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TUNISIA'S CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

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Cover photo: Activists protest climate change in front of the municipal theatre in Tunis, Tunisia, March 2021, urging government action.

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About the Author

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Introduction

As a hotspot for climate change risks, Tunisia faces pressing challenges. One of the most water-scarce countries in the world, Tunisia ranks 20th globally in water stress.¹ In 2023, the country's per capita water availability was just 400 cubic meters annually, well below the 1000 cubic meters threshold for water poverty set by the UN. Climate change is projected to decrease rainfall by up to 30% by 2050,² impacting agriculture, which contributes 9% to the country's GDP and employs 16% of the workforce.³ Coastal zones will likely experience rising sea levels, increased temperature, salinity, and acidity, causing significant impacts, including loss of urban areas, infrastructure, and ecosystem degradation. Over 3100 hectares of urban land are at risk of submersion, and 44% of the coastline is highly vulnerable to these effects. The tourism sector faces significant threats from coastal erosion and sea-level rise, with an estimated loss of 1000 jobs per year by 2030.⁴ Climate change will increase vector-borne, water-borne, and food-borne diseases, exacerbate air pollution-related health issues, and raise the risk of floods damaging infrastructure. These effects are already being felt. In the Kerkennah Islands off the east coast of the mainland, for example, local fishermen

are facing declining fish stocks and increasing water salinity due to climate change, jeopardizing their livelihoods – a case that shows how climate change disproportionately impacts marginalized groups and underscores the urgent need for policies that address both ecological challenges and social inequities (Hafsi and Azouni, 2024).⁵

Most research to date on Tunisia's climate politics has focused on governmental policies to address climate challenges. This study turns instead to the role of grassroots activism, particularly youth movements and civil society organizations (CSOs), in shaping Tunisia's post-revolution climate actions. Through the lens of social movement theory, we investigate two central questions: How have grassroots movements shaped environmental governance in Tunisia following the revolution? How does Tunisian civil society engage international climate frameworks to influence local climate actions in Tunisia?

The study aims to:

- Map the progression of climate movements and CSOs in Tunisia, identifying key actors and their contributions to the climate action agenda.
- Assess the impact of these movements on national climate policies and public awareness.
- Examine the challenges CSOs face, including financial constraints, political obstacles, and difficulties in fostering intersectoral collaboration.
- Explore the role of participatory governance and youth activism in advancing climate justice and fostering sustainable change.
- Provide actionable recommendations to enhance the role and effectiveness of CSOs in addressing climate justice at both local and global levels.

The research was conducted in three phases, beginning with a stakeholder mapping in which

1 Samantha Kuzma, Liz Saccoccia and Marlena Chertock, 25 Countries, Housing One-Quarter of the Population, Face Extremely High Water Stress, June 2023, World Resources Institute, available at <https://www.wri.org/insights/highest-water-stressed-countries>

2 The World Bank Group, Climate Risk Profile: Tunisia, 2021, available at https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/15727-WB_Tunisia%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf

3 Chokri Thabet, Zouhair Rached and Ali Chebil, "Improving agricultural policies to enhance food security in Tunisia: A retrospective and prospective analysis", NEW MEDIT, n°3 (2024), available at <https://newmedit.iamb.it/bup/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/07-Improving-agricultural-policies.pdf>

4 Ministry of the environment Tunisia, Updated Nationally Determined Contribution, UNFCCC, October 2021, available at <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-08/CDN%20-%20Updated%20-english%20version.pdf>

5 Intissar Hafsi, Adel Azouni, Addressing Gender Inequality and Climate-Induced Displacement in Kerkennah, Tunisia, Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, May 2024, available at <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/addressing-gender-inequality-and-climate-induced-displacement-kerkennah-tunisia>

we identified and categorized key stakeholders involved in climate justice in Tunisia, including CSOs, governmental bodies, and private sector actors. This mapping included a comprehensive analysis of their roles, agendas, and influence in the climate landscape. In parallel, the research conducted a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed research and policy papers published since 2010 on the themes of climate action, activism, justice, and the role of CSOs – in Tunisia primarily but also as a secondary consideration of the North Africa and MENA regions. Finally, the research is based on primary data collection gathered through 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders.

The first part of the report offers a historical and contemporary analysis of climate activism in Tunisia. We trace the origins and evolution of climate movements, particularly in the post-revolutionary period, highlighting key milestones, pivotal events, and the emergence of influential actors within both the national and international spheres. Additionally, we analyze the capacity constraints, funding limitations, and political dynamics that often undermine the efforts of CSOs and grassroots organizations. In the second part, we address the challenges faced by CSOs and grassroots movements in Tunisia, identifying the institutional, social, and political obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of these groups in advancing climate action. In the third part, we assess the effectiveness of climate activism in influencing climate policies in Tunisia, exploring the extent to which these movements have shaped public discourse, policy development, and tangible climate actions. We end with concrete recommendations for overcoming these challenges and enhancing the effectiveness of climate activism, with a focus on improving multi-sectoral collaboration and promoting a proactive approach to climate policy formation in Tunisia.

1. Mapping Climate Activism in Tunisia

1.1 Evolution of Tunisia's Climate Movement

Climate justice activism in Tunisia begins in earnest with the 2011 revolution. Before 2011, civil society organizations concentrated on pollution issues and some localized environmental struggles but operated under strict state control and a restrictive political environment that limited public dissent and civil society's capacity for environmental advocacy. As such, CSOs promoted regime interests rather than seeking to enable genuine civic participation.

The post-revolution period marked a critical shift and a resurgence in activism, with environmental issues gaining prominence within the broader human rights framework and alongside calls for democratic governance (Crispino, 2023).⁶ New models of citizen engagement emerged, including informal youth networks, digital activism, and formally structured organizations. Movements and CSOs that gained greater freedom to advocate for change began to clamor not only against environmental degradation but also the socioeconomic inequalities exacerbated by climate change.

Initially, climate activism in Tunisia was heavily influenced by global movements, especially following the framework of the Paris Agreement in 2015. The signing of the agreement was a pivotal moment, as it introduced human rights, gender, and migration into the climate dialogue. This drove local movements to integrate these themes into their advocacy and climate action, on a national and international scale.

However, the concept of climate justice in Tunisia has taken specific forms adapted to the country's socio-political landscape. In Tunisia, climate justice is closely linked to local development, agricultural resilience, and water management, emphasizing equitable access to resources, decision-making processes, and environmental protection, particularly for marginalized rural communities

⁶ Isabella Crispino, In Tunisia, environmental activists on trial, Inkyfada, August 2023, available at, <https://inkyfada.com/en/2023/08/18/environmental-activists-trial-tunisia/>

experiencing water scarcity, extreme weather events, and economic instability. As a conceptual framework, climate justice in Tunisia also connects environmental sustainability, social equity, and human rights,⁷ focusing on addressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations (Yerkes and Arkeh, 2024).⁸ The definition reflects a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the complex interplay between historical environmental challenges, colonial legacies, and contemporary climate vulnerabilities (Kenchen, 2024; Hamouchene, 2023).^{9,10} It demands transparent, participatory policy-making processes that actively integrate local knowledge and community perspectives into climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. By highlighting the unequal distribution of climate change impacts, climate justice in Tunisia advocates for comprehensive solutions that consider the interconnected economic, political, and social dimensions of environmental transformation. This approach also goes beyond local environmental damage, connecting localized struggles with broader global climate justice movements and emphasizing the rights of populations most at risk.

