency and democratic decision-making. As such, the focus on participatory budget mechanisms was a critical incentive area for citizens to engage in local governance and democracy-building because they would be able to partake in proposing and voting on projects that directly impact their quotidian life (mainly infrastructural and public space projects).

Key to this approach was a comprehensive communication and outreach strategy: most citizens did not understand or know what role

Participatory Budget Mechanism Facts

Participatory budget mechanisms apply to 1 out of 3 municipal budget categories – local level development projects (*Projets de Proximité*), including roads, side-walks, green zones, rain water management, public lightings and neighborhoods' sport fields.

Steps

1. Community sensitization campaigns about participatory budget system.
2. Transparent communication processes about local finances in townhall setting.
3. Voting of citizen-proposed projects and voting of neighborhood representatives.
4. Citizen priority projects accepted by municipal authorities following reviews by technical committees.
5. Participatory budget mechanism is effectuated annually for the following year budget.

municipalities would have post-2011, and later after 2014, once the legal context for decentralization was put into place.

A large portion of Action Associative's activities were devoted to multi-faceted and thorough communication campaigns, making use of citizen fora, traditional, and social media. The communication strategy was carefully crafted to explain the complex technicalities related to the legal framework of decentralization, the mandated involvement of civil society and citizens, as well as how to sensitize transparency around municipal budgets. Building on its strength in communication and public relations as well as in-depth knowledge of all aspects of decentralization in Tunisia, AA was able to target and benefit citizens, local CSOs, elected commune delegates, municipal cadres, and elected council members. Beyond benefitting from project activities, these groups also became integral to the implementation, sustainability, and promotion of participatory budget processes. In turn, the symbiotic relationship between grantee and beneficiaries allowed the grantee to tailor its project and regularly integrate feasible lessons learned in its activities.

III. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

a. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation sought to achieve a comprehensive and forward-looking report of the implemented project, with attention to the grantee's capacity, as well as the overall development context. To this extent, data was collected and analyzed conforming to OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation, especially during in-person interviews, included the criterion of UNDEF's added value and additionally collected information for future avenues of development assistance for local and participatory democracy projects. Recommendations and lessons learned were developed from evidence-based findings following the desk review and field work.

b. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation was conducted in a transparent and participatory approach with attention to grantee capacity as well as the overall development and structural context. This allowed for an in-depth assessment of the project rationale and justification, both its programmatic (outputs and outcomes) and financial dimensions. The variation of site visits and meetings with beneficiaries brought additional value to fully assess impact as well as measure sustainability.

c. Evaluation Questions

For this project, evaluation questions concerned whether the designed and implemented project contributed to local democratic development, and specifically whether trust between citizens and local authorities was established and sustained via participatory budget processes and mechanisms. Key questions revolved around whether the project design is sustainable within the targeted communities, whether its participatory budget mechanisms

have been applied beyond the realm of the UNDEF-funded activities, and whether the mechanism was welcomed from all sides, meaning citizens, elected officials and CSOs. Evaluation questions are detailed in Annex I.

d. Data Collection and Analysis

The UNDEF Operational Manual for Post Project Evaluations was the initial guidance document to develop first the Launch Note (in September 2019), including an evaluation framework and field-work methodology. For this preparatory step, the international expert evaluator conducted an in-depth desk review of all available French and Arabic-language project documentation, including the Project Document, reports and supporting activities documentation submitted by the grantee (15 documents related to project activities), Mid-term and Final Narrative Reports, financial reports and milestone verification reports, and a participatory budget manual produced by Action Associative. Additionally, the evaluator conducted an extensive secondary literature review on decentralization and democratization in Tunisia, as well as a review of the grantee's past and current activities in Tunisian media and resources, as they pertain to local democracy development in Tunisia.

