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ENVIRONMENTAL POLICTICS SERIES

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MOBILIZATION IN TUNISIA

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This study is part of the Arab Reform Initiative's project DIRAIA, "Knowledge" in Arabic, short for "Developing Inclusive Research through Activism and Informed Advocacy". Focusing on fieldwork and multi-method research in Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, DIRAIA explores how frontline communities and organizations are mobilizing around environmental grievances as they intersect with socio-economic and political injustice across the region. DIRAIA is part of the network of Knowledge Alliance for Environmental Defenders (KALLIED), which brings together 32 organizations from 22 countries across the Global South and is funded by Canada's IDRC.

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Cover photo: Bizerte, Tunisia – Wind turbines positioned in open farmland, providing renewable energy in a rural setting, 2023. (© Anastasia Palagutina / Unsplash)

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Introduction

With the outbreak of significant social protest in Tunisia's post-2011 Revolution period, environmental mobilization received much attention. New environmental campaigns – such as Manish Msab (I Am Not a Dump) and Stop Pollution behind which local communities rallied – gained recognition at the national level, raised awareness of environmental harms, and succeeded in inducing state action. Yet social protest was only one of the forms of environmental mobilization that Tunisia witnessed in the revolution's aftermath. Several movements with different organizational forms and affiliations, operating in various geographical locations, have been active since 2011, and some even prior.

This study investigates environmental mobilization in Tunisia, focusing on the period from 2011 until the end of 2024. It relies on an empirical study based on a survey and interviews conducted with 11 environmental civil society organizations (ECSO) based in Tunisia, many of which played a considerable role in various forms of environmental mobilization in the country. The mission of most of these organizations is hardly confined to achieving environmental objectives. Rather, environmental objectives mingle with social, political, and economic ones, and these other objectives often take precedence. Environmental movements engage in various forms of mobilization and interact among themselves and with various other actors – such as the state, business, labor, and international organizations – in ways that vary between cooperation and confrontation and in their level of trust and coordination. Such interactions shape their environment-oriented activities and their outcomes.

The study is a part of a wider research project entitled “Developing Inclusive Research through Activism and Informed Advocacy”, bringing together the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) and the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis, and funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre. The project's main aim is to investigate environmental mobilization in the Arab world with the purpose of creating knowledge on the various forms, expressions, and demands of environmental movements, their organizational parameters, interactions with other state and non-state actors, and the conditions they face.¹

Considering the multidimensional environmental challenges faced on a global scale, exploring the dynamics of ECSOs is of utmost importance given that they are the actors often most concerned with addressing these challenges. Tunisia, located at the center of North Africa and one of the closest points to Europe, highlights the environmental dimensions of north-south disparities and discourses about green colonialism. Moreover, the nature and pace of political changes in the country since 2011 demonstrate how changes in governance – i.e., a democratic transition and authoritarian resurgence – and ongoing, unsettled sociopolitical struggle reverberate and interact with environmentalism.

The study starts with exploring the political-economic context in post-2011 Tunisia and how the opening of the political field led to the emergence of various ECSOs. This section also explores the most important environmental challenges that the country faces, with a focus on industrial and service sector pollution, water usage, and the green transition. The study then engages in a mapping of ECSOs, their modes of organization, geographical distribution, strategies and tactics, objectives and priorities, and the challenges they face. A subsequent section studies how ECSOs interact with each other and with state, social, and international actors, with a focus on the fields and the extent of cooperation, confrontation, and coordination. An assessment of the successes and failures of ECSOs then follows. The study concludes with a summary of findings and practical implications.

Methodology

The study is based primarily on a survey of closed and open-ended questions, the latter of which functioned as structured interviews for survey participants. The survey and interviews were conducted by the author and the ARI team in Tunisia in person and online between May and September 2024. Twenty-five civil ECSOs that are active in the environmental field were contacted to participate in the study. A snowball sampling technique was used for selecting the study participants, whereby ECSO and ARI team members were asked for recommendations and contact information of important ECSOs. Key members of 11 active and important ECSOs agreed to participate in the study. Most of the organizations were based in the governorate of Tunis and a few in Sfax but have activities in several Tunisian governorates. Table 1 provides a list of the participant ECSOs.

1 Julia Choucair Vizoso, “Environmental Struggle in the Middle East and North Africa: A Research Agenda”, Arab Reform Initiative, 2025.

Table 1: List of Survey and Interview Participants

Organizational Affiliation	Year Established (in Tunisia)
Fédération Tunisienne de l'Environnement et du Développement (FTED)	2013
Tunisian Youth Impact (TYI)	2018
Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS)	2013
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS)	2013
Soli & Green and Tounes CleanUp (collectively SG/TCU)	2018
Association Tunisienne de Protection de la Nature et de l'Environnement de Korba (ATPNE)	2012
Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FTDES)	2011
Un Dimanche à Carthage	2023
Association Ifriqiya	2020
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)	1988
Tunisie Verte	2020

The interviews were conducted in Tunis and Sfax, where either the headquarters or key offices of participating ECSOs are located – though their activities take place across the country and many of their successes were achieved outside these two metropolises. The qualitative data is complemented and contrasted with the existing literature, which includes information and analysis from studies conducted by civil society organizations and international organizations as well as academic journal articles.

Given the limited number of participants and the method used in selecting them, this study does not claim that the sample is statistically representative of the spectrum of Tunisian ECSOs. However, many of the study participants are among the most active and important ECSOs, as evident from the literature on their activities and their impact on several environmental cases at the regional and national levels. The relative significance of these participants renders the study relevant for understanding the landscape of ECSOs in Tunisia, and certainly for understanding the dynamics of those most active.

The Political-Economic Context

As early as the 1990s, Tunisia developed a national plan of action for the environment and set the UN's Agenda 21 as a national sustainable development program.² Agenda 21 was “a program of action for sustainable development worldwide” from the 1990s into the twenty-first century with the following goals: “improving the living standards of those in need, better manage and protect the ecosystem; [and] bring about a more prosperous future for all”.³ Yet the post-2011 Revolution period witnessed significant developments in Tunisia's environmental policies, such as the development

2 Teycir Ben Naser, “Tunisia-Environment: Where Government Is Checked Out, Civil Society Has Stepped In”, Nawaat, 5 April 2022, <https://nawaat.org/2022/04/05/tunisia-environment-where-government-is-checked-out-civil-society-has-stepped-in/> (Naser, “Tunisia-Environment”).

3 Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, Review of Implementation of Agenda 21: Detailed Review of Implementation of Agenda 21, United Nations, January 2012, p. 1, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1126SD21%20Agenda21_new.pdf

of legislation emphasizing the importance of environmental protection. The 2014 constitution introduced unprecedented environmental rights in Articles 44 and 45, which included the rights to clean water and a healthy environment.⁴ Several laws supporting sustainability were enacted, such as the 2019 Local Organization Charter, which provided local authorities the right to handle sustainable development issues. Tunisia also signed various international agreements aimed at promoting sustainable economic development.⁵

However, the implementation of specific and effective environmental laws was either delayed or never materialized. Key legislation inspired by the Environmental Charter and the Water Charter (both initiated in 2013) faced various obstacles. The former was neither presented to nor approved by the parliament, while the latter, presented in 2020, was sent back for revisions.⁶ Other enacted laws were vague, allowing for voluntary rather than mandatory compliance, lacking incentives or support mechanisms, and often did not align with Tunisia's international commitments. This was evident in laws such as the 2018 Social Responsibility of Enterprises Law (Law 35 of 2018), which Tunisian civil society considered to be ambiguously formulated. Furthermore, in comparison to pre-2011 economic legislations such as the 1993 Investment Promotion Charter, environmental concerns were less emphasized in post-2011 economic legislations such as the 2016 investment law.⁷ Generally speaking, and as acknowledged by the Ministry of Environment,⁸ environmental policies lacked a precise and coherent vision, were fragmented, and did not involve concerned stakeholders or take regional and local conditions into consideration.⁹

The 2014-2019 parliament, which operated from the enactment of the 2014 constitution through to the 2019 elections, failed to pass many important environmental legislations. This period was marked by escalating political turmoil that culminated in President Kais Saied's unconstitutional measures in July 2021.¹⁰ The presence of members linked to the former Ben Ali regime, coupled with the Islamist Ennahda party's efforts to appease coalition partners, rendered the parliament unable or unwilling to challenge the economic privileges of powerful big business groups through more stringent environmental legislation. Additionally, despite not holding the presidency, the secular political party Nidaa Tounes controlled key positions within the General Legislative Commission and the Industrial, Energy, Natural Resources, Infrastructure, and Environmental Commission, both of which were crucial for civil, commercial, and environmental legislation. Members of Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda dominated these commissions.¹¹ These parliamentary bodies lacked the incentive to enact effective environmental regulations that could have conflicted with big business groups' economic interests in certain sectors.¹²

Another hurdle for progress on environmental protection in the post-revolution period was the inability to benefit from the potential of local authorities who were better fitted to implement the central government's general guidelines. Following the revolution, there was movement toward decentralization – as codified in an organic law that identified the responsibilities of local authorities on environmental issues, Law No. 29 of 9 May 2018. The decentralization process, however, was uneven and incomplete. Municipalities often lacked sufficient capacities and qualified personnel, and the coordination with central authorities was insufficient.¹³

In such a political and social context, ECSOs flourished in Tunisia and were actively engaged in environmental mobilization in an unprecedented way. The more democratic climate allowed more freedom of association and the emergence of a freer media, which permitted ECSOs to mobilize and spread awareness on environmental and social issues. The fields of their activities and the range of strategies and tactics they pursued widely varied as will be discussed later in this paper.

4 Riheb Mabrouki and Rabeh Ben Othmane, "Litigation for Enforcing Environmental Justice: The Use of Litigation as a New Strategy to Defend Environmental Rights" (Arabic), in *Supporting Environmental Issues: From Demonstrations into Litigation: The Annual Report of the Environmental Justice Section*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2022, pp. 57-74; Ines Labiadh and Mohamed Gaaloul, "The Post-Revolution Environmental Movements: Various Protesting Forms to Restore Rights" (Arabic), in *Supporting Environmental Issues: From Demonstrations into Litigation: The Annual Report of the Environmental Justice Section*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2022, pp. 9-29 (Labiadh and Gaaloul, "The Post-Revolution Environmental Movements").

5 Afaf al-Hamamy al-Marakshi and Wahid al-Farshishi, *Ten Years of Environmental Laws in Tunisia: Environmental Situation at the Tenth Anniversary of the Revolution 2011-2021*, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2021 (al-Marakshi and al-Farshishi, *Ten Years of Environmental Laws*).

6 al-Marakshi and al-Farshishi, *Ten Years of Environmental Laws*.

7 al-Marakshi and al-Farshishi, *Ten Years of Environmental Laws*.

8 Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable, "Observatoire et Indicateurs de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable, Tunisie, Rapport de Synthèse", July 2015, [https://cgdr.nat.tn/upload/files/Bilioenligne/ReGoKo_Observatoires_rapport_de_synth%C3%A8se_Tunisie\(1\).pdf](https://cgdr.nat.tn/upload/files/Bilioenligne/ReGoKo_Observatoires_rapport_de_synth%C3%A8se_Tunisie(1).pdf)

9 Naser, "Tunisia-Environment".

10 al-Marakshi and al-Farshishi, *Ten Years of Environmental Laws*.

11 Marsad Majlis-the Tunisian Parliament Observatory, "The General Legislative Commission", <https://majles.marsad.tn/ar/assembly/commissions/legislation?periodId=1>

12 Mohamed Ismail Sabry, "State-Society Relations and Industrial Sustainable Growth: The Case of Post-Revolution Tunisia", *Sustainable Development Vol.32(3)*, September 2023, (Sabry, "State-Society Relations").

13 Adel Ben Youssef, "Climate Change in the Tunisian Cities: Lessons Learned and Best Practices", *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies Vol. 26(2)*, 2024, pp. 145-64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10018-022-00353-x> (Youssef, "Climate Change in the Tunisian Cities").

Main Environmental Issues in Tunisia

Industrial and Service Sector Pollution

Several types of business enterprises are involved in polluting activities and violating health, safety, and environmental regulations. Even multinational corporations that were likely following any environmental laws in their home countries were involved in violations of environmental regulations in Tunisia. Small and medium-sized enterprises, on the other hand, often lack the resources necessary to effectively comply with these regulations, and state subsidies for fostering environmentally friendly practices were insufficient. Legislation and regulations related to industrial waste exist, but they can be easily ignored because of their delayed enactment; slow, inefficient implementation; and problematic structure that relies on voluntary compliance rather than obligatory compliance.¹⁴ The voluntary nature of environmental laws enables big business firms to bypass regulations.¹⁵

Two major industrial sectors in Tunisia, the textile and apparel industry and phosphates, are responsible for alarming levels of pollution in the country.¹⁶ The textile industry is globally recognized as one of the most ecologically damaging sectors, especially the wet processing technique (e.g., bleaching, dyeing, and printing) and the use of heavy metals.¹⁷ The resulting wastewater is responsible for 17-20% of global water pollution.¹⁸ Furthermore, the industry is a significant source of carbon emissions.¹⁹ The sectors' various violations in Tunisia have been documented, especially the dumping of industrial waste into the Gulf of Monastir, which jeopardizes the livelihoods of local fishers.²⁰

In the phosphate industry, two main state-owned enterprises are responsible for significant violations of environmental laws and regulations that subject local communities and workers to pollution-related hazards: the Gafsa Phosphate Company (Compagnie des Phosphates de Gafsa, CPG) and the Tunisian Chemical Group (Groupe Chimique Tunisien, or GCT). Communities are exposed to harmful emissions from drilling and blasting, material-processing operations, material handling, wind erosion of stockpiles, and wastewater mismanagement,²¹ as well as transportation pollution from vehicles.²² The resulting pollution is blamed for serious diseases among local populations.²³ For example, the GCT's industrial activities in Gabes have been linked to widespread respiratory and skin diseases and cancer among the city's residents.²⁴ Workers are also exposed to highly hazardous conditions, leading to a high incidence of both fatal and non-fatal workplace accidents due to insufficient safety measures.²⁵ Employees of the CPG and GCT are exposed to harmful vapors both at work and in their nearby residential areas, where waste is dumped into drinking water sources.²⁶

There was also a notorious incident of Italian waste exportation to Tunisia in 2020, when hundreds of waste containers were illegally brought to Sousse.²⁷ These were imported under the pretext of recycling plastic wastes in Tunisia, but they were medical and household waste. As a result of protests, the containers were returned to Italy in February 2022.²⁸

14 Sabry, "State-Society Relations".

15 Sabry, "State-Society Relations".

16 Sabry, "State-Society Relations".

17 Roy Choudhury and Asim Kumar, "Green Chemistry and the Textile Industry," *Textile Progress* Vol. 45(1), 1 March 2013, pp. 3-143, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405167.2013.807601>

18 Mohamed Gaaloul, "The Textile Industry in the Sahel Area – a Non-Sustainable Industrial Policy" (Arabic), in *Selection of Important Publications of the Environmental Justice Section on the Right to the Use of Water*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2022, pp. 11-15, (Gaaloul, "The Textile Industry").