Furthermore, climate justice is fundamentally linked to the fair treatment of all individuals and their right to participate in decision-making regarding climate policies (International Development Law Organization, 2021).¹¹ Framing climate action within

the broader human rights discourse highlights the right to a healthy environment, which is included in the 2022 Tunisian Constitution. Article 47 states that “the State guarantees the right to a healthy and balanced environment and contributes to the protection of the environment,” which aligns closely with the provisions found in the 2014 Constitution. This continuity reinforces Tunisia’s commitment to environmental rights and highlights the state’s responsibility to combat pollution and ensure sustainable development. This perspective also aligns with international frameworks like the Paris Agreement, which integrates human rights considerations into climate policies and underscores the need to tackle the unequal effects of climate change on vulnerable populations and regions (International Climate Action Network, 2015).¹² Numerous CSOs are actively advocating for the recognition of environmental rights as fundamental human rights. Organizations like the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights argue that access to a healthy environment is essential for individual and community well-being. These groups have been instrumental in raising awareness about the environmental impacts of industrial practices. By emphasizing human rights, climate activists believe this approach can effectively address the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on marginalized communities (Interview with an environmental activist).

7 Hivos, An insider’s view on just climate action in Tunisia, available at <https://hivos.org/story/an-insiders-view-on-just-climate-action-in-tunisia/>

8 Sarah Yerkes and Joy Arkeh, What Tunisia’s Municipalities Can Contribute to Climate Adaptation, Carnegie Endowment, June 2024, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/06/tunisia-climate-adaptation-regions-local-communities?lang=en>

9 Mona Khechen, The quest for social and environmental justice in the Arab Region, The Policy Initiative, May 2024, available at https://api.thepolicyinitiative.org/content/uploads/files/TPI_climate_land_inception_paper_EN.pdf

10 Hamza Hamouchene and Katie Sandwell, Dismantling Green Colonialism: Energy and Climate Justice, ed. Transnational Institute, 2023, available at https://www.tni.org/files/2024-09/Dismantling_Green_Colonialism_Full_Book.pdf

11 International Development Law Organization, Climate Justice: A rule of law approach for transformative climate action, 2021, available at https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/climate_justice_policy_paper_-_climate_action_-_final.pdf

The practical implications of this concept are profound, calling for targeted support for rural and marginalized communities, enhanced climate communication strategies, and robust mechanisms for community empowerment and capacity building. It represents a holistic framework that recognizes climate change not merely as an environmental challenge, but as a complex social justice issue requiring nuanced, inclusive, and equitable responses. By prioritizing the experiences and voices of those most affected, climate justice advocates in Tunisia seek to transform environmental policy from a top-down approach to a collaborative, bottom-up strategy that respects local realities and promotes sustainable, just solutions.

https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/climate_justice_policy_paper_-_climate_action_-_final.pdf

12 Climate Action Network, Integrating Human Rights into the Paris Agreement, October 2015, available at <https://climatenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/climate-action-network-final-position-hr-in-the-paris-agreement-october-2015.pdf>

The discourse on climate justice in Tunisia reflects local realities but also reveals tensions between governmental approaches and civil society advocacy. Civil society organizations advocate for grassroots mobilization and integration of local knowledge into climate strategies. They emphasize inclusivity in decision-making processes to ensure that community interests are represented (Chibani, 2023).¹³ The Tunisian government has been criticized for its lack of responsiveness to local needs and failure to adequately involve communities in policy-making (Ben Naser, 2022).¹⁴ This disconnect highlights a broader trend where governmental initiatives may not align with grassroots demands for equity and inclusion.

Since 2017, awareness and activism around climate change have surged in Tunisia, driven by a growing recognition of previously overlooked environmental issues. This shift was partly due to inadequate communication about NDCs across various cities. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further catalyzed a re-evaluation of behaviors and practices related to environmental sustainability.¹⁵

1.2 Key Actors and Issues in Tunisia's Climate Movement

Participation in Tunisia's climate movement can be categorized into local CSOs, regional actors (e.g., North African environmental networks), and international organizations (e.g., Greenpeace). While

¹³ Achref Chibani, How to talk about Climate Change in Tunisia? Overview and Perspectives, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, July 2023, available at <https://rosaluxna.org/publications/how-to-talk-about-climate-change-in-tunisia-overview-and-perspectives/>

¹⁴ Teycir Ben Naser, Tunisia-Environment: Where government is checked out, civil society has stepped in, Nawat, April 2022, available at <https://nawaat.org/2022/04/05/tunisia-environment-where-government-is-checked-out-civil-society-has-stepped-in/>

¹⁵ Prabhat Kumar Rai, C Sonne, H Song and Ki-Hyun Kim, The effects of COVID-19 transmission on environmental sustainability and human health: Paving the way to ensure its sustainable management, Sci Total Environ, May 2022, available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9113776/>

local organizations focus on community mobilization and advocacy, international NGOs provide financial support and technical expertise for large-scale projects (Jamea and Sfeir, 2014).¹⁶

Over 1,000 environmental associations were formed and around 200 remain active; 50 of them reflecting an initial boom followed by a stabilization in the climate activism landscape (Ben Youssef, 2021).¹⁷

At the forefront of local activism, various grassroots organizations, including Stop Pollution, Youth for Climate Tunisia, the Tunisian League for Human Rights, and the Association for the Protection of the Shatt al-Salam Oasis, advocate for a just transition to renewable energy, the end of industrial pollution in coastal areas, and greater public participation in climate decision-making processes. Established environmental organizations, including ACDD Gabes and Our Big Blue, channel their efforts into protecting ecosystems, managing water resources, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Several CSOs, movements, activists, and experts are pushing for stronger legal frameworks that hold both the government and private corporations accountable for environmental harm. Their advocacy emphasizes community engagement and collaborative partnerships to amplify their voices around climate justice issues while fostering connections with local communities.

The intersection of climate change with several critical sectors in Tunisia, including agriculture, water management, energy, and public health, is central to the work of many CSOs, which have increasingly recognized that addressing climate change in isolation is ineffective. For instance, Tunisia's agricultural sector, which is highly vulnerable to climate impacts, such as droughts and extreme temperatures, plays a key role in both the country's economy and food security. CSOs working on climate issues frequently find themselves

¹⁶ El Mostafa Jamea and Patricia R. Sfeir, Mapping of key civil society organizations in the Middle East and North Africa to join civil society network on renewable energy, low carbon development and climate Protection, February 2014, available at <https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/publication/8889.pdf>

¹⁷ Adel Ben Youssef, The Role of NGOs in Climate Policies: The Case of Tunisia, Economic Research Forum, Working Paper n°1519, December 2021, available at <https://erf.org.eg/publications/the-role-of-ngos-in-climate-policies-the-case-of-tunisia/>

tackling agricultural challenges, advocating for more resilient and sustainable farming practices that align with climate adaptation goals. Similarly, Tunisia's ongoing water crisis, exacerbated by both climate change and mismanagement, has mobilized several environmental movements. Water justice, as framed by movements, addresses not just environmental degradation but also social inequality, as poorer communities are disproportionately affected by water shortages and pollution.