The evaluator and Action Associative project leadership and staff held an introductory meeting for the evaluation at the headquarters of Action Associative in Tunis in October 2019 to discuss the overall project and to organize a detailed field-mission plan. During this meeting, the evaluator and grantee discussed two critical areas: (1) the overall development context for decentralization projects in Tunisia, including review of important political decisions setting the stage for legal reform and mandated civil society participation, and (2) the positioning of the UNDEF-funded participatory budget project within this specific setting, including possibilities and barriers (contextual and project-specific). During the field mission, the evaluator traveled to Mahdia to interview beneficiaries (the Mayor, elected members of the municipal council, municipal staff and civil society representatives), Gremda (Sfax) to interview the Mayor (elected head, former elected neighborhood representative) and Secretary General of the municipality (administrative head), met with an elected council member and municipal cadre in Ariana (Tunis), and completed the field-mission with a follow-up meeting with grantee leadership and staff, as well as a UNDP representative. The full list of people interviewed is provided in Annex 3.

The grantee also provided the evaluator with additional contextual documentation about laws and regulations related to decentralization and participatory budget mechanisms, as well as videos and short documentaries produced as part of the project. Additional research during field work included similar work by other key actors, both bi-lateral and multi-lateral, governmental and non-governmental, as well as conversations with citizens, members of other municipal councils (where similar projects did not occur), and researchers working on decentralization in Tunisia. The field work included equal research in Tunis as well as outside of the capital.

e. Limitations

There were no challenges to the evaluation. The grantee was eager to discuss the project, including its limitations and new possibilities, share project-specific and additional supporting documentations, assist in contacting beneficiaries at multiple localities, and remained available for follow-up meetings and discussions. The grantee too adapted to the evaluation field work, suggesting additional meetings, providing additional documentation, and overall facilitating the field work mission.

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

a. Relevance

Oeil sur le budget was implemented at a critical juncture in Tunisia's decentralization process, spanning 20 months between January 2017 and December 2018. The project design, its implementation, and especially its adaptation to a changing local context in terms of delays of passing a local electoral law and organizing municipal elections, worked to promote local and participatory democracy and democratic development at the local level. The project was relevant as it squarely contributed to establishing democracy through trust at the local level, while its focus on participatory budget mechanisms worked in different local contexts as tested through its implementation in seven diverse communes and across time, first among appointed special delegations, during electoral periods and finally, post-elections among elected local officials (see sustainability section below). Participatory mechanisms are stipulated in the Code of Local Collectivities (CCL), and are limited to the latter of three municipal budget categories (administrative, structural and community-based – *projets de proximité*). Community-based budget categories concern streets, sidewalks, green zones, public lighting, neighborhoods' sport fields, and rain water management – issue areas that directly affect inhabitants' daily life.

A comprehensive multi-tiered approach

At the core of its strategy, Action Associative designed an exhaustive and multi-tiered strategy aimed at building trust between Tunisian citizens, CSOs, and local authorities by sensitizing the targeted populations to participatory budget mechanisms with a strategy to “teach” democracy by “doing” at the local level. The project was implemented in a logical order: first, meetings were held with targeted partner communes to gauge their interest and commitment, followed by workshops between CSOs and local authorities to sign conventions of promise to engage citizens in participatory budget mechanisms. For instance, in Sidi Bouzid, as reported by the Tunisian UNDP representative who conducted the milestone review, AA signed a memorandum of commitment with the special delegation to set a precedent for CSO and citizen involvement, and later an agreement with election candidates. Once communes were on board, AA organized and mediated a series of trainings and workshops to sensitize citizens, CSOs and municipal officials to mechanisms of participatory budgeting – including what elements of budgets were open for public debate, as well as the laws and legal regulations governing not only decentralization, but local powers. These workshops were especially welcomed by newly elected officials, as

explained in interviews in Ariana and Mahdia, some of whom did not have prior experience in local politics and immediately saw the importance of including civil society in the work of municipalities due to issues of trust, confusion about the role of municipalities and what was simply feasible. Trainings introduced by AA included processes of holding townhall meetings, electing local commune delegates, citizen fora to discuss budgetary priorities, trainings for local officials pre- and post-elections, and inclusion of CSOs at all stages of the process. AA actively engaged its partner organizations ATIDE and Kolna Tounes in the monitoring element of delegate elections as well as discussions and voting on local budgetary priorities.