19 Wen Hsien Tsai, "Green Production Planning and Control for the Textile Industry by Using Mathematical Programming and Industry 4.0 Techniques," *Energies* 2018, Vol. 11(8), 9 August 2018, p. 2072, <https://doi.org/10.3390/EN11082072>

20 Gaaloul, "The Textile Industry".

21 Roukaya Issaoui, "Sustainable Phosphate Management: Environmental and Social Life Cycle Assessment of Phosphate Mining in Tunisia", Karlsruhe Institut für Technologie, 2022, pp. 78-79, (Issaoui, "Sustainable Phosphate Management").

22 Minyara Mejbri and Hayet Attar, "The Support Strategy to Environmental Rights: The Experience of the FTDES" (Arabic), in *Supporting Environmental Issues: From Demonstrations into Litigation: The Annual Report of the Environmental Justice Section*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2022, pp. 30-56 (Mejbri and Attar, "The Support Strategy to Environmental Rights").

23 Rabeh Ben Othman and Rihab Mabrouki, "The Law of Social Responsibility: The Weakness of the Content and the Political Will" (Arabic), in *The Six-Party Report for Environmental Justice: Rights, Social Obligations, Nutrition Sovereignty, and Sustainable Development*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2021, pp. 85-101.

24 Sihem Irouche, Manon Moulin, and Pola Anquetil-Barba, "Redeyef, Gabes, Wa Zarzis: No Environment without Class Struggle. Condemnation, Resistance, Organization" (Arabic), in *The Six-Party Report for Environmental Justice: Rights, Social Obligations, Nutrition Sovereignty, and Sustainable Development*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2021, pp. 116-20 (Irouche, Moulin, and Anquetil-Barba, "Redeyef, Gabes, Wa Zarzis").

25 Issaoui, "Sustainable Phosphate Management", p. 124.

26 Sabry, "State-Society Relations".

27 Naser, "Tunisia-Environment".

28 Sofia Barbarani, "Italian Mayor Decries Waste Dump Plan after Tunisia Returns Illegal Rubbish", *Independent*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/italy-tunisia-waste-dump-illegal-rubbish-b2020782.html>

Water Usage

Tunisia suffers from a shortage of water resources. It is estimated that the yearly water available per capita in the country is only 400m³, far below the international minimum threshold of 500m³.²⁹ Water problems are exacerbated by the highly irregular annual rainfall.³⁰ Water scarcity is expected to worsen with climate change as well as with desertification.³¹ The south, comprising about 62% of the country's size, suffers especially from water shortages as it has only 7% of Tunisia's total surface water potential and 15% of renewable groundwater resources. In terms of deep aquifers, the south has 58% of the country's total, but the water quality of those aquifers is low, which limits their use.³²

Despite this shortage, excessive use of water is reported in several economic activities, especially in the industrial sector. In the textile and apparel industry, for instance, the production processes involve extensive water usage, which poses a major environmental concern. Companies in this sector often dig deep wells to extract valuable freshwater, frequently without obtaining the necessary licenses or permissions, and consume large quantities of water, particularly during the washing and dyeing processes, exacerbating the water shortage for the local population.³³ The phosphate industry's activities also lead to the depletion of freshwater resources.³⁴

The Green Transition

The green transition, the use of renewable energies, and decarbonization are currently at the heart of the economic, geopolitical, and environmental agenda globally. The transition is promising to address the alarming concerns of climate change, especially with the accelerating pace of extreme environmental events: heat waves, forest fires, floods, droughts, and others. Tunisia is endangered by many of these hazards (e.g., heat waves, droughts, floods, and degradation of water tables), despite being insignificant in terms of carbon emission.³⁵

The green transition is particularly promoted by the EU within

29 Naser, "Tunisia-Environment".

30 Thameur Chaibi, "Water Report: Tunisia Water Report", 4 March 4 2020, <https://water.fanack.com/tunisia/> (Chaibi, "Water Report").

31 Youssef, "Climate Change in the Tunisian Cities".

32 Chaibi, "Water Report".

33 Gaaloul, "The Textile Industry", pp. 11-15.

34 Issaoui, "Sustainable Phosphate Management", pp. 78-79.

35 Youssef, "Climate Change in the Tunisian Cities; The World Bank Group, "Climate Risk Country Profile: Tunisia" (Washington DC, 2021), 11, <https://reliefweb.int/report/tunisia/tunisia-climate-risk-country-profile>

Tunisia, given its geographical proximity and close economic relationship with Tunisia. Nevertheless, environmental and social concerns accompany those schemes. One of the most discussed cases is the windmill at Bourj Al-Salehi, which caused significant sound pollution for the local community, and set a bad precedent for renewable energy schemes in the country.³⁶ There are concerns about green hydrogen production as a new activity that would use excessive water and add to water scarcity. Even though the project stresses it would use desalinated sea water, concerns still exist regarding the resulting brine that could increase sea salination, especially since for every one kilogram of green hydrogen produced, vast amounts of water (estimated to be between 18-24L) are needed.³⁷

The social dimension is interwoven with the environmental one, as one of the major concerns surrounding renewable energy projects is the right of the local communities to the land required for these projects and the need to involve them in the developmental objectives of the green transition schemes.³⁸ The lack of transparency and information provided to the public (especially regarding green hydrogen) and questions on the extent of the benefit for Tunisians create further social tension. Those concerns exist despite the emphasis of state and business association actors that environmental assessments are conducted for new renewable energy projects and that consideration is taken for local communities' developmental needs – such as water – particularly in green hydrogen projects.³⁹

36 Ines Labiadh and Hayet Attar, "Bourj Al-Salehi or the Dark Side for Renewable Energies" (Arabic), in *The Six-Party Report for Environmental Justice: Rights, Social Obligations, Nutrition Sovereignty, and Sustainable Development*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2021, pp. 54-83.

37 Aïda Delpuech, "Who Benefits from Tunisia's Green Hydrogen Strategy?", *Environmental Policies Series*, Heinrich Boll Stiftung Tunisie, October 2022 (Delpuech, "Who Benefits from Green Hydrogen?").

38 Delpuech, "Who Benefits from Green Hydrogen?"; Imen Louati, "Tunisia: What Is the Energy Transition About?" *RLS North Africa Research Paper Series*, August 2022.

39 Mohamed Ismail Sabry, "The Development of Tunisia's Green Transition: Actors' Interests, and Policy Coalitions' Power Dynamics," 2024, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4729172> (Sabry, "Tunisia's Green Transition"). This is based on an interviews with a leading member at the FTDES, a leading figure at Agence Nationale pour la Maîtrise de l'Énergie (National Agency for Energy Conservation, an employee at Société Tunisienne de l'Électricité et du Gaz (Tunisian Company of Electricity and Gas), and a leading figure at the Chambre Syndicale du Photovoltaïque de Tunisie (Syndicate Chamber of Photovoltaic of Tunisia).

A Mapping of ECSOs and Environmental Movements

General Overview of ECSOs

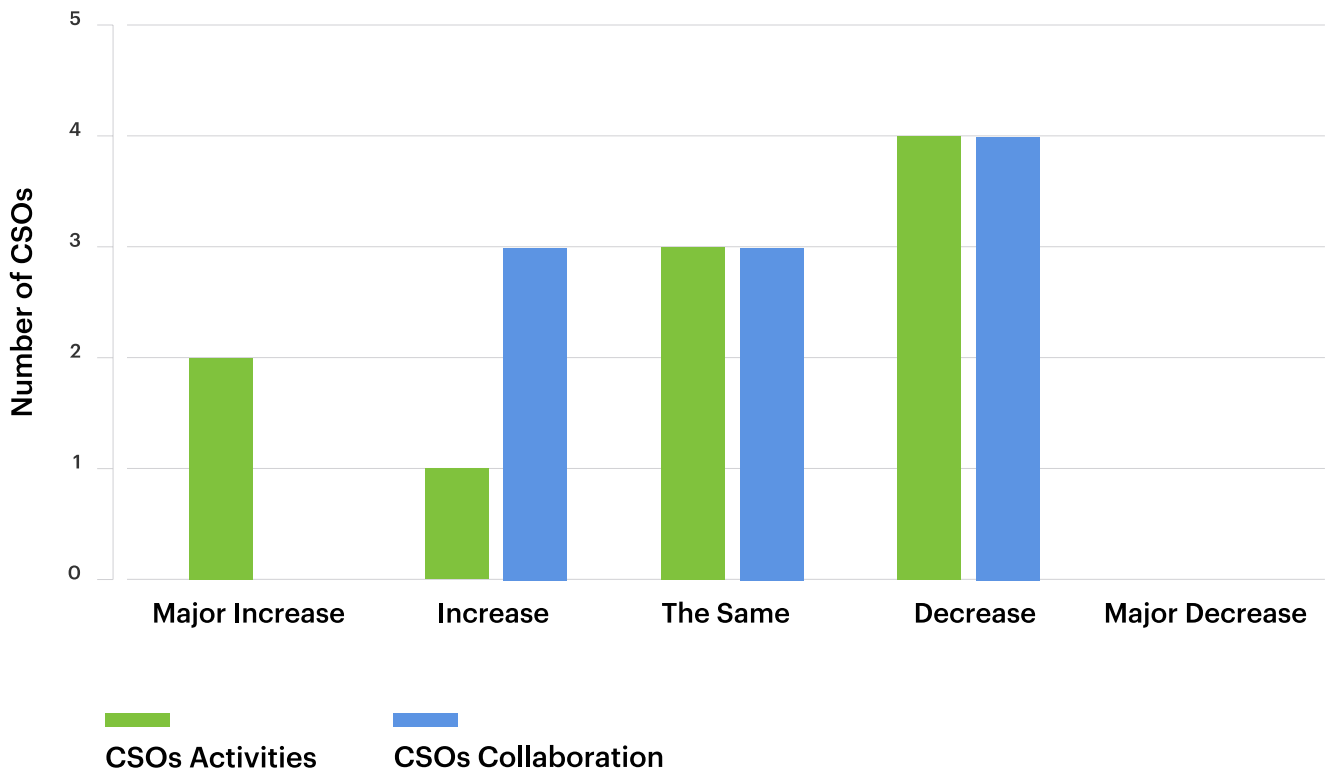
One of the important developments that followed the 2011 Revolution was the growth of many civil society organizations (CSOs) that adopted an environmentalist mission, either as a priority or as one among other social, political, and economic objectives. A major development took place on July 25, 2021, when President Kais Saied initiated a constitutional coup. The 2022 constitution significantly expanded the president’s powers, removing most judicial and legislative checks and reducing the authority of the parliament.⁴⁰ In 2022, a draft law was introduced that would restore and tighten state

control over foreign funding for CSOs, require government approval for their formation, allow increased regulation of their activities, and enable the government to dissolve them without judicial oversight.⁴¹ These developments have left CSOs feeling threatened even though the laws have not yet been enacted.⁴²

As Figure 1 shows, of the ten surveyed ESCOs, a slight majority reported a decrease in their activities and collaborations with other ECSOs after 2022 compared to other responses (although the difference is not significant when compared to those reporting either an increase or major increase in their activities or collaboration in the post-2022 period). The political changes since 2022 seem not to have strongly impacted ECSOs’ activities or collaborations.

When asked to rank different environmental fields in terms of their priority, Figure 2 shows that ECSO survey participants reported that the green transition was the most important activity.

Figure 1 : Change in CSO Activities After 2022

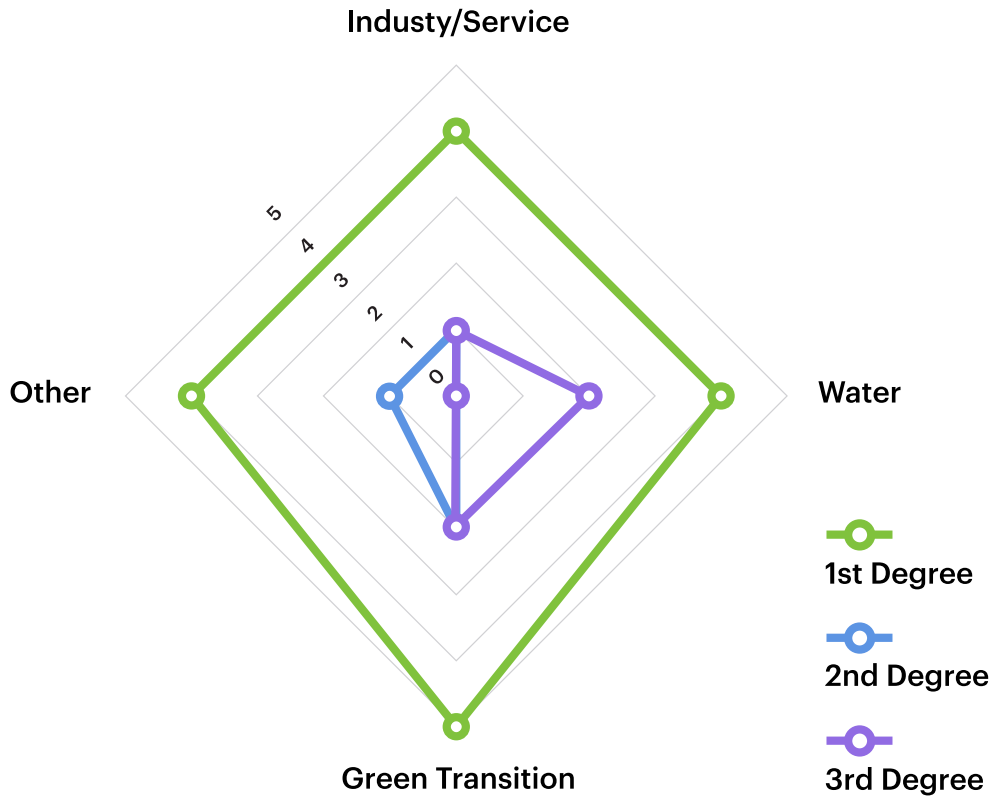


40 Zoe Petkanas, “Kais Saied and the Demise of Democracy,” *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 28, no. 4, 4 July 2023, pp. 733-40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2023.2211838>.

41 Amnesty International, “Human Rights under Assault Two Years after President Saied’s Power Grab,” 24 July 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2023/07/human-rights-under-assault-two-years-after-president-saieds-power-grab/>

42 Sabry, “Tunisia’s Green Transition”.

Figure 2 : ECSO Ranking of Environmental Fields by Importance to their Work



Note: “Other” includes: legal, UN Sustainable Development Goals and climate justice, plastic pollution, reforestation, climate change and environmental education, biodiversity, waste drainage, removing polluting waste, and climate change and governance.