Through initiatives like Fridays for Future Tunisia, youth have become prominent leaders in the climate justice movement motivated by their urgency for change and fresh perspectives on environmental challenges.¹⁸ Youth-led organizations like Youth for Climate Tunisia and Tunisian Youth Impact emphasize the importance of climate justice, local governance, and gender-inclusive approaches to climate finance. Although youth activists play a crucial role in mobilizing communities and raising awareness about pressing environmental challenges, their formal involvement in policy-making processes remains limited, as will be discussed in Section 3.

Women-led CSOs, such as Women for Water, have been at the forefront of advocating for gender-sensitive climate policies, though these efforts have yet to be fully integrated into national climate plans. This work is motivated by the recognition that climate change exacerbates gender disparities in Tunisia, particularly among rural women who are heavily involved in water resource management and agriculture, and therefore particularly impacted, facing increased workloads due to the feminization of labor and the decline in grazing areas. Rising temperatures and water scarcity disproportionately affect women's ability to cultivate crops, thus threatening their livelihoods and food security. These women bear the brunt of household tasks, including water collection and livestock care, while having limited access to decision-making power, resources, or training to cope with climate stress. Additionally, the scarcity of clean water poses significant health risks, further complicating their already demanding roles. Economic constraints, including limited access to credit and the lower value of livestock they own, exacerbate their vulnerability. Women-led CSOs are advocating for gender-sensitive climate policies,

emphasizing that women's unique experiences and needs must be addressed in water management, agriculture, and climate adaptation strategies. These organizations are working to ensure that women are not only seen as victims of climate change but also as key agents of change who can contribute to sustainable climate solutions when given the necessary tools and support.

Media outlets are also playing a pivotal role in shaping the climate discourse in Tunisia. As a specialized digital media outlet, Cosmos Media provides in-depth, high-quality coverage of environmental issues and advocates for policy change. Its ability to reach diverse audiences has made it an asset in efforts to address climate change.

1.3 Cooperation Inside the Climate Movement

Collaborations among CSOs in Tunisia's climate action landscape are vital for enhancing effectiveness and influencing policy. Collaborations have led to diverse participation, capacity building, and networking efforts, with examples including energy transition forums, training initiatives, and participation in international climate negotiations. One of the most successful examples of cross-sector collaboration is the response to the environmental crisis in the Rades forests, where both formal CSOs and informal movements worked together to mobilize local communities and influence policy. These collaborations often arise in moments of environmental crisis, underscoring the potential for collective action.

Tunisian CSOs have increasingly formed (mainly informal) alliances and coalitions both within the country and across borders. These alliances allow for the sharing of knowledge, and advocacy power. For example, movements such as the Stop Pollution coalition, which has historically been active in protesting industrial pollution in southern Tunisia, have partnered with other organizations and activists to amplify their demands on a global stage. These partnerships have helped place Tunisian environmental struggles within a broader narrative of climate justice.

The dynamics between formal and informal organizations significantly influence the nature of partnerships and coalitions in Tunisia's climate movement. Formal organizations, with their

¹⁸ George Gale, Maisie Odone, Hanen Zrig, and Fadil Aliriza, *Tunisian Activists on Climate Change, Environment, and Development*, Meshkal, October 2019, available at <https://meshkal.org/tunisian-activists-on-climate-change-environment-and-development/>

structured frameworks and established international connections, often lead project-based collaborations that are short-term. While these partnerships provide access to funding and technical expertise, they are frequently hindered by misaligned priorities and an over-reliance on external funding, which limits their sustainability.¹⁹ Despite their ability to be more structured, they often struggle with governance challenges, such as leadership being concentrated within families or close-knit circles.

Conversely, informal collaborations are characterized by their spontaneity and focus on immediate community needs. These partnerships excel in mobilizing local support and fostering grassroots participation. One of their greatest strengths lies in the informal networking that occurs among these organizations, which fosters collaboration across diverse bioclimatic regions and sectors. However, their lack of structure and resources makes it challenging to sustain these efforts over time. Crisis-driven collaborations, while effective in the short term, often fail to transition into long-term strategic alliances. The scaling of these initiatives beyond reactive efforts to more sustained and strategic collaborations remains a challenge, particularly in light of political and institutional instability.

The fragmented nature of the network is particularly evident in the weak links between youth organizations and formal institutions. Generational and structural divides create barriers that hinder the integration of youth-led initiatives into national decision-making processes. Additionally, resource scarcity often fosters competition rather than collaboration among CSOs, undermining collective advocacy efforts. The absence of shared platforms for decision-making exacerbates these issues. Grassroots movements and informal actors face significant obstacles in engaging with more established entities like international organizations and government bodies. This disconnect limits their ability to influence policy and advocate for systemic change.

The lack of a centralized platform for coordinating intersectoral climate action results in fragmented efforts that fail to scale or create long-term impact. Opportunities, however, abound in areas such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and water management. Tunisia's potential for solar energy, for example, remains untapped, and there is significant

room for CSOs to advocate for investments in this sector that align with both economic and environmental goals.

To improve this situation, establishing more formalized partnerships or shared platforms for decision-making is essential. Creating inclusive forums for dialogue can bridge gaps between formal and informal actors while fostering trust and collaboration across different levels of the movement. Additionally, shifting from ad-hoc responses to long-term strategic alliances can enhance resilience within Tunisia's climate movement.

At the regional level, coalitions between Tunisian and other North African or Mediterranean CSOs, such as those forged during Euro-Mediterranean forums, have proven effective in sharing best practices and engaging with cross-border climate issues like desertification, migration, and water scarcity (Union for Mediterranean, 2016).²⁰

Despite these successes, regional and international collaborations are not without challenges. Differences in funding structures, political priorities, and even cultural approaches to activism can sometimes create friction within coalitions. For instance, Tunisian CSOs may struggle to maintain sustained engagement with international partners due to limited financial and human resources. Furthermore, the geopolitical tensions in the region can limit the effectiveness of regional climate collaborations.

International NGOs can support local CSOs in advocating for policy change by providing technical expertise, strategic advice, and access to international forums where policy issues are discussed. They can help local groups build advocacy campaigns that align with global climate agreements or push for stronger environmental regulations. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that these partnerships go beyond project-based work and contribute to broader, systemic change. In some cases, international NGOs can help local CSOs build networks that allow for sustained pressure on governments, but this requires a shift from short-term goals to long-term collaboration focused on policy influence and institutional change. Nevertheless, alliances with international organizations have often been

¹⁹ Hivos, An insider's view on just climate action in Tunisia, available at <https://hivos.org/story/an-insiders-view-on-just-climate-action-in-tunisia/>

²⁰ Union for the Mediterranean, Key players' perspective on climate change in the Mediterranean, November 2016, available at https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/UfM_SectoralReport_2016_EN_web1.pdf

instrumental in pushing forward climate agendas that would otherwise be sidelined at the national level (World Bank Group, 2021).²¹ The presence of Tunisian activists at international platforms such as the Conferences of Parties (COPs) is a testament to the growing influence of these coalitions.