Relevance across territory and actors

The project's relevance was observable on three distinctive levels: (1) it addressed a national priority and effort to develop democracy at the local level by focusing on *one* of the elements of decentralization, participatory budget mechanisms – an element which addressed the historical-structural issue of political mistrust while introducing citizen and CSO involvement to sensitive issues around transparency in public funds; (2) it addressed communes with different characteristics, needs and priorities (and different levels of budgets) across the territory; (3) it was comprised of an adaptable strategy that took into account different legal-political contexts – appointed special delegations, municipal elections, and newly elected local officials while involving civil society and citizens at all stages.

b. Effectiveness

The project as implemented was able to achieve the objectives and goals in the seven municipalities, and the introduction of participatory budget mechanisms led to an increase in citizen participation, civil society involvement, as well as more effective management by local officials. The project was effective in that its adaptable strategy allowed for the management of unforeseen delays (delays in passing of laws, delays in holding local elections) and inclusion of additional municipalities, allowed for all target indicators and outcomes to be achieved, with compelling justifications for short implementation delays as well as slight changes, especially in the last implementation phase (adding of 3 new municipalities – Tabarka, Kairouan, and Mahdia). The project's overall effectiveness was the result of an effective project design, realistic implementation plan, and a capable and highly knowledgeable grantee, well-positioned to implement this kind of activity.

Adaptability to different contexts

A key element to its successful implementation was the ability of Action Associative to adapt to different regional contexts and tailor the activity implementation plan to different communes with different needs. While the contour of activities was equally implemented across communes, depending on the socio-economic context and geographic diversity of each municipality as well as different needs (i.e. seasoned local officials vs. first-time elected officials). The first set of municipalities - Ariana (Tunis), Sidi Bouzid (interior), Gremda (Sfax, second largest city in Tunisia), and Monastir (coastal city in the Sahel/tourism centric), each had unique characteristics as well as set of demands. Of these four municipalities, Ariana is the largest in terms of population (114,000 inhabitants and 20 neighborhoods with a minimum of 20 and maximum 60 elected delegates for the neighborhoods) as well as

number of communes, and its elected council members were especially dependent on civil society to play an active role in budgetary decisions. After AA conducted trainings with municipal staff on participatory budget processes, elected officials invited AA back to continue trainings as knowledge on the steps of how to involve civil society as mandated by law was unknown to many new council members. In Gremda, on the other hand, the newly elected mayor was herself a previously elected neighborhood representative who participated in trainings and townhalls facilitated by AA, and as such was well-versed in participatory budget mechanisms when she took office. With her previous experience, she was able to expand civil society participation through her previous knowledge of communication strategy and citizen involvement strategies. Of the three new municipalities added in the second phase of the project – Tabarka (north-west), Kairouan (center), and Mahdia (coastal), the latter was a particularly interesting case as the municipality always enjoyed high levels of gender parity in representation (50 percent of the council members are women) and was working actively to increase civil society participation in neighborhood and townhall meetings to continue overcoming citizen mistrust in municipal affairs. To that extent and following AA's focus on increasing youth and gender participation in citizen involvement in the second phase of the project, the municipality in Mahdia targeted youth organizations and was particularly careful to organize public meetings during times when women could attend (afternoons versus morning; end of week versus mid-week). This strategy allowed the municipality to work towards new regulations that stipulated a specific percentage of citizen attendance in participatory budget processes.

Increase in national representativeness of municipalities

The change of communes, whether intended or not, had a positive impact on the effectiveness of the project. The evaluation included in-depth interviews with communes from both project phases and in both cases, elected officials and municipal cadres stressed the importance of interventions that allowed for an increase in citizen participation and the urgent need for more communication and sensitization campaigns. The seven communes that benefitted from this project are highly diverse in their national representation and served as a test-case for the project design's adaptability as well as need. Additionally, the grantee was able to focus on a gender-specific strategy in which 100 percent of trained facilitators (between 15-20 per commune) for participatory budget processes were female. Thus, of the 121 facilitators trained over the life of the project, 45% are women. Overall, the project was able to make significant steps towards increasing citizen trust in municipal affairs and notably increase the participation of local civil society organizations in facilitating citizen meetings, sensitizing citizens to municipal practices, and partaking in local democracy building.

c. Efficiency

Throughout the project, financial resources were expended as detailed in the financial documents, confirmed by milestone monitoring and evaluation report as well as interview with the evaluator. Budget lines were respected and correspond with actual costs in Tunisia. The burn-rate of expenditures corresponded with the activity implementation plan and was steady throughout the project. Action Associative reimbursed the remaining USD 4,909.75 to UNDEF in November 2019 following the submission of final reports.

