

Analysis of Youth Participation in Arab Countries¹

Case study on

Tunisia

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Prepared by:
Rym Haloues, Tunisia

Thurayya Zreik, Beirut
Nadia Nahmeh, Beirut

Reviewed by:
Mayada Kanj, Beirut
Aline Germani, Beirut

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I. Introduction

This case study is developed in the framework of the **regional analysis** on the situation of youth in selected Arab countries, with a specific **focus on youth participation** in general, and the role of youth in policy making in particular.

The findings of the regional analysis will contribute to:

1. Increased understanding among policymakers of the issues faced by youth, including young women, particularly with regards to their equal participation in economic development.
2. Strengthened capacity of policy makers to formulate cross-sectoral policies that enhance effective participation of youth in economic, social, and political life.
3. Enhanced engagement between policymakers and youth groups in jointly designing, reviewing, and/or implementing youth-based policies for inclusive and sustainable development.

The regional analysis was guided by three key questions:

1. What is the degree of Arab youth participation in decision-making processes, particularly youth development policies, and how?
2. To what extent is youth participation in decision-making processes likely to improve the quality, responsiveness, impact and viability of development policies?
3. How can youth participation in the Arab countries be enhanced, and whose responsibility is it to ensure a larger space and stronger role for youth?

Objective

The case study aims to examine the following issues:

- What is the general situation of youth in Tunisia?
- What is the situation of Tunisian youth in relation to participation in decision-making?
- What meaning do Tunisian youth give to the concepts of participation and decision-making?
- What factors encourage the implementation of effective youth participation in decision-making?
- What are the obstacles limiting the effective participation of young people in decision-making?

II. Methodology

This case study consolidates information from desk-based research as well as through qualitative participatory research conducted with young people and stakeholders in Tunisia. It consists of:

1. A **desk-based background search** relying on documentation found in the desk review search of the regional analysis and documentation from focal points in Tunisia
2. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**
 - 7 focus groups were organized for the purposes of the study and brought together young people of different age groups, ranging from 15 to 24, from both genders and different sociocultural categories.
3. **Interviews with key stakeholders:**
 - Individual interviews were conducted with six stakeholders in the field of youth, who were representatives from civil society as well as the Tunisian government.

III. Background on Youth in Tunisia

Table 1 highlights the youthful nature of the Tunisian population. Among the 11,410,000 inhabitants, young people represent 23% of the population. Data shows that higher proportion of youth reside in urban regions, compared to rural areas².

Table 1 Youth percentages in Tunisia³

% Youth (15-24)		
%	<i>Among Youth % Male</i>	<i>Among Youth % Female</i>
23.0	46	53

² World Bank. (2014) Tunisia “Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion”

³ UNDP (2016) “Arab Human Development Report”

Table 2 Youth Population Characteristics in Tunisia stratified by gender⁴

Youth unemployment rate			Youth literacy rate			Youth education level								
%	%M	% F	%	%M	%F	Elementary			Secondary			University degree		
						%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F
41.3	36.3	48.2	97.3	98.2	96.3	27.8	27.0	28.5	69.5	71.3	68.0	2.7	1.7	3.4

Table 2 shows little to no differences in the population characteristics in terms of gender, except in the case of university degrees where more females had university degrees than males.

In 2014, Tunisia was ranked 96th out of 188 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), which incorporates dimensions of health, education and living standards⁵. Tunisia's progress in each of the HDI's indicators increased its HDI value from 0.486 to 0.721, an increase of 48.4 percent or an average annual increase of about 1.17 percent (Table 3).⁶

Table 3 Tunisia's Human Development Index indicators

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP\$)	HDI value
1980	62.0	8.3	2.0	5,156	0.486
1985	65.8	9.9	2.6	5,383	0.536
1990	68.8	10.4	3.4	5,467	0.567
1995	71.5	11.6	4.1	5,894	0.607
2000	73.2	13.1	4.9	7,252	0.654
2005	74.2	14.1	5.8	8,474	0.688
2010	74.6	14.5	6.6	10,023	0.714
2011	74.6	14.6	6.7	9,719	0.715
2012	74.6	14.6	6.8	10,074	0.719
2013	74.7	14.6	6.8	10,225	0.720
2014	74.8	14.6	6.8	10,404	0.721

In 2016, Tunisia also had a Youth Development Index of 0.597, ranking it at 110th out of 183 in the world.⁷ The YDI is a composite score of 18 indicators across the five domains of Civic Participation, Education, Employment and Opportunity, Health and Well-being, and Political Participation. The YDI in Jordan is at an average range, with low civic and political participation.