There is also a growing collaboration between CSOs and academia. For instance, CSOs advocating for renewable energy have worked with academic institutions to provide research and policy recommendations on solar and wind energy potentials in Tunisia. These collaborations are crucial in pushing for a just energy transition that not only reduces emissions but also ensures energy security and economic benefits for local communities.

Similarly, the private sector, though often viewed with suspicion by activists, is slowly being integrated into climate discussions, particularly around corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Some private companies have started to adopt more sustainable practices, often due to pressure from international partners or as part of global supply chains that require adherence to climate and environmental standards. Yet while many businesses have begun implementing green initiatives, these are often limited to surface-level changes that do not align with the broader systemic reforms demanded by climate justice movements.

1.4 How Tunisian Civil Society Engages the UNFCCC

Tunisia's negotiation landscape in climate action through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is shaped by a diverse coalition of civil society, university representatives, activists, and technicians who collaborate to support government initiatives in climate-related matters. This collective effort ensures that a variety of perspectives are included in the decision-making process. Tunisia approaches COP negotiations with two primary objectives: engaging in technical and legal discussions while seeking financial opportunities and sharing experiences, highlighting the importance of both policy influence and financial

backing in effective climate action.

By actively participating in broader regional coalitions, such as the African Group, which encompasses 54 countries, Tunisia enhances its negotiating power on global issues, particularly through alignment with the G77+China Group. Engagement in the COP extends beyond the event itself, requiring continuous interaction throughout the year to build relationships across various stakeholders and secure successful negotiation outcomes.²²

Civil society plays a vital role in this process, as their understanding of international diplomacy and active participation can significantly bolster Tunisia's effectiveness in climate negotiations. Positioned as a promoter of climate action, Tunisia advocates for its interests within regional and international frameworks, seeking to align with other nations to amplify its voice. Networking and information sharing during COP events are prioritized, enabling Tunisian representatives to identify potential partners and ensure local projects align with national and international priorities. However, civil society faces challenges in establishing credibility, necessitating a demonstration of the outcomes of their initiatives to gain trust and support from both the government and international donors.

Acknowledging the intersection of climate change with social issues, particularly those affecting women and children, Tunisia is making efforts to integrate these dimensions into its climate justice framework, emphasizing a comprehensive approach to climate policy. Looking ahead, Tunisia aims to strengthen collaborations, especially with the media, to enhance public awareness and advocate for environmental issues more effectively. This strategy underscores the necessity of intertwining climate action with broader social agendas to ensure lasting impact and engagement from all sectors of society.

Platforms like the COP play a pivotal role in bridging gaps between scientific knowledge and community needs and provide opportunities for advocating on behalf of Tunisia's unique climate vulnerabilities, particularly in areas such as water scarcity, desertification, and industrial pollution. Tunisian CSOs, including the Tunisian Young Climate Change

21 The World Bank Group, Climate Risk Profile: Tunisia, 2021, available at https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/15727-WB_Tunisia%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf

22 Ministry of the environment Tunisia, Updated Nationally Determined Contribution, UNFCCC, October 2021, available at <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-08/CDN%20-%20Updated%20-english%20version.pdf>

Negotiators group, have aligned themselves with global demands for loss and damage compensation, climate finance, and adaptation measures. They seek to ensure that Tunisia's climate vulnerabilities are acknowledged and addressed within the international framework, including advocating for financial support for mitigation and adaptation projects.

Post-COP institutions, such as climate finance mechanisms and adaptation working groups, have provided varying levels of support for Tunisian CSOs. While some international mechanisms have channeled funds into local projects, CSOs often find themselves sidelined in post-conference decision-making processes, limiting their ability to influence how these funds are allocated or how policies are implemented on the ground.

The shift in the composition of the Tunisian delegation to include civil society, private sector representatives, and young negotiators reflects a broader trend recognized in COP discussions, namely that effective climate action requires diverse perspectives and expertise. By actively involving civil society organizations and youth, Tunisia aligns itself with global calls for participatory governance in climate action, ensuring that the voices of those most affected by climate change are included in the decision-making process.

The Tunisian Young Climate Change Negotiators group's continuous involvement in events and meetings in Bonn highlights the increasing recognition of youth voices in climate discussions. Their proactive engagement suggests a long-term strategy to build capacity and ensure sustained youth participation in Tunisia's climate diplomacy. This effort aligns with international trends that advocate for stronger youth engagement in the global climate movement. The need for continuous capacity building among negotiators is crucial. The COPs are not just about attending meetings; they require a deep understanding of negotiation tactics, political dynamics, and climate science. As Tunisia's delegation evolves, the integration of expertise from young negotiators can enhance its effectiveness in negotiations, particularly in areas such as finance and adaptation as key themes for upcoming COPs. In addition, the effectiveness of their actions is reflected in their advocacy within official bodies, raising awareness about local issues at international gatherings, and adapting successful stories to the local context.

Despite these gains, Tunisian CSOs and youth negotiators face several dilemmas. The slow pace of international climate negotiations, particularly on issues like loss and damage, and the inconsistency in translating international climate goals into actionable domestic policies remain significant obstacles.

The ongoing lack of formal recognition and support for the young negotiators' group points to broader systemic issues within the political landscape. The involvement of supportive figures, such as the former national focal point of UNFCCC in Tunisia, has been crucial in providing opportunities for participation and training, highlighting the importance of mentorship and institutional support in empowering youth voices.

A critical challenge remains the issue of funding, as many young negotiators participate without financial backing. This disparity emphasizes the need for more equitable resource distribution to ensure that diverse voices are adequately represented in climate discussions.

1.5 Summary of Challenges Within the Climate Movement

- **Funding limitations:** Climate movements in Tunisia face considerable difficulties in securing consistent funding. Most activism is voluntary, and available international funding tends to be short-term and project-based, limiting the sustainability of grassroots efforts. Many civil society initiatives are heavily reliant on external funding, which is often unpredictable and short-term. This dependence limits their scope and long-term viability.
- **Inconsistent partnerships:** While collaboration between international organizations and local groups has been crucial, it remains inconsistent. Political and economic barriers often disrupt these partnerships, limiting their effectiveness. Stronger, more sustained cooperation between CSOs, government institutions, and international actors is essential for advancing climate action.
- **Fragmentation and lack of coordination:** The proliferation of environmental organizations in Tunisia post-revolution has led to uncoordinated and often redundant efforts. This fragmentation

diminishes the overall impact of civil society, as many initiatives lack a unified strategic approach.

- **Need for Specialization:** There is growing recognition that CSOs should specialize in specific environmental issues – such as water management or renewable energy – to enhance their effectiveness. Specialization would enable activists to develop deeper expertise and deliver more impactful interventions.
- **Professionalization of CSOs:** Many CSOs in Tunisia lack the management and operational capacity to ensure the sustainability of their work. High turnover rates and the departure of key members for personal reasons, such as marriage or emigration, further weaken these organizations.