Financial Management and Programmatic Efficiency

AA has a sound financial management structure in place, including its ability to track expenditures, and implements all project-funded activities in a cost-efficient manner commensurate with actual costs in Tunisia. Project funds were expended almost exclusively on facilitation of trainings, development of a comparatively low-cost participatory budget manual that is key to continuity and sustainability, and an effective communication and sensitization campaign. In the duration of project implementation, the Tunisian Dinar was devaluated by 26 percent, from 2.34 TND to 1 USD in April 2017 to 2.95 TND to 1 USD in December 2018. The *actual* exchange after passing through the Tunisian Central bank was slightly lower, and this change was communicated to UNDEF in a timely manner to reassign budget categories.

While the change in strategy to include three new municipalities in order to expand the project module to other localities (rather than replicate in the original 4 municipalities) did not change the cost effectiveness of the project, the additional work required to establish new partnership and communicate with a new set of communes, civil society organizations and implemented activities benefitted from the change in currency exchange in an efficient and positive manner.

Programmatic efficiency was also assured by a continuity of project staff throughout the project and clearly defined roles, in addition to regular monitoring and evaluation (internal as well as by beneficiaries) throughout the life of the project.

d. Impact

While impact is generally difficult to assess in the short term, the field work and interviews with multiple beneficiaries point to a critical impact on three levels directly related to the project objectives and broader goal to establish participatory democratic processes at the local level: (1) strengthening of the capacity of municipal delegates, elected officials and cadres; (2) encouraging and sustaining the engagement of civil society in local decision-making; (3) working towards a greater culture of citizen trust in municipal affairs.

Impact on municipal councils

The most evident impact was on the work of municipal councils. The project spanned multiple phases in the work of municipalities (pre-, during, and post-elections) and was involved in a targeted communication campaign to train municipal leadership and staff in various legal frameworks, guiding the work of local authorities, as well as specific stipulations about the involvement of citizens and civil society in participatory mechanisms, especially as these related to municipal budgets. Newly elected council members were either unaware of laws and regulations or required training on the various steps, including townhall meetings, elections of neighborhood delegates, proposition of projects, voting of projects, involvement of technical municipal teams to assess project feasibility, and implementation of projects decided upon by citizens. While the shifting security and rapidly changing political situation in Tunisia can have an effect on the priorities of local elites, the adaptability and durability of this project lend itself well to incorporate legal and

structural changes into the project. Overall, security was less of a concern in the implementation of the project.

The sensitization campaigns, which included training and distribution of the manual produced by Action Associative, were key elements in building sustainable participatory processes at the local level. In all interviews, elected council members and municipal cadres stressed the critical need to expand such trainings, especially as new regulation requires an exact percentage of citizen participation in local decisions. Even though the Tunisian Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment houses a training center for municipal staff and leadership, both the expansion of municipalities in Tunisia, rapidly changing legal frameworks, as well as the large number of newly elected council members requires sustained and regular assistance from civil society. In addition to meeting the important need of involving civil society, both the expertise of the grantee as well as the inclusion of local civil society organs in townhall meetings, elections, monitoring and issue-formulation, ameliorates citizen trust in processes of local governance.

Impact on local CSOs and citizens

A more difficult to measure but nonetheless important impact was on the role of civil society and citizens in participatory democracy at the local level. Beyond engaging in local decision making and activating citizenry, the project yielded two noticeable impactful results. The first is related to the continuity of CSO involvement in municipal affairs as well as citizen expectations. In Gremda (near Sfax), Mayor Emna Bouaziz, previously a neighborhood representative who was elected in 2018, keenly understands the need for the civil society involvement to encourage citizen participation in local governance. She first partook in participatory budget trainings as a citizen and civil society member in 2014 and 2015 and was able to carry her experience through the electoral period and eventually as the first elected mayor of Gremda. Because of this experience, Gremda (population of 43,000) continues to show a high percentage of citizen and CSO participation in townhall meetings, where citizens now have had almost a half a decade of experience in local democratic practice. Citizen participation is comparatively high and citizen expectations to be involved in municipal affairs has become established. The municipality thus focuses on finetuning citizen-municipal relations by engaging facilitators in public meetings to expedite decision-making, voting, as well as presentation of neighborhood projects for vote.