In the field of industrial and service pollution, ECSOs such as Tunisie Recyclage and Tunisie Verte are active in waste removal and monitoring, respectively.⁴³ The ECSOs active in the field of water usage include the Tunisian Water Observatory (Observatoire Tunisien de l’Eau) and the FTDES. The Tunisian Water Observatory set up an electronic platform for reporting water outages and various other water-related problems.⁴⁴ The most active ECSOs in the green transition are the FTDES and the Working Group for Energy Democracy (WGED). The WGED is a CSO made up of syndicates of the General Federation for Oil and Gas (Fédération Générale de

l’Electricité et du Gaz) and adopts the same critical position toward the transition as the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), with which it is affiliated. This position is based on fear of the privatization of the energy sector, although the WGED developed a more encompassing discourse than that of the UGTT, defending the interests of local communities, addressing developmental disparities between rural and urban areas, and considering national interests.⁴⁵

43 Naser, “Tunisia-Environment”.

44 Observatoire Tunisien de l’eau, “A Propos”, <https://www.watchwater.tn/fr/page/1-propos/>

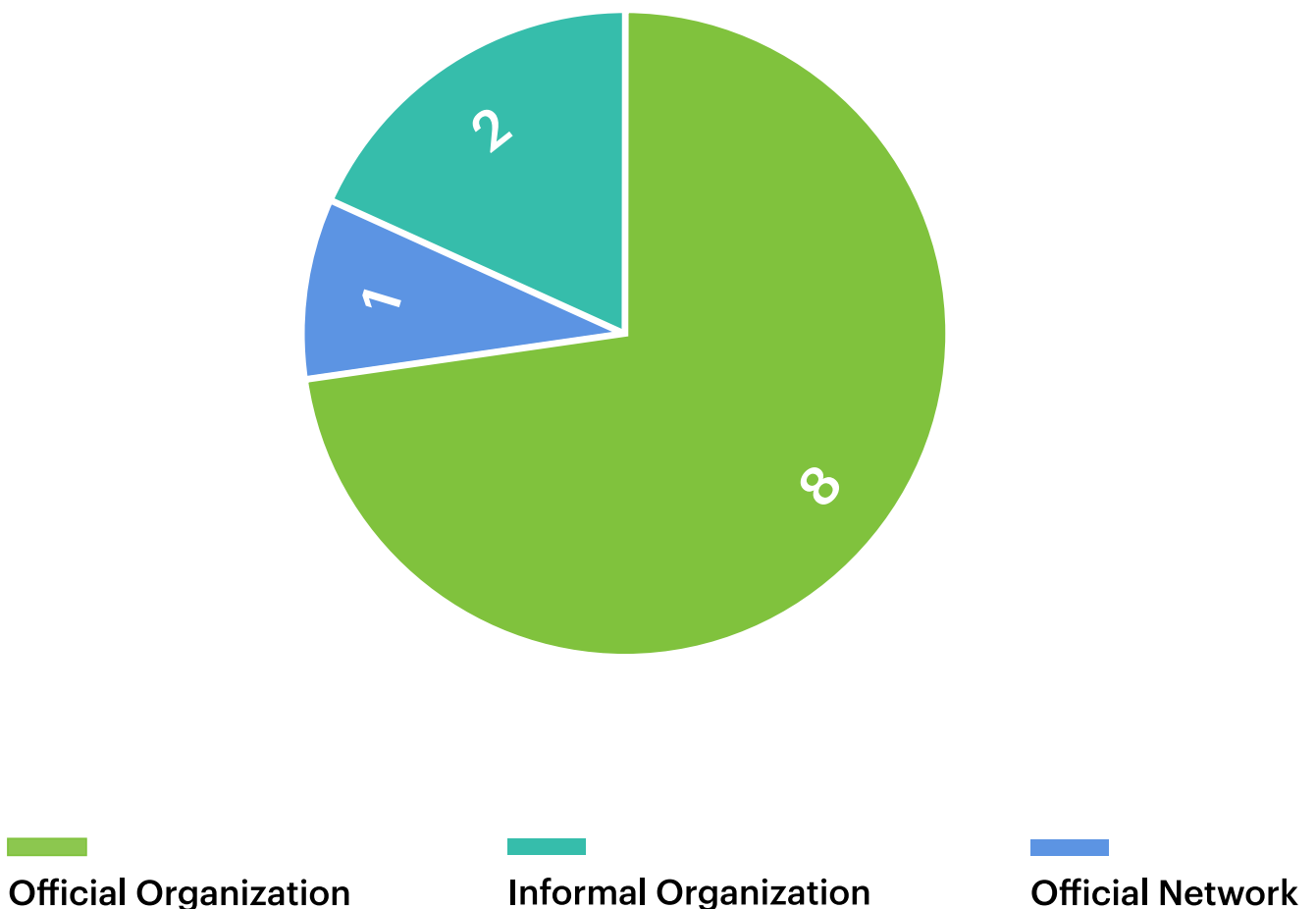
45 Sabry, “Tunisia’s Green Transition”; Ilyes Ben Ammar, “Towards a Just Energy Transition in Tunisia: How to Develop a Democratic Energy Model That Breaks with the Current Approach to Renewable Energy Production?”, Transnational Institute, 6 December 2022, <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/towards-a-just-energy-transition-in-tunisia>

Modes of Organization

As Figure 3 shows, most of the survey participants are official CSOs, two are informal organizations, and one is an official network.

The FTED was established in 2013 and remains one of the successful networks that brought together several ECSOs for a common environmental or developmental purpose. According to the FTED interviewee, the network, which brings together about 23 associations, is the only one that continues to exist and operate in the environment field, although others existed following the revolution. Despite its survival, the FTED is still searching for a clear vision to ensure its sustainability. The interviewee stressed that the concept of a network is new in Tunisia and associations have not yet mastered the ability to engage in collective work; individualism has prevailed. Foreign donors, who were committed to strengthening the capacities of Tunisian ECSOs, did not give network building the attention it deserved.

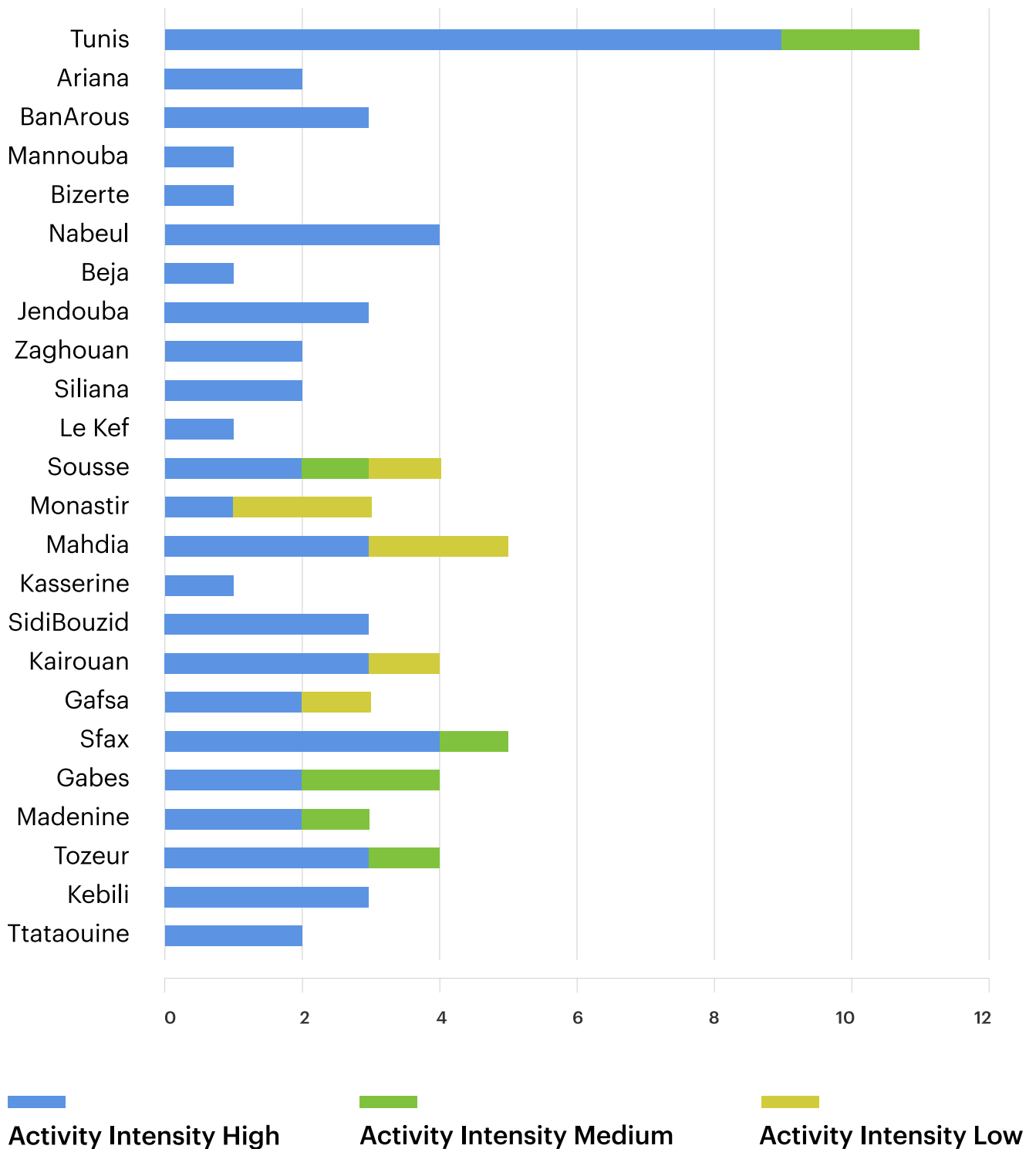
Figure 3 : Organizational Status of Participant CSOs



Geographical Distribution

The survey participants revealed, as Figure 4 shows, that the governorate of Tunis has the highest frequency of ECSO activities by far, even when organizations also engage in activities in other governorates. The next governorates with the most high-frequency activities are Nabeul and Sfax.

Figure 4 : Frequency of ECSOs Activities Across Governorates



Strategies and Tactics

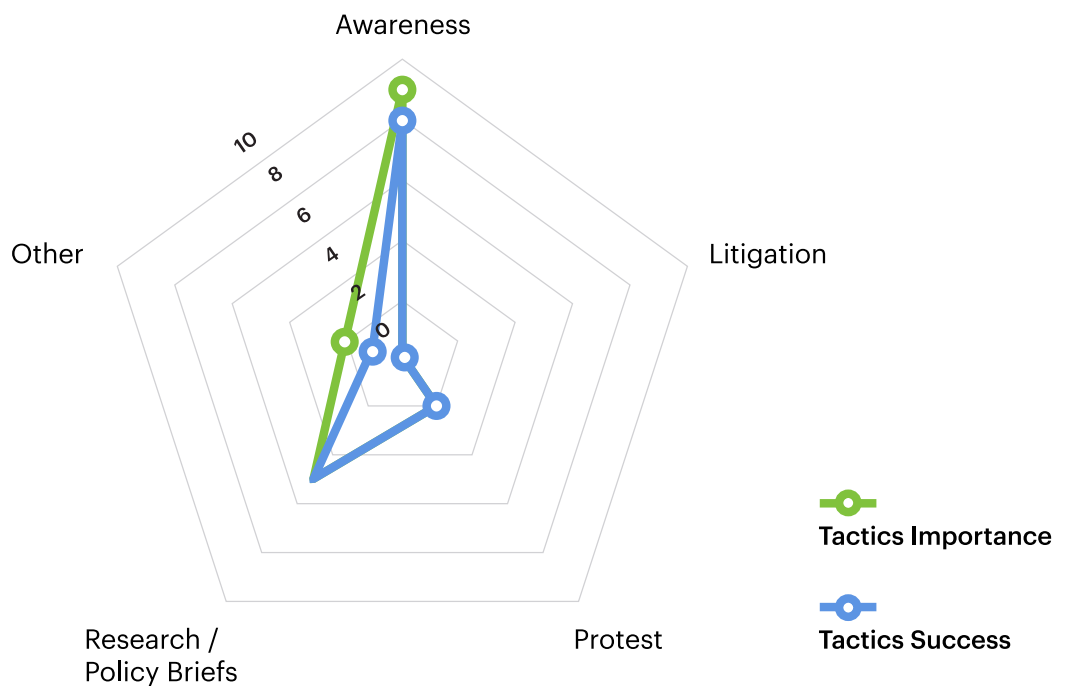
As Table 2 and Figure 5 show, ECSOs identify organizing awareness campaigns as their most important activity. More than half of the survey participants identified awareness campaigns as the first tactic they follow; only two out of 11 ranked these campaigns second. When ranking based on success, most participants also ranked awareness campaigns first, while the rest placed it second or third.

Table 2: ECSO Tactics Ranked by Level of Importance and Success

Tactic	Level of Importance					Level of Success				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Awareness Campaigns	9	2	-	-	-	8	2	1	-	-
Litigation	-	1	2	1	-	-	2	2	-	-
Protest	2	-	2	1	1	2	-	2	1	1
Research & Policy Briefs	5	2	1	1	-	5	2	-	2	-
Other*	2	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-

*Note: "Other" includes training and seminars, prototyping projects, informal education, and capacity building.

Figure 5 : Tactics Ranked as First among Participants



ECSOs affiliated with foreign organizations, especially German institutions, tend to focus on awareness campaigns and training. The HBS interviewee, for instance, spoke about collaborating with other ECSOs on organizing training sessions and workshops that discuss “policy briefs, political notes, analysis, and critical reports”. The RLS interviewee stressed that their organization is working more on “knowledge production and campaigning”. For the FES interviewee, spreading awareness, conducting studies, and engaging in training programs are the most important activities of the organization in the environmental field.

The targets of the awareness campaigns differed from one organization to the other. While the ATPNE interviewee named citizens, agricultural workers, and school pupils more specifically as the target audience for awareness campaigns and training on environmental issues, the FTDES interviewee pointed to “media and communication efforts” as an important part of the organization’s strategy.

Almost half of the participants selected research and policy briefs as their top priority; altogether, most ranked it as either the first or second most important. The FTDES, RLS, and HBS, for instance, heavily rely on this tactic. In terms of the tactic’s perceived success, the same rankings hold.

Two participants ranked protest highest among their organizations’ tactics, and a similar number of participants ranked it first as one of the most successful tactics. Before the 2011 Revolution, Tunisia had experienced some social protests for environmental causes, namely in Gabes and Tozeur where protests were directed against energy and petrochemical industries, yet these were rare.⁴⁶ Environmental protest increased significantly after the revolution, coinciding with the increase in social mobilization and a decrease in police repression. For instance, protests against the environmental violations of the textile sector in the Gulf of Monastir began as early as 2006 but became more frequent after 2011. In 2013, some protests turned violent, with equipment being burned and roads blocked.⁴⁷

Protests have coincided with growing public awareness of environmental issues and have taken various forms, including demonstrations and sit-ins.⁴⁸ Protests have sometimes successfully hindered environmental violations, as was the case of the phosphate industry. In the wave of social protests over environmental issues following the revolution, several demonstrations took place in the city of Redeyef. In June 2018, locals locked down a facility, compelling the company to commit to providing fresh water for the community. In another city, Mdhilla, where CPG and

GCT facilities are located, residents blocked the road to prevent trucks from transporting phosphates.⁴⁹ This protest, backed by environmental ECSOs, also managed to garner the support of local government officials. The local government in Mdhilla banned the transportation of phosphate through the city’s main road.⁵⁰ Additionally, the Stop Pollution movement played a highly active role. The movement, which was established in 2012 in Gabes and led by human rights activists, actively defended environmental rights and organized various protest activities.⁵¹ In one example, Stop Pollution was involved in protesting the GCT in Gabes, which led to its plant’s closure for an entire month in late 2020.⁵²

No participants ranked litigation first in terms of the importance of tactics of their organization, and less than a third identified it as second, third, or fourth. The same was the case in terms of the perceived success of the tactic. The FTDES is one of the most active CSOs in litigation directed against environmental violations. The organization has filed cases against the CPG for the overuse of groundwater and depriving local communities in Redeyef of access to a reliable water supply.⁵³ One of the most successful litigation activities was initiated by Manish Msab: it filed a case against the landfill near the town of Agareb, won the case, and had the landfill closed.⁵⁴

As the survey results indicate, litigation seems to be one of the last resorts for ECSOs. The Tunisie Verte interviewee asserted that “legal matters play an important role in the network’s activities and strategy.” However, the organization starts by “approaching the authority primarily responsible for the environmental issue at hand with written requests”. The next step is issuing public statements. Then the organization resorts to the media to apply some pressure on decision-makers. The last step is resorting to legal action. Participants pointed to other tactics, such as conducting training and seminars, prototyping projects, informal education, and capacity building – some of which were highly ranked.