2. Institutional and Political Hurdles to Climate Justice

Official policy in Tunisia has shifted from initial international engagement – such as ratifying the UNFCCC in 1993 and signing the Paris Agreement in 2015 – to more structured climate policies based on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). In 2012, Tunisia launched its National Climate Change Strategy, and in 2014, a new constitution was adopted that incorporated climate change as a permanent feature. Tunisia's NDCs outline a dual approach focusing on both mitigation, with a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2030, and adaptation with a focus on promoting a resilient country through reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing adaptive capacity.

In line with these commitments, Tunisia has taken significant steps to strengthen its institutional framework for climate governance. Within the Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment, the National Coordination Unit on Climate Change (UGPO-CC) was established in March 2018 to coordinate climate action among public and private stakeholders and oversee the implementation of the NDCs, promoting the integration of climate considerations into all public policies. These efforts have been institutionalized through objective-based management units that aim to enhance local

capacities for addressing climate challenges.

However, the capacity of these institutions is often limited, as many struggle with inadequate resources and fragmented political support. The country's governance system, initially a parliamentary republic, has evolved towards a more presidential model in recent years. Since the 2011 revolution, the country has faced political instability, which has contributed to fragmentation in policy-making, hindering the effective formulation and implementation of cohesive climate policies. Moreover, Tunisia's economic dependencies, particularly in sectors like the phosphate industry, complicate the pursuit of environmentally sustainable policies, as these industries remain significant sources of employment and economic output.

In theory, participatory governance models in Tunisia offer avenues for CSOs to engage in policy development. Following the fall of the Ben Ali regime, Law No. 88-2011 was enacted to establish a legal framework for civil society, promoting the freedom and independence of CSOs, allowing for their establishment and operation without prior authorization from the state. It emphasizes the autonomy of these organizations, enabling them to engage in various activities, including environmental and climate advocacy, while also imposing accountability and transparency requirements, such as financial reporting. Complementing this law, the 2014 Constitution explicitly recognized participatory principles. The 2014 and 2022 constitutions both enshrine the right to a healthy environment, mandating the state to ensure this right and protect natural resources for the benefit of current and future generations. Together, these legal provisions empower civil society to advocate for environmental issues, hold the government accountable, and actively participate in promoting environmental sustainability. Moreover, since 2015, Tunisia's NDC and National Adaptation Plans processes have invited input from various environmental groups, youth movements, and academia. These consultations are a crucial step toward ensuring that climate policies are inclusive and consider diverse communities' needs.

However, the practical influence of CSOs in climate policy in Tunisia and their ability to shape or implement policies that directly address community-specific climate challenges has been limited, as top-down government directives continue to dominate the policy-making process. While CSOs can contribute to the policy dialogue, the actual

implementation of their recommendations is hindered by bureaucratic delays, the centralization of decision-making at the national level, and frequent political shifts (Mnasri, 2016).²³ These create the perception that consultations are symbolic, with the government retaining ultimate control over decision-making, which limits the transformative potential of these participatory processes. Strengthening these mechanisms and ensuring genuine power-sharing is critical to advancing equitable and effective climate governance in Tunisia (Sabry, 2024).²⁴

The Ministry of Environment, the key actor in climate policy implementation in Tunisia, has experienced significant institutional instability marked by frequent structural reorganizations. The environmental portfolio has frequently shifted between various governmental bodies, complicating the continuity of environmental governance. Originally established in 1991 as the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, it underwent multiple transformations until 2011, alternating between independent status and mergers with other portfolios such as agriculture, equipment, and local affairs. After the revolution, it was first merged with agriculture, then reinstated as the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in late 2011, before being downgraded to a State Secretariat under the Equipment Ministry in 2013. In 2014, it became part of the Ministry of Equipment, Planning, and Sustainable Development, regained independence in 2015, merged with Local Affairs in 2016, and was restored as an independent ministry in 2020. Most recently, following political changes in 2021, it was temporarily placed under the Equipment Ministry before being re-established as an independent ministry.²⁵ This constant reallocation has undermined long-term planning and the effective

implementation of environmental policies, forcing officials to focus on immediate management rather than strategic initiatives (Kardous, 2024).²⁶ Repeated restructuring of the Ministry of Environment has stalled the 2020 Climate Law, which aims to mainstream climate resilience across sectors.

According to institutional theory,²⁷ such fragmentation reflects a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, which leads to coordination failures among ministries. When ministries such as Environment and Agriculture are merged, as in Tunisia, their conflicting objectives – resource conservation versus economic exploitation – create policy paralysis. These overlapping mandates weaken the ministry's ability to enforce environmental regulations, as different sectors prioritize economic development over long-term environmental sustainability. Fragmented governmental structures impede coherent decision-making. This dynamic aligns with governance theory,²⁸ which highlights that effective governance requires cohesive frameworks that integrate cross-sectoral policies to avoid conflicting goals. Ministries with conflicting priorities often push for divergent agendas, which undermines the enforcement of environmental regulations. This divergence is symptomatic of a broader challenge within fragmented governance systems, where short-term economic goals are often prioritized over long-term environmental sustainability. The frequent changes also disrupted relationships with CSOs, which often had to rebuild trust and collaboration with each new minister, further complicating efforts to address pressing environmental issues (A climate adaptation expert interviewee).

23 Anwar Mnasri, *Enabling Environment National Assessment of Civil Society in Tunisia*, Al Kawakibi Democratic Center, September 2016, available at <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/eena-reports/eena-tunisia-en.pdf>

24 Mohamed Ismail Sabry, *State–Society Relations and Sustainable Growth in Tunisia Post-2011*, Merian Center for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb, 2024, available at <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/contributions/state-society-relations-and-sustainable-growth-in-tunisia-post-2011>

25 Ministry of the Environment Tunisia, *Droit de l'environnement et droit à l'environnement*, January 2023, available at <https://www.environnement.gov.tn/ministere/cadre-juridique-et-institutionnel>

26 Mohamed Omar Kardous, *Political Instability and Environmental Politics in Postrevolutionary Tunisia*, center for strategic and international studies, April 2024, available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/political-instability-and-environmental-politics-postrevolutionary-tunisia>

27 Jonathan Pinto, *A multifocal framework for developing Intentionally Sustainable Organizations*, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, Volume 28, October 2017, P17-23, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/institutional-theory>

28 Fernando Filgueiras, Pedro Palotti, and Graziella G. Testa, *Complexing Governance Styles: Connecting Politics and Policy in Governance Theories*, *Sage Journals*, March 2023, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/21582440231158521>

Bureaucratic inertia within state institutions responsible for climate governance further complicates the situation. A lack of resources, insufficient capacity, and competing priorities can slow down the implementation and enforcement of existing laws (Muasher, Perini, and Djerassi, 2016).²⁹ The newly established climate change unit within the Ministry of Environment lacks sufficient capacity and coordination mechanisms to effectively address climate change issues across different ministries and sectors. The unit lacks the legal authority to enforce its recommendations or hold other ministries accountable for inaction. Without adequate financial, technical, and human resources, the unit struggles to bridge the gap between high-level strategies and their implementation on the ground. These capacity constraints, coupled with poor inter-ministerial coordination, hinder the alignment of sectoral policies with national climate goals, slowing progress on critical climate strategies.