In Ariana (Tunis), Action Associative activities date to 2017, a year before the May 2018 municipal elections. AA was invited to train newly elected council members following their training of municipal cadres in participatory budget processes. Council member Ilhem Ben Salah stressed that trainings in participatory mechanisms were not only critical for new council members but their replication in subsequent years allowed for the expansion of civil society and citizen involvement, as well as targeting trainings at youth, women and disabled persons. For many citizens *and* newly elected council members, this was the very first experience with participatory democracy in which a direct involvement in political processes was exercised and sustained.

A council member in Mahdia also stressed a new role for municipal councils to play in the building of trust between citizens and local authorities. Municipal councils, that member noted, play a conciliatory role between citizen demands and the technocratic and structural

needs of a municipality. Once participatory budget processes were put into place, the mechanism needed to be sensitized to address what the mayor of Mahdia called a potential tension between citizen demands and municipal priorities. The council member in charge of communication in Mahdia stressed three advantages of the participatory budget mechanism: (1) the proposing of projects by citizens; (2) the direct involvement of citizens through voting; (3) and the expanded role of the municipal council to reconcile citizen demands with critical needs through expanded outreach and citizen fora.

As underscored in interviews with beneficiaries, as well as project documents and supporting documentation, AA workshops and subsequent meetings were welcomed by all three parties. Interview participants stressed the need for their continuity. Evidence was also presented for the desire to continue such sessions and to expand them to other municipalities nation-wide. For both citizens and municipal council members, these workshops and trainings presented a first-time experience in how to implement and sustain these legally mandated mechanisms. While the workshops do not address the chronic problem of insufficient municipal budgets and low levels of revenue from taxation, they empower both citizens and local officials to comprehend their role in municipal decision-making as well as exercising local authority.



Participatory Budget Voting, Second Citizen Forum, El Helya (Monastir), October 1, 2017

e. Sustainability

Project sustainability for participatory budget mechanisms in implementing communes is high. This is due to four interrelated factors: (1) evidence of continuity of participatory mechanisms post-trainings after UNDEF-funding ended; (2) clear beneficiary demand for continued trainings targeting future staff and elected officials; (3) the training of local trainers in the communes as well as availability of resources, including a manual and videos of previous activities; (4) laws and regulations stipulating participatory budget mechanism and a minimum threshold for citizen participation. Action Associative's project design has been previously tested and ameliorated for the purposes of sustainability in terms of producing materials that can be utilized in future trainings, commencing projects with sensitization campaigns, as well as signing cooperation/promissory agreements with targeted municipalities that serve as precedents for future CSO and citizen engagement (even beyond official regulations).

Short-term indicators for sustainability

The clearest predictor for sustainability is the implementation timeframe of the UNDEF-funded project, which spanned three distinct periods of municipal management, including special delegation (2011-2018), an electoral period (May 2018), as well as a post-electoral period in which municipalities were managed by elected councils (May 2018 to present). Because the same multi-tiered project framework involving local authorities, CSOs and citizens has been applied to Tunisia's different political contexts, coupled with AA's expertise in the legal and technical debates and regulations pertaining to decentralization, the project continued seamlessly across profoundly different contexts. As stated in mid-term and final reports, in municipalities where project beneficiaries were pushing back against principle elements – neighborhood representative elections and adaptation of some participatory budgetary rule – AA was able to apply its expertise and comparative experience to convince beneficiaries in a compelling and dialogue-based manner. Multiple municipal council actors attested to participatory budget mechanisms remaining in place and their implementation following the life of the UNDEF-funded project. Additionally, the transfer of trainings during different political phases served as critical skill-building exercises in an area that beneficiaries expressed continued needs. As participatory budget mechanisms are well installed in the targeted municipalities, beneficiaries expressed the need for wider and longer communication and outreach campaigns, involvement of civil society in this critical stage (pre-town hall meetings, pre-neighborhood representative elections). Beneficiaries too expressed the need to sustain trainings around legal and regulatory changes – both through the work of training centers (e.g. CFAD) and the sustained involvement of civil society to sensitize citizens and train new municipal cadres and elected authorities.