46 Chiara Loschi, “Local Mobilizations and the Formation of Environmental Networks in a Democratizing Tunisia,” *Social Movement Studies* Vol. 18, no. 1, 2 January 2019, pp. 93-112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1540974> (Loschi, “Local Mobilizations”).

47 Labiadh and Gaaloul, “The Post-Revolution Environmental Movements”, pp. 25-29.

48 Labiadh and Gaaloul, “The Post-Revolution Environmental Movements”.

49 Rabeh Ben Othmane, “The Mining Basin Branch of the Forum: The Strive for the Right to Access Water Continues” (Arabic), in *Selection of Important Publications of the Environmental Justice Section on the Right to the Use of Water*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2022, pp. 38-43; Rabeh Ben Othmane, “The Mining Basin – Where Obtaining a Water Drop Is Unrealizable Dream” (Arabic), in *Selection of Important Publications of the Environmental Justice Section on the Right to the Use of Water*, ed. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, 2022, pp. 4-10.

50 Mejri and Attar, “The Support Strategy to Environmental Rights”.

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

52 Irouche, Moulin, and Anquetil-Barba, “Redeyef, Gabes, Wa Zarzis”.

53 Naser, “Tunisia-Environment”.

54 Will Todman, “I Am Not a Dump: Mobilization and Environmental Action in Tunisia,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 8 November 2023, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/middle-east-almanac/i-am-not-dump-mobilization-and-environmental-action-tunisia>

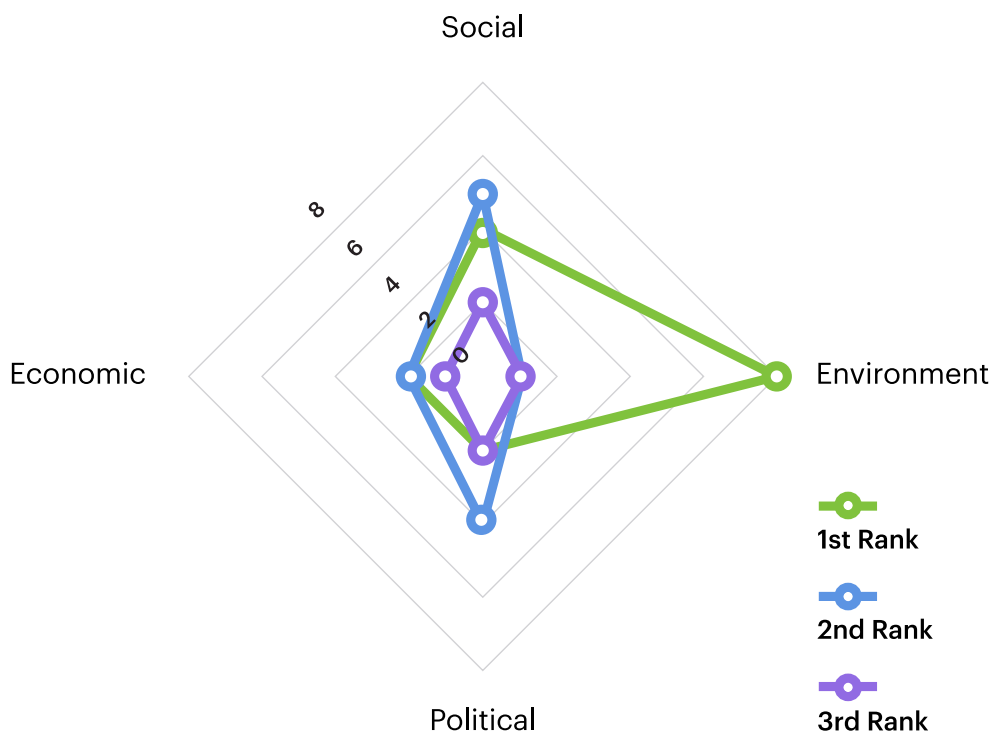
Priorities: Environmental Versus Other Issues

Given that the targets of the survey and interviews were ECSOs active in the environmental field, it is not surprising that most participants identified the environmental field as their first objective, as shown in Figure 6. All participants, however, reported having other objectives and some even ranked these higher than their environmental concerns. The most important among these other objectives were social ones, which were ranked among the first or second most important objectives by all but two participants. More than half of the participants also ranked political objectives as either first or second. Economic objectives were not ranked highly, not even reaching the top four most important objectives for more than a third of the surveyed participants; only about one-third of the survey participants ranked economic objectives as first or second, and less than half of the participants ranked them among the top three most important objectives.

The interviews also revealed that even for ECSOs, environmental activities are often mixed with or motivated

by other developmental objectives with their social, political, and economic dimensions. The TYI interviewee, for instance, asserted that the organization’s “primary focus is on social and governance issues” and that the environmental efforts of the ECSO are “rather an integral part of their overall objectives to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and promote a better life for youth, women, and vulnerable people”. The TYI increasingly considered environmental projects as a “risk mitigation strategy” for realizing the important objective of protecting “vulnerable groups”. The Ifriqiya interviewee, while asserting that environmental issues are the most discussed in the organization, stressed that only about half of the 12 projects the organization has been responsible for since 2020 were of a purely environmental dimension, “such as local environmental governance and climate change (water, agriculture, energy, education)”. Sometimes the projects crosscut with other objectives, as was the case in projects targeting the “youth, local democracy, and migration issues”. The FTDES interviewee stressed that the organization’s perspective is rather “a human rights-based approach”, defending “fundamental and essential” rights that crosscut with environmental ones as they do with “the right to health and life”.

Figure 6 : How ECSOs Rank their Objectives



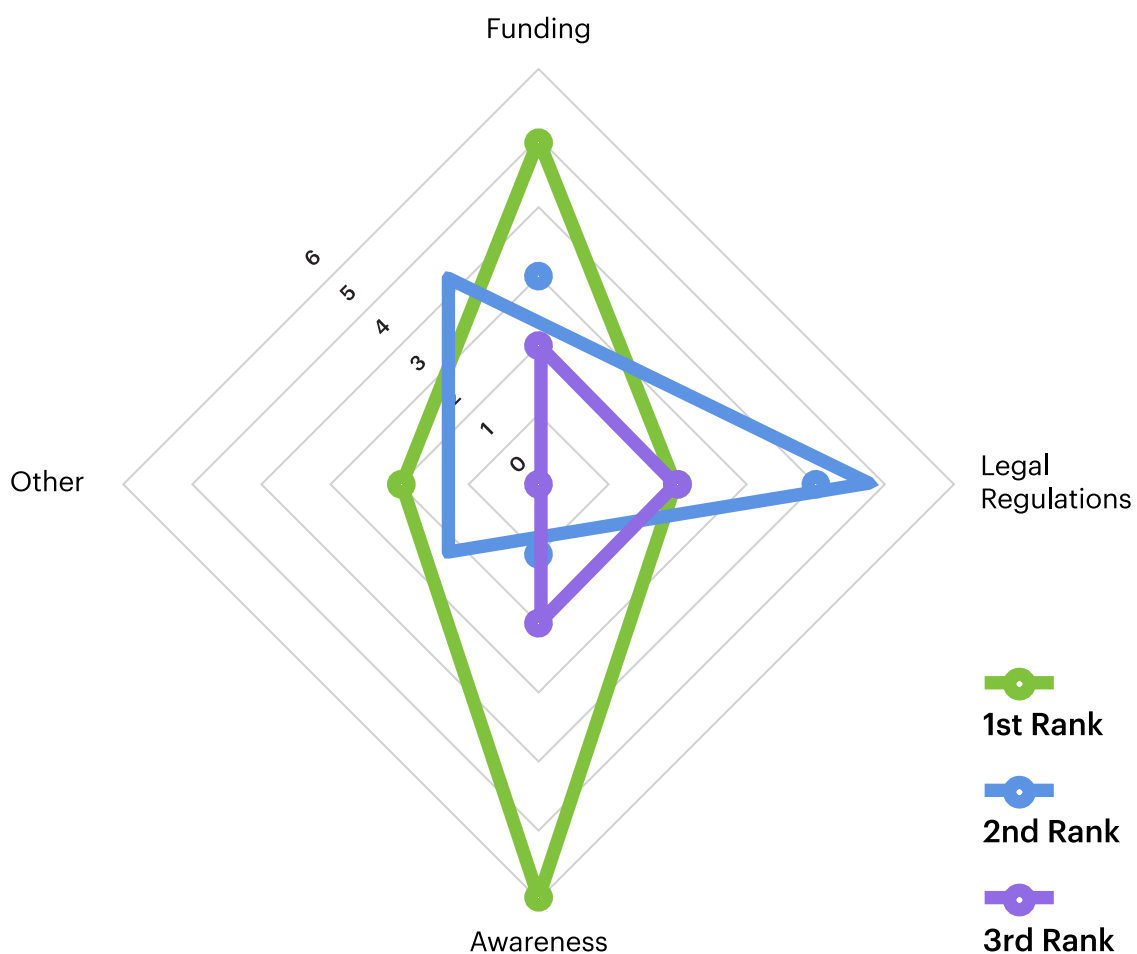
Challenges

More than half of the surveyed participants ranked the lack of awareness of environmental issues first among the challenges they face, as shown in Figure 7. For more than two-thirds of the participants, funding is their first or second biggest challenge. Only two participants identified legal regulations as their biggest challenge, though more than half listed it among the top challenges. Other top challenges identified by participants included political and economic contexts, logistics, lack of information, inadequate coordination, and complicated procedures to get bank approvals on funding.

The political situation represents another important challenge that ECSOs now face. According to the RLS

interviewee, the organization assesses “more prudently what we should publish and what event we can organize when it comes to the political situation in Tunisia, or other topics that are politically sensitive (like migration, political critical publications)”. A further problem facing German-affiliated ECSOs is the repercussions of the war on Gaza that began in October 2023. The HBS interviewee pointed out that more caution is being taken when organizing events that address the public. There are also other exogenous obstacles. For instance, the RLS interviewee spoke about the diminishing funds from the organization’s donor organization, which prevents the organization from supporting its partners. The SG/TCU interviewee mentioned the sustainability of projects and the need to develop an economic model as an important challenge.

Figure 7 : How ECSOs Rank their Challenges



Note: “Other” includes political and economic context, logistics, funding approval process, lack of information, and coordination.

ECSOs in the Context of State-Society Relations

Inter-ECSO Relations

Most participants referred to a medium level of collaboration among ECSOs on environmental issues, as Figure 8 shows. They also revealed that collaboration among ECSOs is more common on environmental issues compared to others, especially in activities involving medium levels of collaboration.

Table 3 shows the relationships between various ECSOs according to the survey participants and how they rank those relations. Figure 9 visualizes those relationships. Nomad 08, Tunisie Recyclage, FTDES, Hivos, Scout, and La Ruche de Tozeur received the most votes as “strong partners” for the surveyed organizations, while Nomad 08, Tunisie Recyclage, and FTDES were also ranked number one at least once by their partners in terms of the strength of the relationship.