Additionally, Tunisia's political volatility since 2011, marked by frequent changes in leadership and governance structures, has hindered the development of comprehensive climate and environmental policies. This instability often results in neglecting climate issues in favor of more immediate socio-economic concerns such as unemployment and poverty (expert interviewees from academia). Key legislative reforms, such as the Water Code and Climate Law, have stalled due to frequent political transitions and the lack of institutional continuity.

The slow progress on climate justice can also be attributed to various political and economic interests that oppose more stringent environmental laws. Within the government, stakeholders linked to industries such as mining, agriculture, and construction often perceive stricter environmental regulations as a threat to economic growth and their business operations. They argue that more stringent regulations could lead to job losses, hinder economic development, or diminish Tunisia's competitiveness in international markets. These industries typically prioritize short-term economic benefits over long-term environmental sustainability, resulting in resistance to stronger enforcement of environmental protections. This resistance manifests in delays

in passing legislation, the weakening of proposed environmental laws, or the implementation of regulations that are not adequately enforced (an interviewee from CSO).

Furthermore, certain political factions may regard environmental rights as secondary to pressing socio-economic issues, leading to a neglect of comprehensive environmental policy despite its critical role in sustainable development. The interplay between political instability and economic dependencies – such as reliance on phosphate industries – creates a bottleneck for implementing effective climate strategies.

Restrictions on freedom of information also condition the policy influence of civil society. In the context of environmental journalism, media initiatives exist, but effective partnerships with state structures are scarce. Organizations like Cosmos Media often find themselves working in isolation, facing significant barriers to accessing information and participating in policy-making discussions (interviewees from media). For instance, media organizations sometimes struggle to obtain permissions for fieldwork, such as photographing dams, reflecting a broader difficulty in facilitating environmental coverage. The lack of open dialogue is evident, as the authorities tend to welcome media coverage only when it aligns with their achievements, while investigative journalism or critical discussions are met with resistance. This disconnect highlights that, despite being on the ground daily, the insights and experiences of journalists are often overlooked by policymakers.

The restrictions on environmental reporting limit the ability of local organizations to document and highlight the impacts of climate change, such as water scarcity or infrastructure failures. For example, the inability to photograph or document the state of critical resources like dams impedes the movement's ability to visually convey the urgency of climate-related challenges. This lack of access not only hinders the media's role in educating the public but also restricts grassroots groups from mobilizing citizens and pushing for policy change. Moreover, climate change advocacy often depends on data and evidence gathered through fieldwork, whether it is monitoring pollution levels, water resources, or the effects of extreme weather events. When local organizations face barriers to this type of work, it limits their ability to build strong cases for climate justice and policy reforms.

²⁹ Marwan Muasher, Marc Pierini and Alexander Djerassi, *Between Peril and Promise: A New Framework for Partnership With Tunisia*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2016, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/04/between-peril-and-promise-a-new-framework-for-partnership-with-tunisia?lang=en>

3. Assessing the Policy Influence of Tunisian CSOs

Evaluating these climate actions' success is a multifaceted process involving internal and external assessments. Movements usually measure their success through a variety of indicators, including public engagement (such as participation in strikes, petitions, and social media activity), policy influence (reflected in changes to environmental regulations), community mobilization (assessed through local campaigns and citizen empowerment), partnerships with other organizations, and media coverage. External evaluations, mainly in the case of externally funded projects, are carried out by entities like the UN, the World Bank, and international NGOs, which focus on Tunisia's progress towards international climate commitments and the effectiveness of local interventions. At the same time, movements conduct self-evaluations by gathering feedback from communities, tracking advocacy outcomes, and performing internal monitoring of their activities. Despite these efforts, challenges to an effective evaluation remain, including limited access to comprehensive climate data, political and institutional barriers, and resource constraints faced by grassroots groups. Interviews with local activists underscore the importance of both internal and external evaluations, highlighting the role of youth movements in driving change and acknowledging the slow pace of policy transformation due to entrenched political and economic interests.

3.1 Youth Influence in Policy

Relationships between youth organizations and formal institutions, such as the Ministry of Environment, are notably weak (Byiers, Ronceray, and Bossuyt, 2021).³⁰ Youth organizations face

³⁰ Bruce Byiers, Martin Ronceray and Jean Bossuyt, Applying a political economy approach in Tunisia, The European Centre for Development Policy Management, January 2021, available at <https://ecdpm.org/application/files/2816/5546/8588/Applying-Political-Economy-Approach-Tunisia-ECDPM-Discussion-Paper-290-January-2021.pdf>

significant barriers when engaging with government bodies like the Ministry of Environment, resulting in weak advocacy outcomes (An interviewee from an NGO). Previously, youth were engaged in advocacy and awareness campaigns, but now there is a focus on ensuring they have a direct role in shaping climate policies. Actively engaging youth means giving them a seat at the table where decisions about climate change are made – whether through participation in policy development, climate negotiations, or leadership roles within organizations. This change reflects the recognition that youth, especially those facing the consequences of climate change, bring fresh perspectives and urgency that are essential for effective solutions. It is a move towards more inclusive and impactful climate action that ensures youth voices are heard, and their future is considered in decision-making. Despite significant challenges, such as dependence on funding and a lack of institutional trust, the activism landscape is maturing, with a growing emphasis on concrete proposals and sustained engagement with local realities. Initiatives like the Tunisian Young Climate Change Negotiators Group exemplify this commitment, seeking to translate activism into tangible impacts within the climate policy framework.

Launched in August 2021 by the Tunisian Ministry of Environment, the Tunisian Young Climate Change Negotiators Group is a youth-focused initiative designed to accelerate the country's response to the climate emergency. This program aims to integrate informed and youth-driven perspectives into Tunisia's climate negotiation processes, ensuring a more representative and ambitious approach. The Group comprises young activists with diverse professional backgrounds and relevant experiences, each specializing in a specific area of the UNFCCC. By involving youth, the initiative aims to bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the table, contributing to more effective and inclusive climate policies. The creation of this group was driven by the recognition that young people are crucial agents of change and have a significant stake in the future of the planet (An interviewee from a governmental agency). By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, Tunisian Young Climate Change Negotiators Group hopes to foster a new generation of climate leaders who can advocate for sustainable and equitable solutions. This group has played a significant role in advancing youth involvement in climate action, activism, and justice. Originating from the need to bridge the gap between youth and formal climate decision-making processes, the group has shifted from merely observing climate

negotiations to actively contributing to them. Since 2015, they have participated in international climate conferences, such as the COP, where their efforts have been recognized globally. The group's involvement has been pivotal in integrating critical issues like loss and damage, gender, and climate empowerment into Tunisia's climate policies. Through voluntary work and collaboration with civil society, they managed to gain a seat at the table, offering proposals and supporting the official Tunisian delegation in climate negotiations. Their achievements include being recognized by the UAE COP presidency as one of the most youthful delegations, sharing their expertise with other countries like Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Morocco, and training the next generation of climate activists and negotiators.