Ripple effect and replication

Throughout its implementation, AA and beneficiaries enjoyed a symbiotic and critical relationship in which the grantee, through regular monitoring, evaluation and communication, translated stated training and workshop needs into action. Beneficiaries consulted AA on how to resolve participation problems during the course of the project. Through this effective exchange, the grantee was able to finetune the substantive portion of the project. In all cases, beneficiaries reported that many municipalities in Tunisia suffer

from the absence of such trainings and stressed the need for continuity within the targeted communes, while expanding to new municipalities. AA's selection of targeted municipalities was diverse and nationally representative, attesting to its ability to adapt the project design to different political contexts (as tested with this project) and across diverse geographical and socio-political needs.

A final ripple effect, more difficult to measure, is the expectation of citizens to be involved in future municipal decision-making because of previous experience in this project. As noted in interviews in Ariana (Tunis), this was the first time citizens have been involved in political decision-making. The experience in Gremda (Sfax) showed a half a decade of citizen expectation to be involved and high-levels of participation in town halls and public meetings. Once citizens are involved in budgetary decision making that directly affects their quotidian life, it is likely that they will continue to place pressure on local authorities to guarantee participation in future budgetary cycles or newly elected councils.

f. UNDEF Added Value

The UNDEF added value for this project as well as the overall work of Action Associative was multi-fold. First, UNDEF allowed for great flexibility within the project that benefitted the overall strategy, impact for the donor and tested effectiveness of the project module for the grantee. By increasing the number of targeted communes from four to seven, the grantee was able to test its participatory budget module across more cases, while adding value to the overall decentralization context and meeting a critical development need. UNDEF too provided AA with the possibility to adapt its already well-planned strategy to different contexts, especially the contextual and political changes in Tunisia and test project design against environmental challenges such as the delays in parliament voting on local election law. With its funding of a multi-tiered strategy, UNDEF added significant value to assist in establishing citizen trust in local democratic processes, and directly contributing to the skills and possibilities necessary to building democracy at the local level.

g. UNDEF Visibility

The presence of the UNDEF logo buttressing event announcements, workshops as well as training and presentation materials enhanced the credibility of a nascent civil society organization and implementor, which began working on building democratic processes at the local level in 2012. Action Associative's work has always been in the context of local governance, overcoming corruption and building trust. With funding from the UNDEF, AA was able to hone its design of participatory budgeting modules and to build a strategy that focuses directly on citizen engagement in municipal decision-making. UNDEF visibility too allowed for attracting trust among new municipalities and cross-nationally, while lending legitimacy from the national level, particularly the Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment following the re-municipalization of the territory and the period of contentious national-level decision making around decentralization. Finally, UNDEF-funding also has an impact on perception by beneficiaries and local stakeholders who do not link this funding mechanism to bi-lateral interests, and as such view the work as implemented by AA as politically neutral. This dimension is especially important in a highly polarized political