Figure 8 : Level of Collaboration among ECSOs

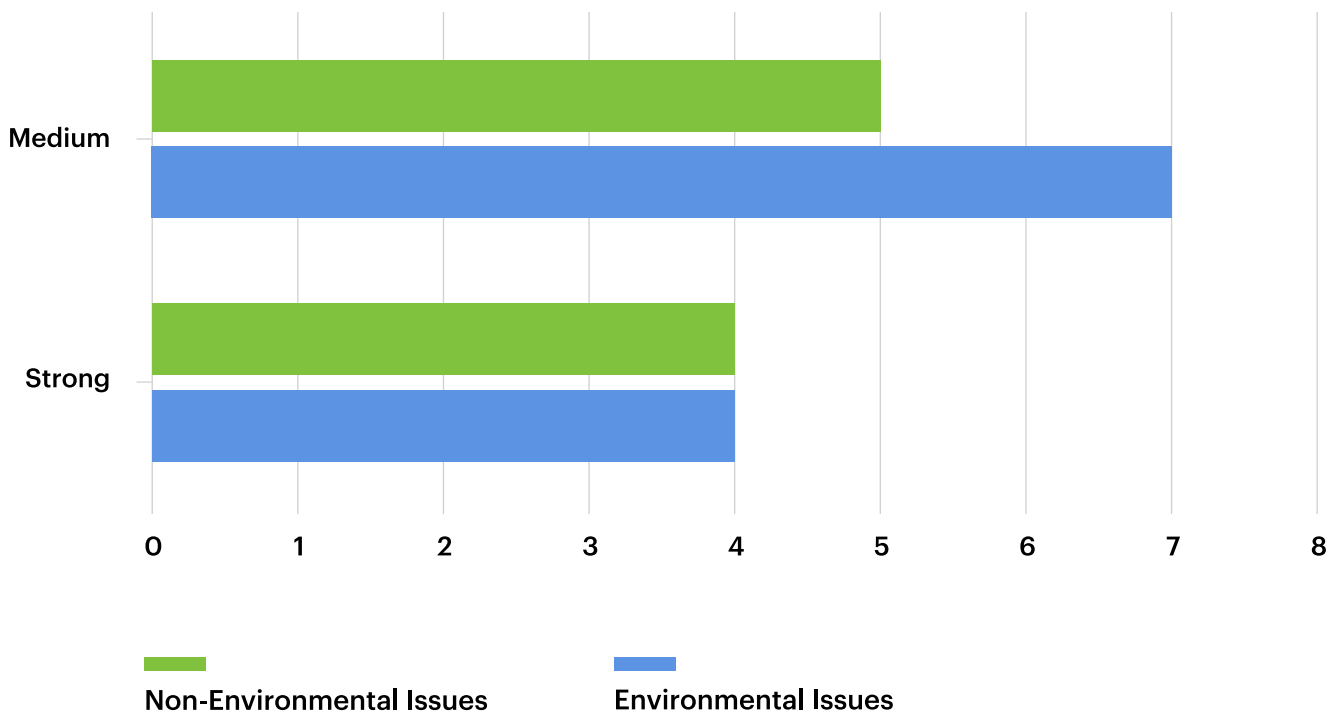
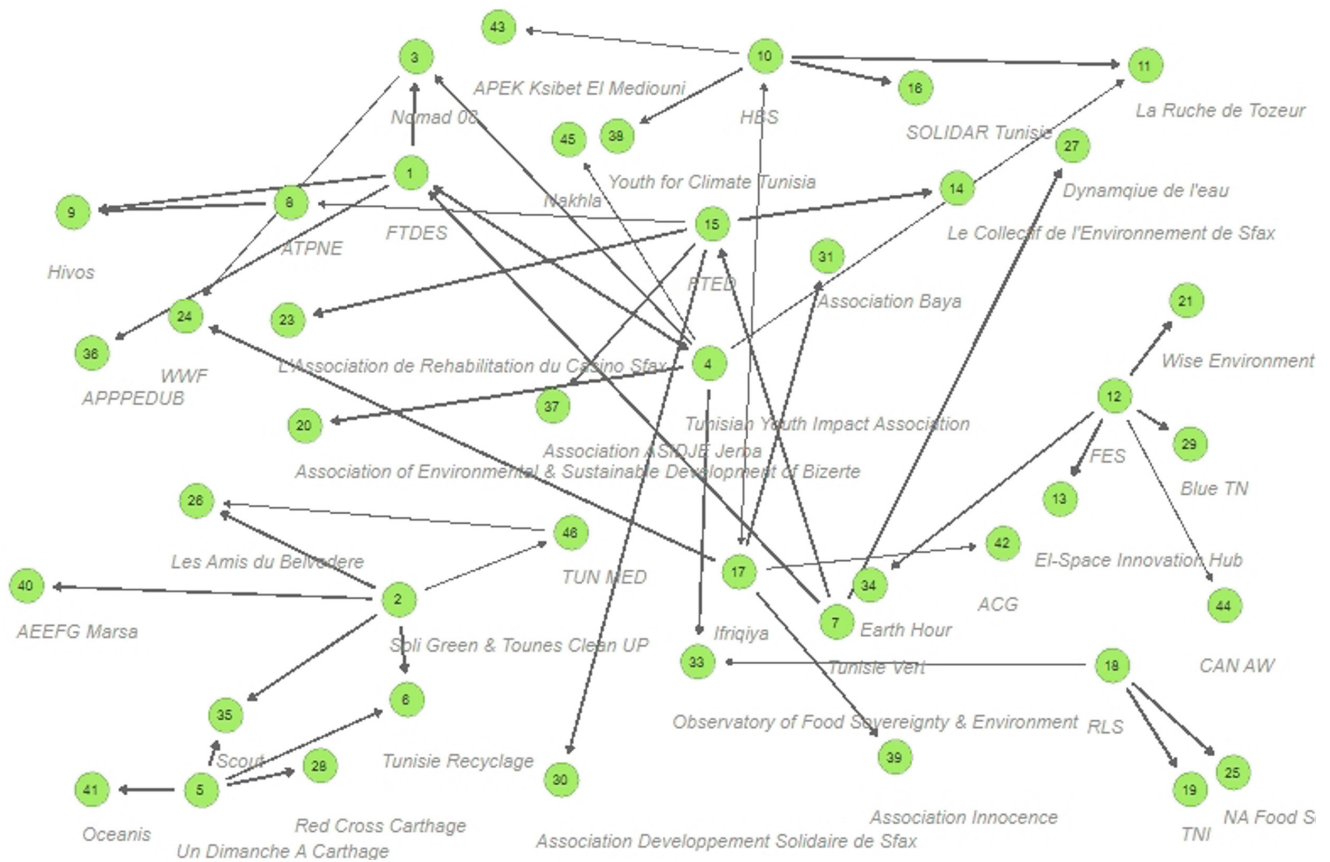


Table 3: ECSOs Identified as Strong Partners by Surveyed Organizations

ECSO	Times Selected	Highest Rank	Selected By
Nomad 08	2	1	FTDES; TYI
Tunisie Recyclage	2	1	SG/TCU; Un Dimanche à Carthage
FTDES	2	1	Tunisie Verte; TYI
Hivos	2	2	ATPNE; FTDES
Scout	2	2	SG/TCU; Un Dimanche à Carthage
La Ruche de Tozeur	2	3	HBS; TYI
Observatoire de la Souveraineté Alimentaire et de l'Environnement. (OSAE)	2	3	RLS; TYI
EL Space Social Innovation Hub	1	1	FES
Collectif de l'Environnement de Sfax	1	1	FTED
SOLIDAR Tunisie	1	1	HBS
HBS	1	1	Ifriqiya
Transnational Institute	1	1	RLS
Association of Environmental & Sustainable Development of Bizerte	1	1	TYI
Wise Environment	1	2	FES
TYI	1	2	FTDES
L'association de réhabilitation du Casino Sfax	1	2	FTED
Ifriqiya (in Sfax)	1	2	HBS
World Wildlife Fund (WWF)	1	2	Ifriqiya
North African Food Sovereignty Network	1	2	RLS
Les Amis du bévédère	1	2	SG/TCU
Dynamique de l'eau	1	2	Tunisie Verte
Red Cross Carthage	1	2	Un Dimanche à Carthage
Blue TN	1	3	FES
Association développement solidaire de Sfax	1	3	FTED
Association Baya	1	3	Ifriqiya
FTED	1	3	Tunisie Verte
Earth Hour	1	4	FES
APPEDUB	1	4	FTDES
Association ASSIDJE JERBA	1	4	FTED
Youth For Climate Tunisia	1	4	HBS
Association Innocence	1	4	Ifriqiya
AEEFG Marsa	1	4	SG/TCU
Oceanis	1	4	Un Dimanche à Carthage
Arab Coordination Group	1	5	Ifriqiya
Association de la Protection de l'Environnement à Ksibet el Mediouni	1	5	HBS
Association ATPNE KORBA	1	5	FTED
Climate Action Network–Arab World	1	5	FES
Nakhla	1	5	TYI
TUN MED	1	5	SG/TCU

Figure 9: Inter-ECSOs Connections



Graphic created using Social Network Visualizer Program. The arrows flow from survey participant ECSO to their partners; the darker the arrow color, the stronger the relationship. The numbers correspond to the ECSOs as follows: (1) FTDES, (2) Soli & Green and Tounes CleanUp (SG/TCU), (3) Nomad 08, (4) Tunisian Youth Impact (TYI), (5) Un Dimanche à Carthage, (6) Tunisie Recyclage, (7) Tunisie Verte, (8) ATPNE, (9) Hivos, (10) HBS, (11) La Ruche de Tozeur, (12) FES, (13) EL Space Innovation Hub, (14) Le Collectif de l'Environnement de Sfax, (15) FTED, (16) SOLIDAR Tunisie, (17) Ifriqiya, (18) RLS, (19) Transnational Institute, (20) Association of Environmental & Sustainable Development of Bizerte, (21) Wise Environment, (23) L'Association de Rehabilitation du Casino Sfax, (24) World Wildlife Fund, (25) North African Food Sovereignty Network, (26) Les Amis du Belvedere, (27) Dynamique de l'eau, (28) Red Cross Carthage, (29) Blue TN, (30) Association Developpement Solidaire de Sfax, (31) Association Baya, (33) Observatory of Food Sovereignty & Environment, (34) Earth Hour, (35) Scout, (36) APPPEDUB, (37) Association ASSIDJE Jerba, (38) Youth for Climate Tunisia, (39) Association Innocence, (40) AEEFG Marsa, (41) Oceanis, (42) Arab Coordination Group, (43) Association de la Protection de l'Environnement à Ksibet el Mediouni, (44) Climate Action Network–Arab World, (45) Nakhla, (46) TUN MED

Collaboration among ECSOs takes different forms. Some interviewees highlighted joint activities such as awareness campaigns or protests. Others are organized in networks, such as Tunisie Verte and the Tunisian Network for Climate Change (TNCC), which bring together several ECSOs rallying behind a cause or participating in a common project. According to the Ifriqiya interviewee, a joint project originally created with HBS called EnviroED succeeded in creating an informal regional network in Sfax that brought together seven

local associations not necessarily focused on environmental issues for a project with an environmental objective at its core. EnviroED was created as an educational project in the form of a half-year academy for training young activists using theoretical and practical approaches. The modules included topics on the science of climate change; legal frameworks related to climate change; policy, engagement, and funding; and the role of civil society in the fight against climate change.⁵⁵

55 "Context of the EnviroEd Project," Jamaity, 21 July 2023.

Moreover, mere participation in events organized by other ECSOs was also reported by the ATPNE interviewee, who indicated that some organizations are less active in more intensive collaboration forms. The FTED interviewee pointed out that collaboration among ECSOs intensifies only in times of crisis, even when these ECSOs do not set environmental issues as a priority. The FTED interviewee referred to various examples of this, such as the Siape and household waste crises in Sfax and other crises in Gabes and Sousse where the FTED “coordinated with all social actors” and participated in the coordinating bodies.

Among the most active ECSOs in building cooperative links with their counterparts are German-affiliated ECSOs. The HBS interviewee pointed to how the organization actively collaborates with other ECSOs “as a facilitator of environmental initiatives”, mainly with well-structured ECSOs, but also sometimes “with networks and (unofficial) groups of individuals”. The HBS collaborates with ECSOs, for instance, in facilitating and organizing training sessions and workshops. The FES interviewee, on the other hand, spoke about how the organization tries to use project calls to establish “a new ecosystem of associations that can have an impact even at the local level”. The FES interviewee, on the other hand, pointed to the organization’s strategy of “inclusive cooperation” that allows its partners “to actively participate in the planning and implementation of projects”.

The FTDES is also among the most active in collaborating with other ECSOs. It regards as part of its strategy “the empowerment of movements, networking between

various movements, coaching, and mediation”, according to the FTDES interviewee. Collaboration takes the form of engagement in joint activities and establishing partnership agreements.

Collaboration between ECSOs brings many advantages. As the TYI interviewee pointed out, collaboration and engagement in joint activities even with the less experienced ECSOs increases their awareness and knowledge of environmental issues and concerns. The collaboration also strengthens advocacy for a certain cause. As pointed out by the Tunisie Verte interviewee, the collaboration with other ECSOs was what helped in the internationalization of the Italian waste case.

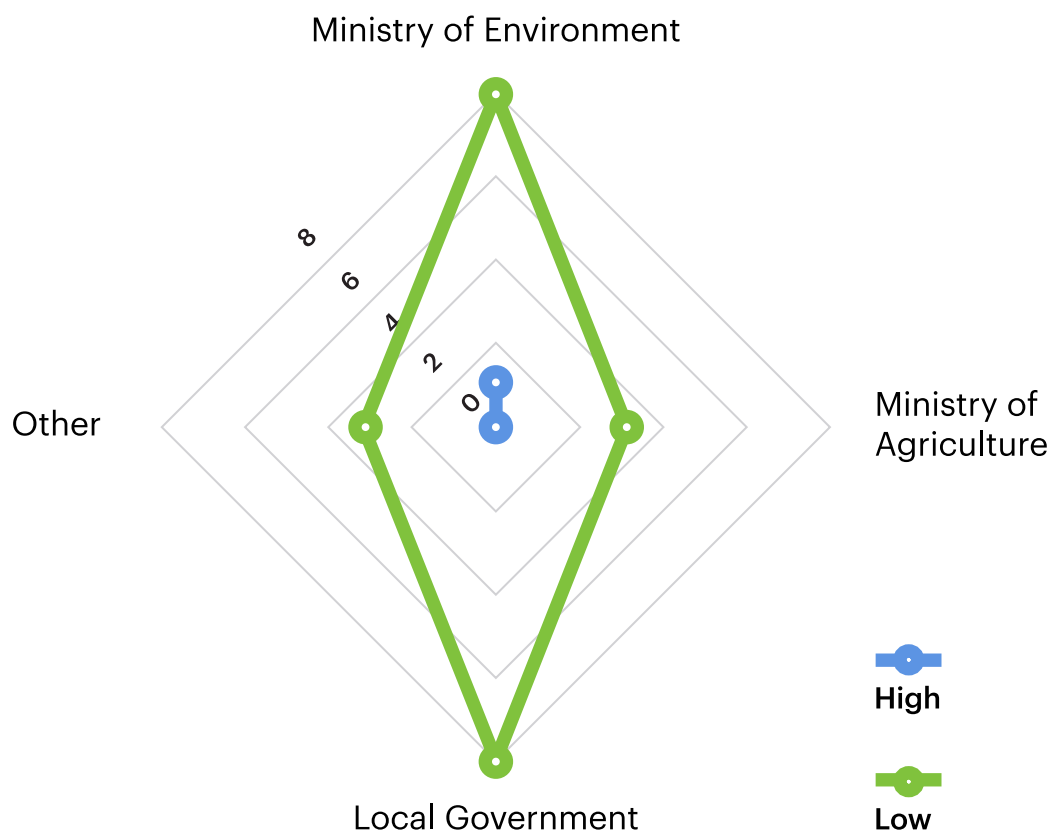
Several obstacles, however, prevent the establishment of strong collaboration among some ECSOs. For instance, in energy transition, WGED claimed to build connections with other ECSOs that share similar goals. However, WGED avoids collaborating with ECSOs linked to foreign, non-leftist ruling political parties, which it views as representing the interests of European governments such as with some ECSOs associated with German ruling parties.⁵⁶ The TYI interviewee pointed to the challenges that their organization faces when dealing with inexperienced ECSOs in comparison to more experienced organizations with whom collaboration “facilitates the technical aspects and promotes knowledge sharing”. Relations could even be confrontational. The SG/TCU interviewee pointed to how in Gabes some non-environmentally oriented CSOs together with labor unionists were “defending the chemical plant” company.

56 Sabry, “Tunisia’s Green Transition”.

ECOSO Relations with the Government

Most of the survey participants indicated the presence of low-intensity relations between their organizations and the Ministry of Environment and local government institutions, as shown in Figure 10. Between a third and a fourth of the participants indicated the presence of low-intensity relations with the Ministry of Agriculture and other government institutions, including the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Education. Only one participant identified the relation with one of the government institutions, the Ministry of Environment, as strong.