3.2 CSO Success at the Local Level

On the local scale, environmental CSOs in Tunisia have accomplished several achievements. For example, Citizenship and Sustainable Development Association (ACDD Gabes), achieved significant milestones by initiating the first climate action plan for the Beni Khedash region, a localized version of a Nationally Determined Contribution. This region was chosen due to its high vulnerability to climate change. Its economy heavily relies on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture and tourism, which are highly susceptible to climate impacts like extreme heat and drought. Moreover, the region faces projected increases in temperature, decreases in rainfall, and increased water loss, further straining water resources and agricultural productivity. This plan, developed with strong stakeholder participation (including local authorities, youth, women, and more), outlines 75 projects focused on both mitigation and adaptation, aligned with Tunisia's national climate goals. The initiative targets 10 objectives (two for mitigation, and eight for adaptation). As a result, Beni Khedash became one of seven model municipalities chosen for a UNDP-funded climate change project, receiving annual funding of \$100,000-\$150,000 for four years to implement its climate strategy. The association also developed an inventory of eight storytelling pieces highlighting traditional climate practices like rainwater collection and local food security. Additionally, the association created a smart transition plan, incorporating technology to enhance the local community's traditional knowledge and practices such as monitoring oxygen levels in rainwater harvesting. This innovative approach was

highlighted by the Ministry of Agriculture, further demonstrating the initiative's impact.

The movement Stop Pollution has played a key role in pushing for the dismantling of polluting industrial units in Gabes, succeeding in securing a government decision in 2017 after sustained pressure. The movement was established in Gabes in 2012 to tackle environmental pollution through community mobilization. Initially organized around World Environment Day, the movement quickly gained momentum, attracting 2,000 citizens during its first event. Over time, it evolved from a campaign into a structured movement with a core group of activists who coordinate environmental actions and engage with the public. Its notable achievements include organizing the largest environmental march in Tunisia in 2013, which saw participation from around 7,000 people and prompted political parties to issue supportive statements. Since 2012, the movement has mobilized thousands of citizens to protest industrial pollution from phosphate plants, achieving notable success such as the government's 2017 commitment to reduce emissions. Its ability to unite labor unions, human rights organizations, and environmental groups demonstrates its leadership in Tunisia's broader climate movement. The movement's strategy combines grassroots activism with coalition-building, involving organizations like the Tunisian General Labor Union and the Tunisian League for Human Rights. It has also expanded its scope to address broader environmental issues, such as waste management and climate change, and works to foster cooperation between various civil society actors.

Despite limited financial resources, the movement Stop Pollution exemplifies resourcefulness, relying on grassroots mobilization and commitment rather than extensive funding, demonstrating that impactful activism can thrive without substantial financial backing.

Other significant milestones include the establishment of a lobby for renewable energy in 2016 in cooperation with the Tunisia Order of Engineers and the Forum of Federations to promote energy transitions, although political instability has occasionally disrupted these efforts.

Local advocacy efforts, such as the successful closure of a polluting phosphate plant in Gabes, highlight the effectiveness of grassroots movements in addressing specific environmental issues. Stop Pollution demonstrated how local actors can leverage their proximity to affected communities to align advocacy

efforts with their immediate concerns. Social movement theory explains this success through the “resource mobilization framework”, which emphasizes the strategic use of local resources, including community networks, local knowledge, and trust. Local actors in Gabes could mobilize these resources quickly and efficiently, ensuring the advocacy campaign was both targeted and responsive. Furthermore, the framing process illustrates how local movements can effectively frame issues in ways that resonate with community values, fostering widespread support and collective action.

The following are the factors that have made local-level advocacy by CSOs effective:

- **Alignment with community interests:** Local actors have a direct understanding of the needs and priorities of their communities, allowing them to frame issues in ways that resonate with the affected population. For instance, the Gabes campaign effectively highlighted the health risks of industrial pollution, galvanizing community support.
- **Rapid mobilization:** Grassroots movements can mobilize resources and public support more quickly than national campaigns. Local actors bypass the bureaucratic inertia that often slows down national efforts, enabling them to respond dynamically to emerging issues.
- **Trust and legitimacy:** Local CSOs benefit from established relationships with communities, fostering trust and ensuring accountability in their advocacy efforts.
- **Focused objectives:** Local campaigns are often more targeted, addressing specific issues rather than the broader, more complex agendas of national movements.

3.3 Lessons for National-level Advocacy

National-level campaigns in Tunisia face significantly greater challenges. Efforts to pass critical legislation, such as the Environment Code and the Water Code, have been stalled by bureaucratic delays, fragmented governmental structures, and political conflicts. Unlike local advocacy, which operates within more accessible and less hierarchical contexts,

national movements must navigate a centralized and opaque decision-making system. The Ministry of Environment, for example, lacks jurisdiction over key sectors such as phosphate production, which falls under the Ministry of Industry, creating conflicts of interest and policy deadlock.

Social movement theory explains this disparity based on the political opportunity structure, which highlights how institutional barriers shape the opportunities for advocacy. At the national level, Tunisia's centralized governance model, frequent government restructuring, and competing priorities among ministries hinder the ability of CSOs to influence policy effectively. These systemic barriers often result in fragmented campaigns and diluted impact, as national movements struggle to align diverse stakeholders under a cohesive agenda.

While local advocacy has proven effective, translating these successes to the national level requires strategic coordination and systemic reforms:

- **Strengthen local-national networks:** Building alliances between local and national CSOs can amplify grassroots achievements, providing momentum for national campaigns.
- **Leverage local success stories:** Highlighting cases in national and international forums can serve as evidence of the feasibility and benefits of targeted environmental reforms.
- **Enhance participatory governance:** Institutionalizing mechanisms that integrate local voices into national decision-making processes can bridge the gap between grassroots movements and centralized governance.
- **Address structural barriers:** Reforms to streamline bureaucratic processes, reduce fragmentation among ministries, and clarify jurisdictions are critical for enabling national-level advocacy.

To shift from environmental to climate mobilization, advocacy must reframe local issues within the broader context of climate justice, emphasizing resilience, adaptation, and systemic reform. Building multi-sectoral coalitions, including diverse stakeholders, ensures alignment with national climate goals. Civil society can prioritize integrating climate considerations into all sectors, moving beyond localized concerns to address systemic drivers of climate change. Enhanced collaboration,

participatory governance, and access to global climate funding can amplify impact and drive the transition toward comprehensive climate action.

4. Recommendations for Climate Action

Coherent, integrated, and multi-sectoral decision-making processes are important to overcome policy paralysis. Additionally, there is a need for long-term, inclusive, and equitable solutions to climate hurdles. Tunisia's path towards sustainable development should focus on adopting a proactive approach – anticipating challenges, engaging in long-term planning, and integrating international best practices in climate finance and community engagement rather than relying on reactive measures to address the immediate impacts of climate change. To achieve this, Tunisia should:

Institutional Reform

- Establish clear governance frameworks: Tunisia should address the fragmentation within ministries, particularly the Ministry of Environment, by creating clear institutional frameworks with distinct roles and responsibilities. This would improve coordination and enable ministries to work cohesively towards long-term climate goals. A more integrated governance structure would avoid conflicting priorities between economic development and environmental conservation.
- Decentralize climate governance: Empower local government authorities and CSOs to create localized climate action plans tailored to their specific environmental constraints (e.g., droughts, floods). This would enhance community resilience while aligning with national climate strategies.
- Improve inter-ministerial coordination: Strengthen the coordination between the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other relevant sectors. This would ensure that national climate policies are implemented effectively and that sectoral policies align with Tunisia's climate targets.