environment such as post-Revolutionary Tunisia, and certainly allows AA to implement across political contexts.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion	Recommendation
A sound communication, advocacy, outreach and sensitization strategy is central prior to the implementation of activities. This strategy needs to involve all levels of beneficiaries: citizens, CSOs and local authorities.	Action Associative should identify a donor to fund the development of a communication and advocacy guide for civil society based on its own expertise in communication strategies as well as its in-depth knowledge of decentralization in Tunisia. The guide should include sections on participatory democracy and participatory budget mechanisms.
The work of civil society is key in building citizen trust at the local level, while balancing needs between citizens and municipal authorities. In addition to functioning as a counterweight to local authorities, civil society also fills an important knowledge and skill-building gap as Tunisia's decentralization process is taking root.	As initiated by Action Associative, a wide range of civil society organisms should be involved at all stages of a project and actively participate in trainings, workshops, town halls, monitoring and evaluation as well as citizen sensitization to help municipalities increase citizen participation.
Only CSOs and implementers who have a clear understanding of the local context – legal, political, nation-wide variation should work on complex issues of decentralization and municipal budgets.	Action Associative's project design based on subject-specific expertise, and long-term vision of involvement in local politics and citizen trust, evolving experience through testing the design over different periods of time, adaptability and creativity should serve as a model and selection criteria for future initiatives.
Decentralization laws and regulations, especially municipal budgets, are complex and misunderstood – they add to citizen mistrust and misunderstanding of what participatory democracy entails.	Action Associative has created a training module to explain municipal budget plans to beneficiaries. This training module should be expanded and adapted to different audiences (elected officials, CSOs, and citizens) to help overcome misunderstanding and mistrust.
A new focus should include newly created municipalities and municipalities where citizen involvement is comparatively low.	Action Associative should develop a guiding document based on its previous experience in overcoming either complex issues as well as recommendations for municipal cases

	where citizen trust and participation is extremely low. Either a base-line study or literature review of existing international and national surveys can serve as an analysis for geographic focus areas.
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VI. LESSONS LEARNED

Project designs and strategies based on in-depth knowledge of the development issues and context (in this case decentralization) are economical, replicable, and easily adaptable.

The strength of Action Associative as grantee and implementer derives from a unique set of expertise by both its leadership and staff. The project design funded with this grant was based on previous exercises in participatory mechanisms focused on overcoming issues of citizen mistrust during the post-dictatorship era. A key lesson learned is that projects rooted in issue-specific knowledge (legal, political, historical, procedural, technical), are economical, replicable, and easily adaptable to contentious and swiftly changing contexts of political transformations. This not only ensures sound project delivery and completion but also allows for much-needed legitimacy among different stakeholders.

Projects that work on issues of building citizen-trust as broader democratization initiatives need to allocate large programmatic and budgetary portions to effective communication, advocacy, outreach and sensitization campaigns.

Action Associative stresses this element as do both the direct beneficiaries of the projects and those who have not encountered such initiatives. In politically polarized and rapidly transforming conditions, misinformation (or oversaturation of information) does not allow for clear understandings of reform projects (local collectivities code, constitutional chapter on decentralization, additional regulation), adding to citizen mistrust in local governance. Effective and clear communication and sensitization about contentious political issues is critical to any project launch, the project life cycle, as well as prospects for sustainability.

Projects based on a symbiotic relationship with beneficiaries (rather than purely instructive or instructional) increase potential for ownership, adaptation, as well as sustainability.

The adaptability of the Action Associative participatory budget module to different political contexts and across geography is a result of an underlying symbiotic strategy in which the grantee communicated regularly with all tiers of beneficiaries to adapt the content of project activities to local needs and demands. This allowed the project to stand out from others in that it did not operate as a “technical course,” but was rather demanded by beneficiaries as it helped the targeted population make sense of both possibilities and barriers to participation in local governance.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation questions and detailed findings:

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	1. To what extent did the project design and implementation of activities address the issue of promoting local and participatory democracy and democratic development in Tunisia?	<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?
Effectiveness	<p>1. Was the project as implemented able to achieve the objectives and goals in the seven municipalities and did participatory budget practices lead to increased trust between citizens, CSOs and elected officials?</p> <p>2 (Note: this question is copied from the Information Note for Post-Project Evaluation): Did the change of communes that occurred had an impact on the effectiveness of project implementation?</p>	<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?
Efficiency	How did the resources expended relate to the 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? Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?