Figure 10: Government Entity and Intensity of Relations with CSOs



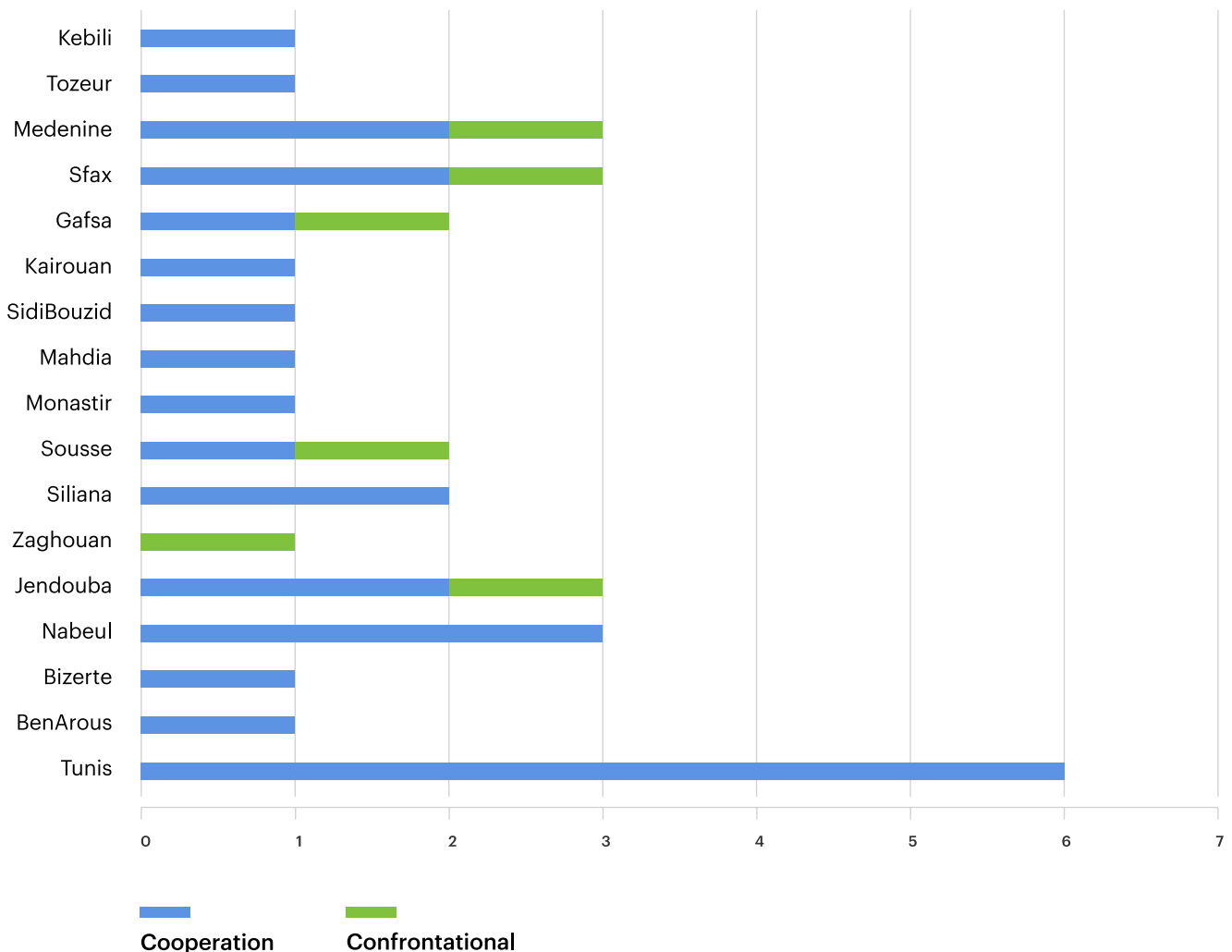
Note: "Other" includes the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Education, L'Agence de Mise en Valeur du Patrimoine et de Promotion Culturelle (Agency for Development of Heritage and Cultural Promotion), and the Delegation of Carthage.

The relation between ECSOs and the state oscillates between cooperative and confrontational. The relation varies according to the geographical location in which the ECSO is active, as shown in Figure 11. The governorate of Tunis was reported by more than half of the participants as being cooperative in its relationship with ECSOs, while less than one-third reported Nabeul as cooperative, and only two participants reported Jendouba, Siliana, Sfax, and Medenine as cooperative. In some governorates, the relationship was reported as both cooperative and confrontational by different interviewees (not necessarily equally), including Jendouba, Sousse, Gafsa, Sfax, and Medenine. Zaghouan was only reported as confrontational by one participant, and no one reported it as cooperative. This suggests the presence of obvious

discrepancies in terms of cooperation with local governments between the big urban center of Tunis and others, many of which are rural areas. This could be partly attributed to the various problems faced by local governments, especially in poor governorates. A previous report by Lana Salman discussed how local governments lack financial resources and personnel, including police agents, making enforcement rather selective.⁵⁷

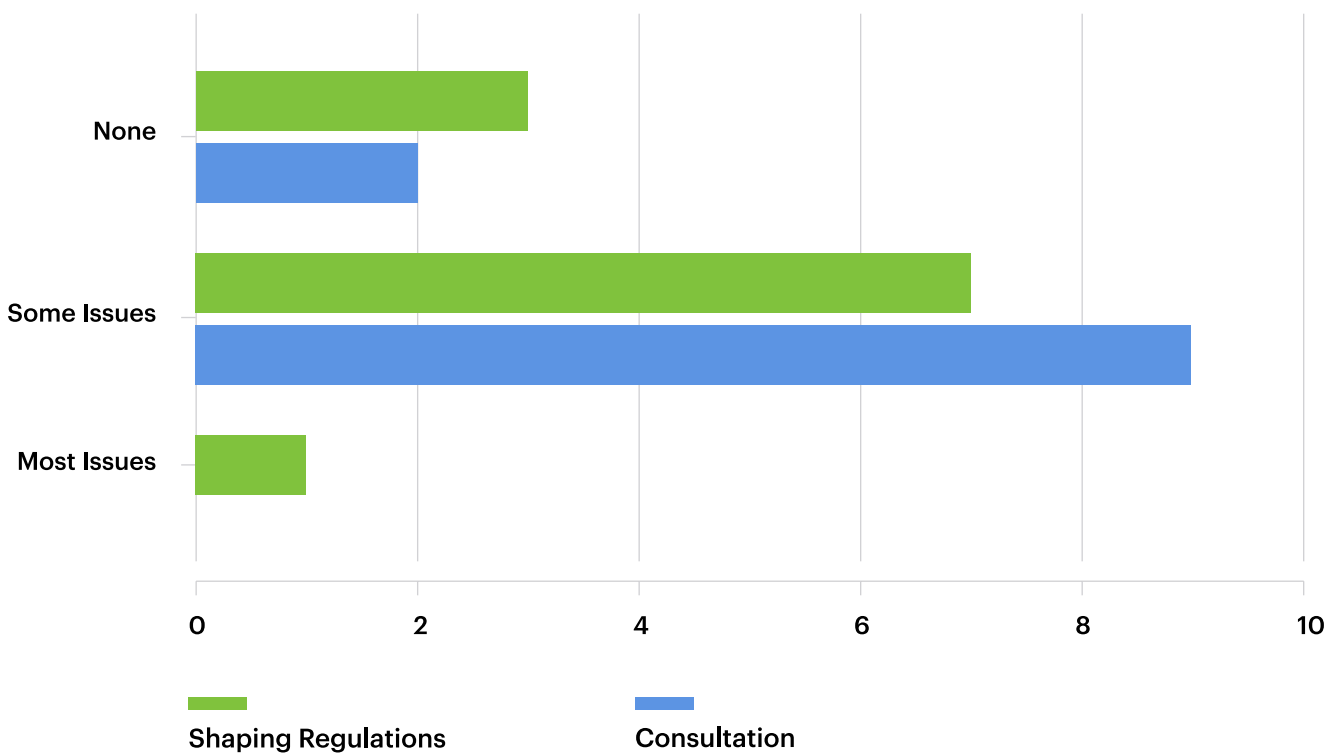
57 Lana Salman, “Environmentalism after Decentralization: The Local Politics of Solid Waste Management in Tunisia”, Arab Reform Initiative, 29 April 2021, https://www.academia.edu/94898959/Environmentalism_After_Decentralization_The_Local_Politics_of_Solid_Waste_Management_in_Tunisia (Salman, “Environmentalism after Decentralization”).

Figure 11: Cooperation versus Confrontation with Local government



In terms of government consultation with ECSOs, and as shown in Figure 12, all but two participants reported the presence of consultation on some issues, but none reported consultation on most issues. A majority of interviewees reported that some local governments would consider ECSOs' suggestions while drafting regulations, although this took place less frequently than consultations.

Figure 12: Extent of Government Consultation with ECSOs



Earlier research has argued that the Tunisian state tends to formulate policies independently, involving ECSOs primarily to appease international development partners and donors.⁵⁸ In this paper, the interviewees' accounts also suggested that this is the case with the national government. As discussed by the TYI interviewee, connecting with government actors at the national level could be challenging and would need connections. Despite resource limitations, it seems that connecting with local officials and cooperating with them is less problematic. A remarkable example that was reported in an earlier report mentioned how ECSOs in Maamoura distributed trash bags for organic and nonorganic household waste while the local municipality installed plastic bottle

containers and collected separated waste.⁵⁹ The Ifriqiya interviewee spoke about the organization's attempts to develop partnerships on environmental issues with various local government actors in Sfax. The TYI interviewee stated that the organization tries to involve governmental actors in its activities. This works well when "well-mobilized actors" exist "due to efforts from local partners". Yet, in some regions, those actors are "less collaborative and reluctant to share information even when administrative permission is obtained".

Yet, as pointed out by ATPNE interviewee, both on the local and national level, the relationship between the organization

58 Sabry, "Tunisia's Green Transition".

59 Salman, "Environmentalism after Decentralization".

and state officials “is dependent on the official’s awareness of the environmental issues importance”. This account agrees with Ben Naser’s research which finds that the relation between the government and ECSOs is of a personal nature.⁶⁰

On the national level, the Ministry of Environment is a common target for environmental ECSOs, as they are often invited to participate in steering committees for various projects.⁶¹ The state frequently invites ECSOs to events and considers their recommendations. However, this process is not well-institutionalized, varies depending on the minister in office, and tends to be informal. Additionally, discussions with ECSOs are often meant to satisfy donors rather than to genuinely incorporate their input. There are also questions about the power of the Ministry of Environment relative to other ministries or the executive in general. For instance, the Ministry of Environment seems to be excluded from the plans to develop the green hydrogen sector, which is actively pursued by the Ministry of Industry.⁶²

Two interviewees spoke in more detail about their organizations’ collaboration with the Ministry of Environment. The HBS interviewee spoke about some forms of collaboration with the ministry and other environmental agencies. The HBS supports existing programs and the ministry’s efforts in, for instance, climate negotiations and proposing exchange and debate activities (e.g., climate risks). The HBS interviewee has asserted that the relation between his organization and “political decision-makers” in the environmental field is “good, if not excellent” and characterized by mutual trust resulting from years of cooperation. On the other hand, the Tunisie Verte interviewee spoke about the network’s work with the ministry on the environmental code. The experience was assessed positively. Members of the network prepared the draft code and a critical review of it. Both were sent to the ministry which incorporated many of the recommendations into the code’s final draft.

However, there is also a confrontational relationship between some ECSOs and various state agencies. The FTED interviewee believes that this is because “government actors are subject to political, social, economic, and lobbying pressures” that direct their decisions away from meeting sustainable development objectives, pushing ECSOs and state agencies into a confrontational trajectory. The German-affiliated FES interviewee asserted that the current relations with public institutions are “very limited due to the current political context”. This aligned with the SG/TCU interviewee’s assessment that the relations with the government “is not easy after 2022”, and that the organization managed to avoid hardships because it is “not deeply involved in politics”.

The FTDES interviewee highlighted the mixed cooperative and confrontational nature of their organization’s relation with

the state. The interviewee pointed to how on the local level, the organization supports different civil society movements and activists in their fight for environmental rights while on the national level, the organization brings ECSO demands to the attention of decision-makers and politicians through communication and exchange and, when necessary, questioning public institutions to hold them accountable to their responsibilities.

It could be said that the relations between ECSOs and various government bodies varied widely and tended to be personalized and depended on mutual trust; the relations were affected as well by the prevailing domestic and international political conditions and the government’s position vis-a-vis international donors.

ECSO Relations with Other Actors

Relations with Business

Businesspeople have been involved in environmental initiatives in Tunisia. For instance, the largest business association in the country, the Union Tunisienne de l’Industrie, du Commerce et de l’Artisanat (Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce, and Artisans) was a counterpart for an important agreement with the Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment in October 2016 that limited the use of single-use plastic bags and replaced them with reusable ones.⁶³

However, survey participants revealed that the relations between their organizations and business associations are limited. As Figure 13 shows, only about one-third of the participants reported either low or highly cooperative relations. As shown in Table 4, the Union Tunisienne de l’Industrie, du Commerce et de l’Artisanat was reported as an association with which the organizations of the survey participants have both cooperative and confrontational relations, while the relation with the Confederation of Citizen Enterprises of Tunisia was reported only as confrontational. The relation with the associations of some professions such as the Union of Farmers and Fishermen, the Association des Jeunes Avocats, and organizations of physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, and engineers was reported as being cooperative. One of the few participants who spoke about the presence of relations with business associations was the HBS interviewee who spoke about the involvement of the organization in events that target the private sector. The interviewee stressed that the activities of the organization in this field are “limited to promoting the ecosystem of start-ups active in the field of ecology”.

60 Naser, “Tunisia-Environment”.

61 Sabry, “Tunisia’s Green Transition”.

62 Delpuech, “Who Benefits from Tunisia’s Green Hydrogen Strategy?”

63 “Plastic Atlas: Facts and Figures about the World of Synthetic Polymers”, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, November 2019, p. 48, <https://za.boell.org/en/2019/11/06/plastic-atlas-facts-and-figures-about-world-synthetic-polymers>