Capacity Building and Resource Allocation

- Boost capacity within the Ministry of Environment: The newly established climate change unit must be provided with adequate resources – financial, technical, and human – to fulfill its role effectively. This includes improving inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms and providing legal authority to ensure that ministries adhere to climate policies.
- Empower CSOs through capacity building: CSOs must receive consistent support in terms of training on climate policy advocacy, project management, and legal frameworks. Programs focused on enhancing technical expertise in specific climate issues (e.g., water management, renewable energy) will increase the effectiveness of CSOs in shaping policy and executing large-scale projects.
- Diversify funding sources for CSOs: Beyond short-term, project-based international funding, Tunisia should explore mechanisms for providing sustainable and long-term financial support to CSOs, possibly through government-backed climate funds or public-private partnerships. This would reduce reliance on external funding and improve CSOs' operational stability.

Building Trust and Fostering Collaborative Platforms

- Create formal dialogue platforms: Tunisia should establish multi-stakeholder platforms that facilitate regular dialogue between the government, CSOs, the private sector, and international partners. These platforms would foster transparency, trust, and collaborative decision-making, ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly from marginalized groups such as rural communities and women.
- Enhance Government-CSO relationships: Efforts must be made to overcome past mistrust between CSOs and public institutions. Establishing formal, institutionalized channels for collaboration would encourage CSOs to actively engage in the policy-making process and ensure their inclusion in climate governance.
- Collaborate with media for increased public awareness: Building stronger alliances with

media outlets is essential to raise awareness about climate issues, CSO initiatives, and government actions. Increased media coverage can amplify the visibility of grassroots efforts and foster a climate-conscious public.

Fostering Regional Leadership in Climate Action

- **Regional Collaboration for Climate Resilience:** Tunisia could lead in regional climate action by establishing partnerships with neighboring North African countries. Tunisia can collaborate on shared challenges such as water scarcity, desertification, and renewable energy development. By creating regional cooperation mechanisms, Tunisia can set the stage for joint climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, benefiting from cross-border knowledge exchange and shared resources.
- **Lead on Climate Finance Mechanisms:** Tunisia could position itself as a regional leader in climate finance by advocating for increased access to international funds (e.g., Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund) and ensuring that financial resources are effectively allocated for adaptation and mitigation projects. The government, CSOs, and the private sector can work together to ensure transparency in the management of these funds, enhancing Tunisia's credibility as a climate finance hub.

Long-Term Strategic Partnerships and Specialization

- **Focus on Specialization within CSOs:** Tunisian CSOs should focus on specializing in particular areas of climate action, such as water management, renewable energy, and ecosystem restoration. Specialization will help CSOs develop deep expertise in critical sectors, increasing their impact and ability to advocate for specific policies and projects.
- **Build Long-Term Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthen relationships between CSOs, government institutions, and the private sector, ensuring that they are built on shared long-term objectives rather than ad-hoc, crisis-driven responses. These partnerships would allow for coordinated action and enhance the resilience of

the climate movement.

- **Incorporate Climate Change into Economic Diversification Plans:** To address Tunisia's economic dependency on phosphate production, Tunisia should prioritize green economic diversification strategies. This includes fostering sectors such as organic agriculture, eco-tourism, and green manufacturing. The government, CSOs, and the private sector must work together to ensure that new economic models are sustainable and create long-term, green jobs.

Transparency, Accountability, and Political Will

- **Implement stronger accountability mechanisms:** To ensure that Tunisia's climate commitments are met, there must be stronger accountability mechanisms in place. This could include independent oversight bodies to track the progress of climate policies, evaluate their effectiveness, and hold the government accountable for delivering on its NDCs.
- **Ensure Political Will for Climate Action:** Overcoming political fragmentation and prioritizing climate action must be a fundamental part of Tunisia's political agenda. Political leaders should champion climate policy reforms and push for long-term institutional stability to avoid policy paralysis and ensure continued progress in climate governance.

Promote Alternative Economic Models

- **Develop and implement policies to reduce Tunisia's reliance on the phosphate industry,** particularly in regions severely impacted by pollution. Promote alternative, sustainable economic models that emphasize environmental restoration and the creation of green jobs. Focus on sectors such as renewable energy, organic agriculture, and eco-tourism to not only mitigate environmental damage but also provide long-term economic opportunities for local communities.
- **Implement policies that promote economic diversification by fostering green jobs in sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and environmental restoration.**

Ensure that these sectors contribute to long-term economic resilience, protecting public health and ecosystems from the negative impacts of climate change.

Address Cross-Cutting Climate Justice Issues

- Integrate climate justice into Tunisia's climate policies by addressing the interconnectedness of climate change with broader social justice issues such as biodiversity loss, land degradation, and water scarcity. Strengthen collaborations among CSOs to build regional coalitions with marginalized areas in Tunisia and across the MENA region to create a unified front for environmental protection and social justice.
- Prioritize the inclusion of marginalized communities, such as rural farmers, coastal populations, and low-income groups, in climate policymaking processes. Design policies tailored to their specific vulnerabilities, such as food security, water access, and land rights. Additionally, promote gender-sensitive climate policies that address the disproportionate impact of climate change on women, especially those in agriculture.

Strengthen Environmental Regulations

- Enforce stronger environmental laws and regulations to address pollution and environmental degradation caused by industrial activities. Implement stricter regulations on industries contributing to environmental harm while promoting public participation in decision-making processes. Ensure that local communities' voices are heard in policy development and prioritize environmental justice in the design and execution of climate policies.

Annex: List of Interviewees

- Former director at the Ministry of Environment (Tunisia), former UNFCCC focal point, and coordinator of a local UN project focused on environmental governance.
- Expert in climate change adaptation and water resource management
- University professor based in France, specializing in climate change. Author of publications on the role of NGOs in climate policies and climate action in Tunisian cities.
- Environmental journalist and media leader, founder of a media platform dedicated to environmental issues, and video journalist for international media outlets.
- Coordinator of the national young climate negotiators' group.
- Member of the national young climate negotiators' group.
- Environmental activist, founder of a grassroots anti-pollution movement, and co-organizer of climate action camps in Tunisia.
- Environmental activist and project manager with a background in natural resource management.
- President of a regional association for citizenship and sustainable development.
- Environmental activist recognized by the UNDP in 2022 as one of five inspiring young climate leaders from the Arab region; also, a youth ambassador for food justice.
- Host of an environmental podcast, founder of a sustainability-focused organization, and communication expert in sustainable development.
- Founder and focal point of a national youth climate organization, CEO of a green initiative, media officer for a regional feminist coalition, digital climate activist, and youth adaptation delegate.
- Environmental activist engaged in local and national climate action.
- Environmental activist engaged in local and national climate action.
- Environmental activist and member of a global climate justice movement focused on debt and climate equity.

Arab Reform Initiative

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