

Programme d'Appui à la Société Civile (PASC – Tunisie)

Project fiche

Project :	Programme d'appui à la société civile (PASC-Tunisie)
Donor :	European Commission – European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument
Budget :	3.400.000 EUR
Consortium leader :	European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)
Partner Organisations :	Tunisian Association for Studies on Decentralisation (ATERDAL) Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) National School of Administration (ENA) Centre of Training and Decentralisation Support (CFAD)
Location :	Tunisia (Tunis, Le Kef, Sousse, Gafsa, Tozeur et Médenine)
Duration :	36 months (currently in month 11)

I. Executive summary

The « Programme d'Appui à la Société Civile (PASC-Tunisie) » is one of the most ambitious and innovative initiatives for Democracy Support that the European Union has recently launched in its Neighbourhood. In the wake of the Jasmine Revolution and for the first time in the history of European cooperation, the interim Tunisian government decided to reallocate a substantial envelope of bilateral funds (7M€) –originally foreseen for technical assistance and institutional building– to reinforce the capacities of Tunisian CSOs so that they could be in terms of playing a substantial role in the transition to democracy.

II. Objectives

The overall objective of the programme consists on supporting Tunisian Civil Society in its efforts to consolidate and strengthen its contribution to political and economic dialogue, the consolidation of the rule of law and the promotion of socio-economic development. To this purpose, the programme aims at building spaces for dialogue at local level around policy issues that are to be identified by the CSOs themselves, thus enhancing their ownership over the programme and reversing the top-down approach that was in place during the Ben Ali years.

The climate of distrust resulting from a long dictatorship that used CSOs as a means to embroider its external image is to be overcome by tackling simultaneously the needs of both kind of stakeholders – public administrators and civil society activists– and by promoting the establishment of “operational partnerships” that will address the main public problems that the country is currently facing.

Trust among otherwise separate –and often confronted– stakeholders is to be established, first and foremost, through the collective analysis of the issues to be addressed by the programme. This preliminary phase of participatory assessment is key to ensure the legitimacy of the actions to be carried by PASC and represents the cornerstone of the methodology, based on a shared ownership over the objectives and expected results of the dialogue process.

The programme is strongly policy oriented so as to provide CSOs and public bodies with a shared approach to problem solving, which represents a considerable progress towards a participative democracy. In the long run, this operational partnership will derive in a better understanding of the others' capacities and strengths.

III. Main focus area:

- *Decentralization, participative democracy and good local governance*
- *Employment and socio-economic development, with a special focus on disadvantaged regions*
- *Government and public sector, towards a social cohesion model*
- *Active citizenship based on gender equity and human rights*

IV. Main activities

- Promoting and structuring CSO participation in the decision making process in the field of public policies
- Supporting the implementation and the formalization of dialogue spaces dedicated to public services provision
- Networking targeted actors
- Establishing smooth communication channels (peer to peer) between stakeholders
- Developing tools and solutions adapted to CSO real needs (tailor-made approach)
- Strengthening of the core capacity of civil society as well as their capacity for dialogue vis- à vis the public sector, both at national, regional and local levels
- Setting up actions to improve the institutional and legislative environment for civil society
- Consultation and partnership between stakeholders and capitalization on best practices.
- Support for pilot projects, and support for monitoring and advocacy

V. Achieved results

The programme has put into place a system that allows the key stakeholders to identify those priorities that are to be tackled along the different dialogue processes that are to be conducted simultaneously at local and national level.

1) A Steering Committee composed by an equal number of representatives from some key ministries (Economy and Finance, Home Affairs and Cooperation and Development) and the main networks of CSOs in Tunisia (RANDET, LTDH, Coalition for Women) is in place; its main mission consists on approving the programming documents and providing political guidance to the Management Unit and the Field Offices.

2) The Executive Secretariat, the body in charge of running the programme, is composed of two CSOs –Tunisian Association for Studies on Decentralisation (ATERDAL) and the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES)– and two public institutions –the National School of Administration (ENA) and the Centre of Training and Decentralisation Support (CFAD)–, thus embodying the principles that PASC aims at promoting.

3) A network of Field Offices in six cities (covering the whole country) are providing first assistance and acting as helpdesk for the CSOs operating in their regions, helping them to better understand the political organisation of the Tunisian State (specially after the new Constitution) and providing them with tips and contacts to approach the government agencies in charge of running the different policies that they seek to influence.

4) The programme kick off meeting brought more than 500 participants and multi-stakeholder workshops have been organised in different regions. Local CSOs are agreeing upon those priorities that are keys to their regions or cities and should be given priority by the programme.

During 4 months, these activities, which aimed to stimulate exchanges and debates on regional topics, have enabled PASC staff to identify more than 600 associations, throughout all the country. Workshops and meeting represented an opportunity for associations to consult on relevant and common problems such as:

- Inclusion of rural women
- The dynamics of creating jobs
- Environment problems
- Oasis governance
- Problems faced in disadvantaged-region schools (school dropout, lack of transportation, chronic and contagious diseases)
- Etc

5) The Community of practice (CoP) is a "learning by sharing» platform that provides a link between the physical space (field offices) and virtual space (Internet). It is designed as a toolkit available to CSOs and public actors and is an open and participatory space allowing users to expand their knowledge through: thematic distance learning (e- learning); dialogue and networking; experience and exchange of best practices and a digital library continuous stocked by users. This platform will be launched in July.

VI. Policy context

- The activities of the programme aim at several stages of the policy cycle, depending on the specific needs identified in the field. While some actions tackle the stage of agenda setting (such as those regarding the promotion of Social Economy), most of them are mainly focused in the participatory formulation of local policies to address local problems.
- Although the current process of decentralisation enables working at local level, decision making is still being done at central level, which makes cooperation among local stakeholders –both public bodies and CSOs– a fruitful means of putting pressure on the different Ministries where the final decisions are to be taken
- Therefore, this current process represents a unique occasion to spread power and involve civil society in the new institutional configuration in order to contribute to identify, promote and take advantage of added value brought by each region

VII. Acknowledgements

- The democratic transition seems to be an irrevocable process
- The problem that Tunisia is facing is how to help civil society (and respecting its autonomy as well as its “bottom-up” dynamic) raise its skill levels in order to accomplish its expected mission in a democratic society.
- The willingness of some CSO's to influence the course of public policies doesn't match their technical skills or their knowledge of the policy landscape.
- It is not always easy to measure to what extent a given CSO is representative, nor to determine if it is driven by another groups of interest, with their own hidden agenda.
- In transitional contexts, the tendency of politics to influence policy is often exacerbated, which may entail the irruption of spoilers that aim at blocking the dialogue process from within.
- It is crucial to identify and involve those officials (“allies”) that believe in the importance of opening policy to multi-stakeholder dialogue because they are the ones that can act as drivers of change within the State bureaucracy.
- Tunis, the capital of Tunisia centralizes the largest number of associations and the most representative ones are taking the form of federations. For more efficiency, PASC must approach these national level dialogue partners without neglecting urgent needs of proximity associations, who are playing the role of service providers to deprived sections of society.