Impact	<p>1.To what extent has the project put in place participatory budget processes and procedures to build trust among citizens and local authorities?</p> <p>2.Did the security and political situation in Tunisia and related consequences undermined the project realizations?</p> <p>3.Were the workshops/trainings welcomed from both parties? If so, did it improve the work of elected officials and civil servants in all communes?</p> <p>4. Were the Participatory Budget projects implemented as planned? If so, did the satisfaction of citizens increase in the 4/7 communes?</p> <p>5.Did this project have a ripple effect on other communities in Tunisia?</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?
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Sustainability	<p>1. Do the activities implemented indicate sustainability of the results as well as among the targeted communities and others?</p> <p>2. What measures has the NGO put in place for sustainability of achieved results?</p> <p>3. Have workshops/trainings been conducted to ensure sustainable impact among the direct beneficiaries?</p> <p>4. Do cooperation agreements in the 7 communes still play a role after the end of the project?</p> <p>5. Is the Participatory Budget mechanism still functioning after the end of the project?</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)?
UNDEF value added	<p>How far did UNDEF funding provide value added to the work of the NGO?</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?

Provide a summary of any other results from surveys, questionnaires or key data from interviews.

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed:

Background/Contextual Documents

- Janine A. Clark, 2018, *Local Politics in Jordan and Morocco: Strategies of Centralization and Decentralization*. Columbia University Press.
- Janine A. Clark, Emanuela Dalmasso and Ellen Lust. 2019. *Not the Only Game in Towns: Explaining Changes in Municipal Councils in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia*. Democratization, (no. 26-1): 1-20.
- International Crisis Group, 2019, *Decentralization en Tunisie: Consolider la démocratie sans affaiblir l'Etat*. Report no. 198.
- Intissar Kherigi, November 2018, *Deepening Democracy in Transitional Tunisia: A New Chapter for Local Governance*, Great Insights.
- Intissar Kherigi, 2018, *The Role of Decentralization in Tunisia's Transition to Democracy*, Fletcher Forum of World Affairs.
- Lana Salman. 2017. *What we talk about when we talk about decentralization? Insights from Post-Revolution Tunisia*. L'Année du Maghreb 16, pp. 91-108.
- Lotfi Tarchouna, July 31, 2019, *The Tunisian Experience of Decentralization since 2014*, Arab Reform Initiative.
- The Republic of Tunisia, 2014, *The Constitution of the Tunisian Republic* (Chapter 7, "Du Pouvoir Local," Articles 131-142).
- The Republic of Tunisia, 2018, *Loi Organique No. 2018-29 of 9 May 2018 concerning the Code of Local Collectivities*.
- Sarah Yerkes and Marwan Muasher, May 2018, *Decentralization in Tunisia: Empowering Towns, Engaging People*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Project Documents

- Project Document, Reports: Midterm Progress, Final Narrative, Financial Reports
- Milestone Verification Narrative and Financial Reports
- Documents related to project activities, including fliers for townhall meetings, radio announcements, announcements by municipalities, invitation to neighborhood meetings.

Project Outputs

- Action Associative guide for implementing participatory budget in Tunisian municipalities, 2017
- Action Associative technical assistance for participatory budget/ communication plan for Gremda municipality
- Signed conventions between CSOs and municipalities.
- Technical assistance document (November 2018) for participatory investment plans
- Short project documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nybXZ9xEIWA>

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed

8 November 2019	
Meeting at Action Association HQ in Tunis	
Kouraich Jaouahdou	AA, President
Olfa Karrou	AA, Program Assistant
19 November 2019	
Meeting at Mahdia Municipality	
Faiza Belkhir	Mayor, Mahdia
Lamia Layouni	Elected Council Member , President of the Participatory Democracy Municipal Committee, and CSO representative
Municipal Staff Member Yassine Sfar	Chargé de Communication Chargé PAI of Municipal Administration
19 November 2019	
Meeting at Gremda (Sfax) Municipality	
Emna Bouaziz Krichene	Mayor, Gremda
Bahri Mathlouthi	Secretary General, Gremda Municipal Council
21 November 2019	
Meeting at Ariana Municipality	
Ilhem Ben Salah	Elected Council Member, President of the Participatory Democracy Municipal Committee Ariana
Municipal Staff Member	Citizen Relations
26 November 2019	
Follow-up meeting at Action Association	
Kouraich Jaouahdou	AA, President
Olfa Karrou	AA, Program Assistant
Accountant	AA
11 December 2019	
Meeting at UNDP	
Mohamedhedi Ben Ali	UNDP

Annex 4: Acronyms

AA	Action Associative
CCL	Code des Collectivites Locales
CSO	Civil Society Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program