Figure 13: Relations Between ECSOs and Various Actors

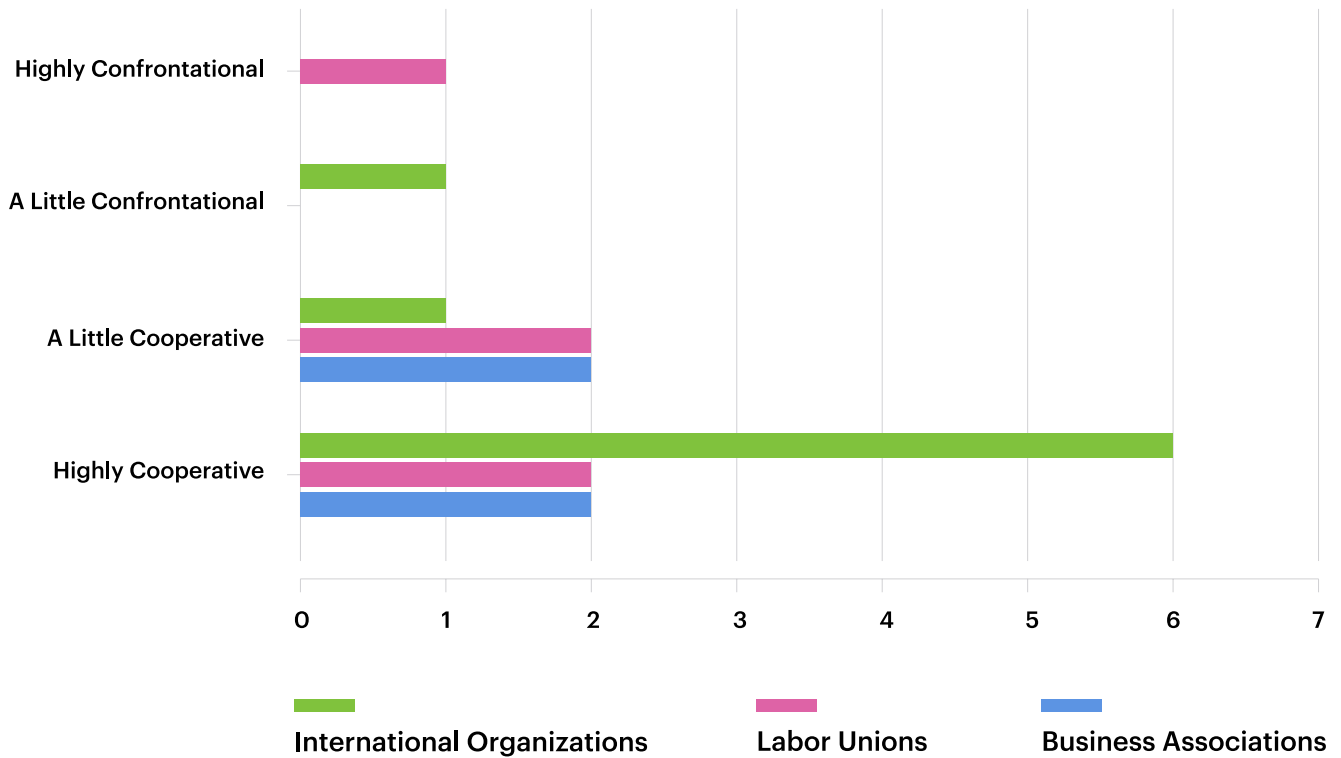
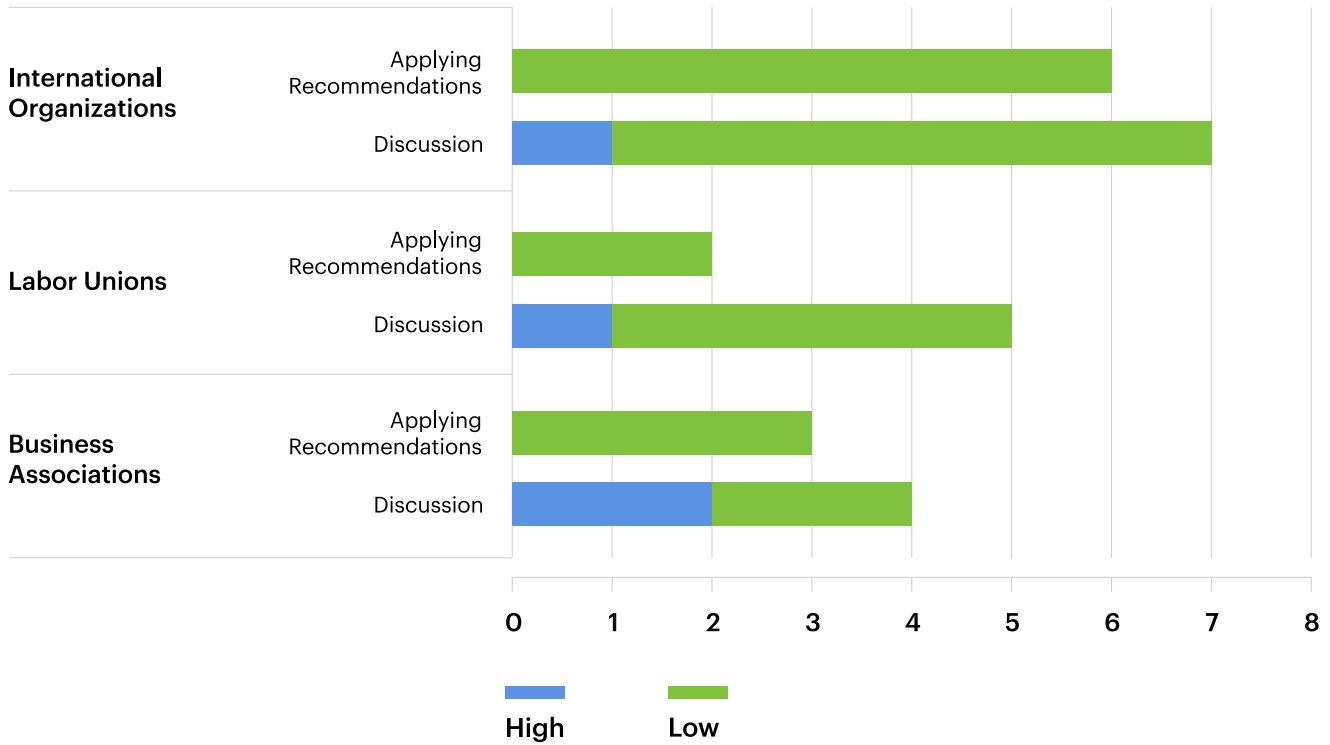


Table 4: Relations between ECSOs and Various Actors according to Survey Participants*

	Business Associations	Labor Unions	International Organizations
Cooperative	Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat, Laboratoire de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire, Union of Farmers and Fishermen, Association des Jeunes Avocats, physicians, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers	UGTT (4 times), Union Tunisienne de l'Agriculture et de la Pêche, Union Régionale de l'Agriculture et de la Pêche	UN Development Programme (4 times), the EU (3 times), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2 times), International Pollutants Elimination Network (2 times), Institut français de Tunisie (2 times), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Food and Agriculture Organization, UN Environmental Programme, UN-Habitat, Akina Mama wa Afrika, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, South South North, Green Peace, Zero Waste, Transnational Institute, Natural Resource Governance Institute, Agence Française de Développement, International Organization for Migration, Climate Action Network
Confrontational	Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat, Confederation of Citizen Enterprises of Tunisia	Workers (generally)	The EU, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Cooperation Italienne

Figure 14 shows that only about one-third of the survey participants had discussions on some or most cases with business associations, while only one-third reported that ECSO recommendations were applied by business associations, and this was only relevant to some cases.

Figure 14: Discussing and Applying Environmental Issues



*Note: Some participants were confused between business associations, international organizations, and ECSOs from foreign origin. Their answers that did not categorize the organizations correctly were excluded.

Interviewee accounts of the slim cooperation between ECSOs and businesses align with earlier research findings. Sabry argued that even in a topic that is very crucial to businesspeople, such as the green transition, cooperation between ECSOs and businesspeople is almost non-existent.⁶⁴ The WGED is also less interested in forming alliances with business associations or major suppliers, despite emphasizing the importance of fostering local production of renewable energy sector inputs. Business associations, in turn, do not appear eager to cooperate with the FGEG, which suggests as well a lower likelihood of willingness to cooperate with the WGED.

Relations with Labor Unions

As shown in Figure 13 above, less than half of the survey participants reported relations with labor unions, where most of them reported a cooperative relationship and only one participant reported a highly confrontational one. Tunisia’s largest labor union, the UGTT, was mentioned by the four participants who reported cooperative relations with labor unions (see Table 4). Figure 13 reveals that less than half of the participants reported having discussions with labor unions, and the discussions that were had were around a small number of issues (only one participant reported that discussions were around most issues). Only two participants reported the application of labor unions of the ECSOs’ recommendations, and this applied only in some cases.

64 Sabry, “Tunisia’s Green Transition”.

Almost none of the interviewees reported the presence of consistent and sustainable cooperation with labor unions, including the UGTT. The HBS interviewee characterized the organization's relation with unions as "very sporadic and [dependent] on the issue in question", referring to the discussions on the law meant to ban single-use plastic bags that witnessed frequent exchanges between HBS and the plastics producers' union. The Ifriqiya interviewee described the relationship with social actors as "neutral or minimally cooperative" where many were invited to various forums as guest speakers, yet the interviewee referred to how some actors "played a negative role on several environmental issues in the region". The Tunisie Verte interviewee also reported the support and opposition received by the network from unions at different points.

It is likely that one of the reasons behind this inconsistent relation between ECSOs and labor unions, and especially the UGTT, is the UGTT's position toward environmental issues. In Sabry, it was suggested that the UGTT adopt an environmentalist agenda that matches that of the international trade union movements and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. This indicates the presence of potentially mutual interests between the UGTT and ECSOs. Yet for the UGTT, environmental concerns, such as protecting workers from environmental hazards, rank after social and economic rights, such as job security.⁶⁵ The same was the case with the UGTT's approach toward waste removal, which was to successfully defend the interests of dump site workers and road sweepers and secure open-ended contracts for the workers, motivated by social justice concerns.⁶⁶

The closest ECSO to labor unions and more specifically the UGTT is certainly the WGED, whose members also share membership in this labor union.⁶⁷ One of the ECSOs that developed relatively strong relations with the WGED is the FTDES. The interviewee of the FTDES pointed to the collaboration between both sides on the green transition issues and their agreement on "energy democratization" and the "opposition to the privatization of the renewable energy sector". The FTDES interviewee also pointed to good relations with the Journalists' Union (though this is confined to the latter attending FTDES press conferences) and with the Municipal Workers' Union, whereby the FTDES supports the improvement of their working conditions.

There is, however, some mutual distrust between the UGTT and some environmental ECSOs, where the former prefers to collaborate with national ECSOs. Many ECSOs, on the other hand, believe that the UGTT's commitment to environmental issues was insufficient.⁶⁸ This clearly explains the deterioration of the relations between the UGTT and the only organization

whose interviewee assessed previous relations with the union and labor unions in general as "highly cooperative". According to the FES interviewee, following the war on Gaza, most of the unions "decided to suspend their activities due to the German government's role in the conflict". Such a boycott affected the organization's activities including those on the climate and where calls for projects were met by a substantial decrease in applications.

Relations with Other Domestic Social Actors

ECSOs have developed cooperative partnerships with other actors. The ATPNE interviewee pointed to the existing partnerships their organization has with research centers working on environmental issues and mentioned how the organization hosts interested researchers. The HBS interviewee has pointed to the organization's collaboration with academics, journalists, and artists. The Ifriqiya interviewee asserted the presence of good relations with university-based research institutions, especially the Faculty of Law at the University of Sfax, with which the organization organized two conferences.

Relations with International Organizations

More than half of the survey participants reported the presence of highly cooperative relations, and another participant reported only slightly cooperative relations with international organizations. Only one participant reported the presence of confrontational relations, and only a little confrontational, with international organizations (see Figure 13). This makes the relation between participants and international organizations much stronger and more cooperative in comparison with either business associations or labor unions. The international organizations with which several participants' organizations reported having cooperative relations were: the UN Development Programme (4 times, once mentioned as the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program), the EU (3 times), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2 times), International Pollutants Elimination Network (2 times), and the Institut français de Tunisie (2 times). The international organizations with which a participant reported having confrontational relations were also the EU and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit in addition to the Cooperation Italienne (see Table 4). Most of the participants reported having discussions with international organizations, even if all but one of them reported that the discussions were only on some issues. Also, more than half of the participants reported that international organizations applied ECSOs recommendations, but only on some issues (see Figure 14). Again, compared with the cases of business associations and labor unions, more survey participants reported the presence of discussions and application of recommendations as a characteristic of the relation between ECSOs and international organizations.

65 Sabry, "State-Society Relations and Industrial Sustainable Growth: The Case of Post-Revolution Tunisia."

66 Loschi, "Local Mobilisations".

67 Sabry, "Tunisia's Green Transition".

68 Sabry, "State-Society Relations".

An important aspect of the relation with foreign organizations is the funding aspect. As the ATPNE interviewee pointed out, foreign funding is higher than public funding; the latter could hardly support important projects. Another aspect of the relation between ECSOs and international organizations is the support that the latter could provide to various environmental mobilization efforts. An example in this field is the mobilization that the Tunisie Verte has led against the Italian waste case. The Tunisie Verte interviewee stressed how international efforts were complementary though secondary to internal networking as a strategy that the organization had followed in this case.

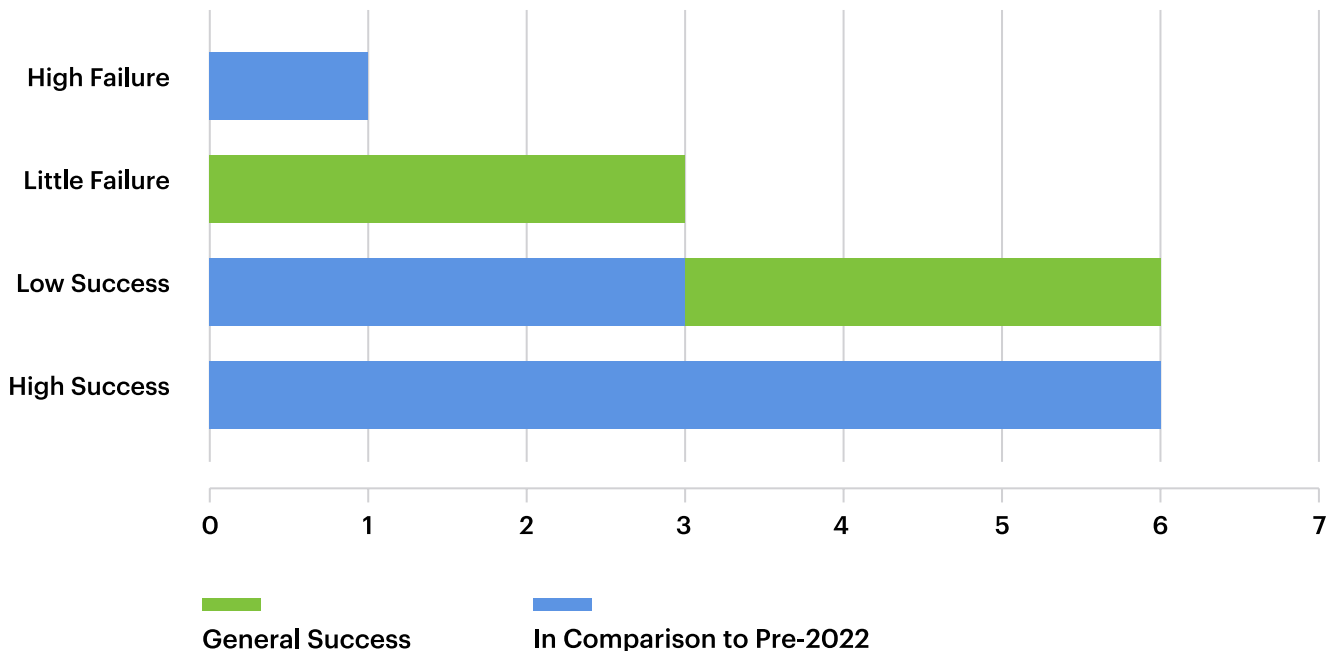
An earlier study pointed out that although international organizations that promote environmental issues do offer support to ECSOs, there are frequent complaints that this support is often insufficient.⁶⁹ Those organizations often lack the enforcement capacity needed to ensure the ongoing implementation of their recommendations. The developmental projects sponsored by these organizations typically last only a few years, and the funding they provide is either temporary or too limited in scope to effectively address the challenges at hand.⁷⁰

Assessment of ECSO Success and Failure

The assessment of success and failure is challenging due to the absence of a clear yardstick. What is being assessed here is the perception of Tunisian ECSOs in terms of meeting their own set of objectives and their assessment of other ECSOs in the field. This assessment, and especially the latter, hardly follows any universal criteria and is subjective.

As shown in Figure 15, half of the participants in the survey considered their organizations highly successful while a quarter reported low success, while only one participant reported high failure. The comparative assessment between before and after 2022 was equally divided between those reporting low success and low failure.

Figure 15: Success Assessment

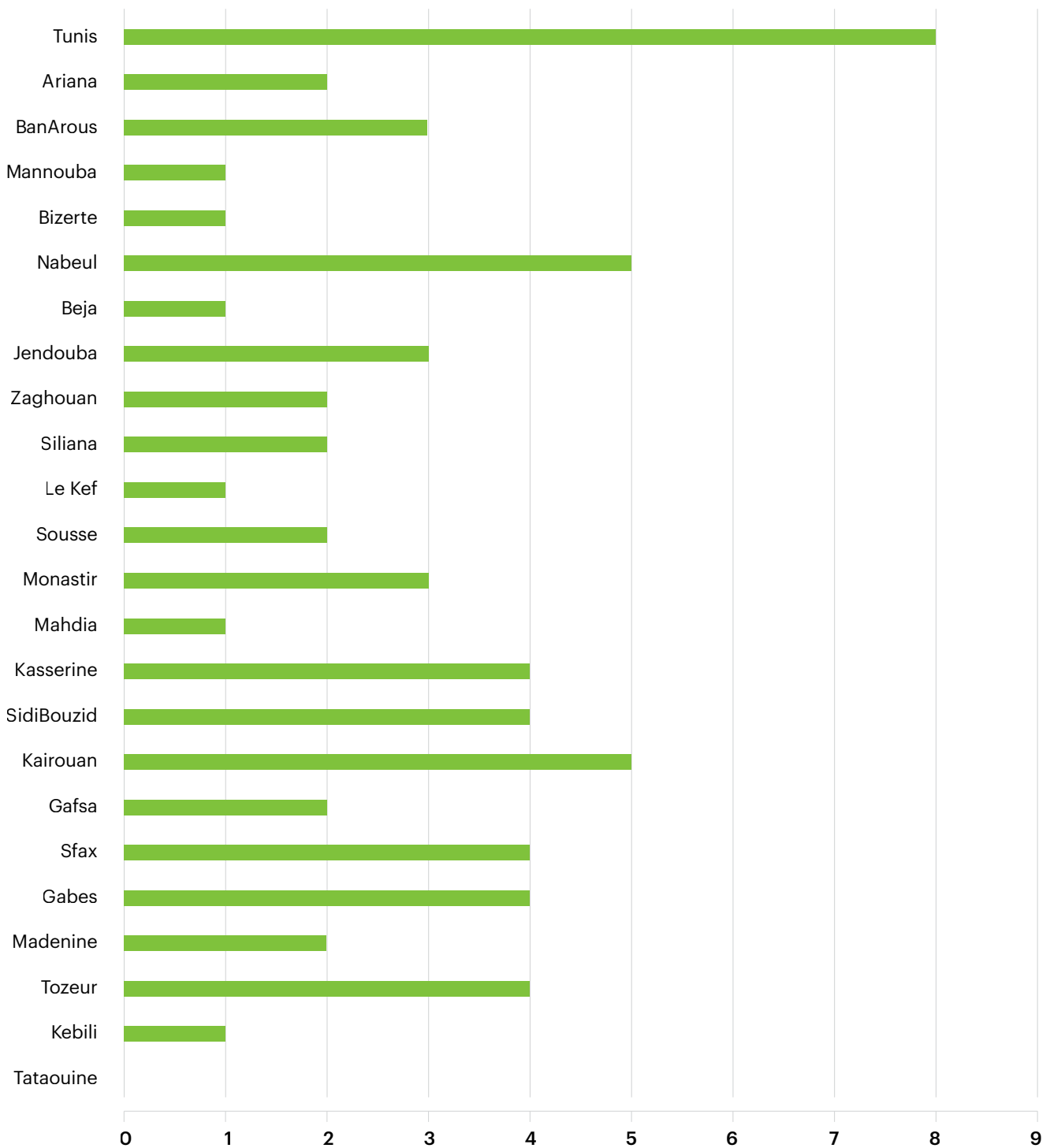


69 Sabry, "State-Society Relations"

70 This was based on an interview with a key member at the FTDES

In terms of geographical distribution, most participants reported success in Tunis, less than half in Nabeul and Kairouan, and about a third in Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, Sfax, Gabes, and Tozeur. All governorates but Tataouine were reported by at least one participant as having successful activities by their ECSOs (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Perceived success in various Governorates

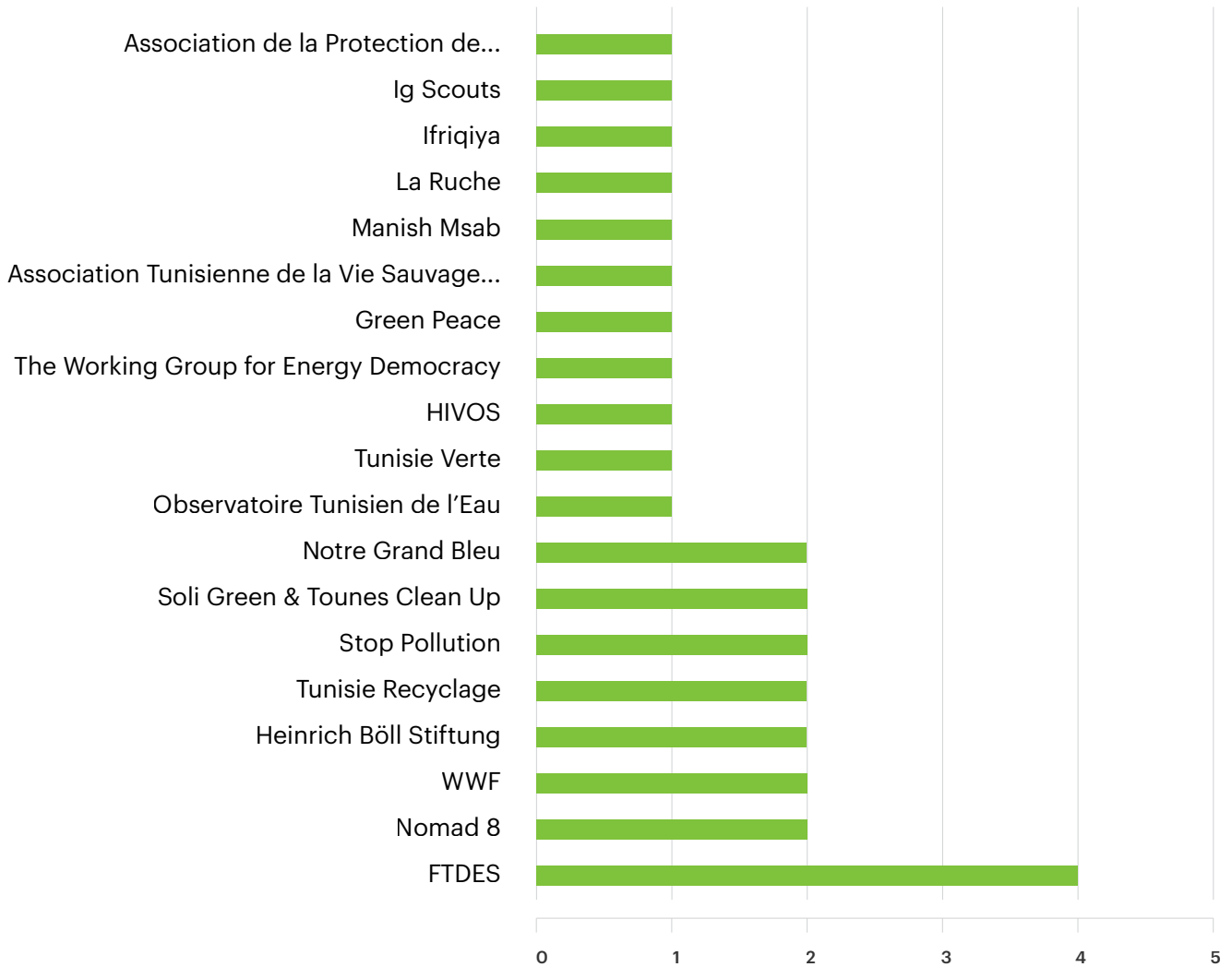


As for the most successful ECSOs, Table 5 and Figure 17 show that the FTDES was the most nominated ECSO among participants as one of the five most successful ECSOs in the country (4 votes). The organization was followed by Nomad 8, the World Wildlife Fund, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Tunisie Recyclage, Stop Pollution, SG/TCU, and Notre Grand Bleu (each with two votes).

Table 5: Voted among the five most successful ECSOs

	Voted Times	Highest Rank
FTDES	4	2
Nomad 8	2	1
World Wildlife Fund	2	1
Heinrich Böll Stiftung	2	1
Tunisie Recyclage	2	2
Stop Pollution	2	2
SG/TCU	2	2
Notre Grand Bleu	2	3
Tunisian Water Observatory	1	1
Tunisie Verte	1	1
Hivos	1	1
The Working Group for Energy Democracy	1	1
Green Peace	1	1
Association Tunisienne de la Vie Sauvage	1	3
Manish Msab	1	3
La Ruche de Tozeur	1	4
Ifriqiya	1	4
Scouts	1	4
Association de la Protection de l'Environnement à Ksibet el Mediouni	1	5

Figure 17: Voted Times



The interviewee of the most voted organization, the FTDES, mentioned some of the major successes of the organization pointing to the positive outcomes of some of the legal cases that the organization supported. A major success was the permanent closure of the El Gonna landfill in Sfax, which was accomplished in a seven-year cooperation with the Manish Msab movement (2014 to 2021). Another success on the local level was ensuring access to potable water for tens of households in rural areas of Gafsa and Kairouan. On the national level, the parliament discussed the FTDES proposals while revising the Water Charter.

Most of the interviewees were critical of the success of their organizations and unsatisfied with their performance. The reasons differed, reflecting the subjective nature of the assessment. The FTED interviewee, for instance, considered mere survival as an indicator of success, especially since the organization is based on volunteer members. Another aspect of success according to the interviewee is related to maintaining

good governance practices such as organizing events on time, ensuring the general assembly of the organization's approval before submitting reports to the government, and financial transparency. The TYI interviewee pointed to considering the numbers of event attendees, especially women and youth, as indicators of success, although the interviewee was critical of this approach as it focuses on numbers "without fully grasping the underlying significance". For the HBS interviewee, success meant meeting the set objectives and for the interviewee "ecological and climate objectives have been achieved". Flexibility was also important; even if the organization's work is excellently structured and objectives and activities are annually planned, political and economic conditions require changes and adjustments. The Tunisie Verte interviewee identified success as emerging victorious in an environmental conflict, pointing to the network's success in the Italian waste case and inducing the government to withdraw a decree that was supportive of the use of plastic.

Pointing to failures, the FTED interviewee highlighted the inability of the organization to become “one of the key players on environmental issues with national decision-making bodies”, especially in what the interviewee referred to as “a highly centralized system where everything happens in the capital”. Other shortcomings included being confined to recruiting members in only certain regions, and the inability to raise the necessary funds needed for establishing a professional, stable structure. The Ifriqiya’s interviewee considered the main shortcoming to be the unsustainability of the organization’s activities even if they achieved many successes in the environmental field (especially in advocacy, raising awareness, research, and networking). For the ATPNE interviewee, the major shortcoming faced by the organization was the rejection it faces sometimes from the people and authorities, which the interviewee attributed to the “lack of awareness of the seriousness of environmental issues and climate risks”. Finally, the FES interviewee assessed that most of the projects financed and conducted by the organization were relatively highly successful but pointed critically to the falling success rate that is due to the current political and geopolitical conditions.

Conclusion and Implications

The following is a summary of the findings from a survey and interviews conducted with 11 key ECSOs in the civil society arena in Tunisia.

- ECSOs have mostly not reduced their activities since 2022, despite the challenges posed by the new political situation.
- Environmental objectives were often mixed with and superseded by other objectives, especially social and political ones.
- Within environmental objectives, the green transition is among the most important fields of engagement, if not the most important.
- ECSOs consider the lack of environmental awareness their biggest challenge, followed by funding – although legal regulations and the current political situation were also listed among major challenges.
- Collaboration among ECSOs tended to be of a medium level, and more often concentrated in activities such as awareness campaigns, protests, and co-implementing projects. Closer collaboration is hindered by differences in political orientations, level of experience, interests, and priorities.

- The relationship between ECSOs and government institutions oscillates between cooperation and confrontation, depending on the geographical location in which ECSOs are active. Even when cooperative, the intensity of engagement tends to be low, with ECSOs being consulted and participating in shaping regulations only on some issues. The Ministry of Environment and local governments were the government institutions that ECSOs deal with the most. Generally, connecting with local officials and cooperating with them seems less problematic, though it ultimately depends on the specific persons in office and their awareness of environmental issues.
- Relationships between ECSOs and business associations are limited.
- Relationships are more common with labor unions (often with the UGTT) and mostly cooperative but also tend to be inconsistent and unsustainable, largely because the UGTT’s position toward environmental issues is often superseded by workers’ social and economic concerns.
- The relationship between ECSOs and international organizations tends to be stronger than with either labor or business, even if international organizations’ application of ECSO recommendations is partial.
- Most of the participants were satisfied with the success of their ECSOs, reporting almost no significant effects from the July 2022 political change. Success also had a geographic component, where participants cited Tunis the most when referring to the location of successful activities. This opens questions on regional disparities in terms of environmental mobilization, state-society dynamics, and government policy implementation between the urban center and rural areas. The assessment of success and failure varied widely and was subjective given that the objectives and targets of each ECSO differed.

The study reveals the need for establishing stronger relations among ECSOs and between them and other social actors, such as business and labor. Progress on the three main environmental issues highlighted in this study – industrial and service sector pollution, water usage, and the green transition – necessitates stronger collaborative relations between ECSOs and business associations, which could contribute to finding ways for using more environmentally friendly technologies and processes that would also align with both business and local community interests. Partnerships between ECSOs and business enterprises are becoming more common and beneficial for both sides. If ECSOs could realize their objective of tackling environmental hazards, the collaboration would help businesses improve brand image, media and public relations, and access to expertise,

among others.⁷¹ Guidance provided by business associations and funded by international organizations toward greener technologies and practices is specifically important for small and medium-sized enterprises that lack the needed resources and incentive to do so on their own. For these enterprises, confrontational tactics such as protest and litigation would not be effective, given their individually small impact even when they constitute the overwhelming majority of business enterprises in Tunisia. Establishing stronger collaborative relations with labor unions is equally crucial and would allow for spreading awareness on how environmental issues are as important as economic and social issues, especially regarding occupational health and safety issues and the environmental hazards on local communities hosting workers. Strengthening relations with various state entities is also important. If this study and previous works on the topic have highlighted how relations between ECSOs and officials depended on officials' awareness, an approach that targets spreading awareness and capacity building of environmental issues for state officials could prove to be fruitful and might attract foreign donors' funding.

71 Gábor Harangozó and Gyula Zilahy, "Cooperation between Business and Non-Governmental Organizations to Promote Sustainable Development," *Journal of Cleaner Production* Vol. 89, 2015, pp. 18-31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.10.092>

About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.



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