⁴ UNDP (2016) "Arab Human Development Report"

⁵ UNDP- Human Development Report

⁶ UNDP- Human Development Report

⁷ Commonwealth (2016) "Youth Development Index"

Table 4 Youth Development Indices for Tunisia

YDI	Political Participation	Health and Wellbeing	Employment and opportunity	Education	Civic Participation
0.597	0.246	0.805	0.568	0.772	0.238

A 2014-2015 Gallup poll also revealed data on the Civic Engagement Indices of Arab countries. This index is calculated using more indicators than that of the YDI in Table 4, and hence will be presented separately in order to offer an idea of youth civic engagement. Table 5 presents the score as well as the indicators (helping strangers, donating money, volunteering time) stratified by gender. The index in Tunisia is very low, with some little to no remarkable differences in gender across the different components of the index.

Table 5 Civic Engagement Index for Tunisia

Civic Engagement index											
			% Youth donated money			% Youth volunteered time			% Youth helped a stranger		
Mean	Male mean	Female mean	%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F	%	%M	%F
17.7	16.7	18.7	5.3	4.7	5.9	8.3	8.5	8.1	40.5	38.0	42.7

The Tunisian Revolution and its Aftermath

In 2010, a revolution known as the “Jasmine Revolution” was triggered in Tunisia, marking the rise of young Tunisian women and men who stood at the forefront of social change⁸. With their demands for participation, transparency, and accountability, the Tunisian revolution was sparked by youth in the face of their social, economic, and political exclusion⁹. It was triggered by the anger of a 26-year-old unemployed vegetable vendor who soon came to represent the situations and daily challenges faced by most Tunisian youth¹⁰. The youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are the most affected by economic exclusion, and the need to ensure their socioeconomic integration through tailored policies and programming sparked raging protests to take it to the streets¹¹. This

⁸ World, Bank. (2014) Tunisia “Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion”

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

revolution played an important role in breaking the authoritarian rule that was in place and allowing for the birth of democracy¹².

Although the revolution was expected to bring about positive change, problems including civil unrest, high unemployment rates and challenges to ensure accountability and transparency are still on the rise in Tunisia today¹³. Tunisia has the highest rates of young men and women who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)¹⁴ and this indicator is critical for understanding the discouragement, disengagement, and the unemployment of youth¹⁵.

Several factors continue to create unrest; including the continuing increase of youth activism outside formal political institutions. The increasing need to support youth became especially urgent after the needs of youth were not met during the revolution¹⁶.

Despite their leading role in bringing change to the regime, youth of Tunisia are still excluded from decision making processes and feel left out on matters that affect them directly. This includes being excluded from opportunities to increase their economic opportunities, as well as being excluded from having civil and political freedom^{17 18}.

Youth unemployment was a major catalyst for the Tunisia revolution To this day, a small percentage of youth have access to secure jobs. Work contract and access to social protection for agriculture and informal day-labor contract are the most common form of employment. As a result, youth are left without any social protection, informal work is abundant, and a great majority of employed youth work in low-skilled jobs in low productivity sectors. Due to this difficult economic situation, youth and adolescents focus their efforts on having stability in their life rather than focusing on public affairs, which in turn decreases youth civil and political engagement¹⁹.

Another factor affecting youth unemployment is the high rates of school dropouts that appear to be strongly linked to unemployment and “not in education, employment, and training” (NEETs)²⁰. In rural areas, 50.4 percent are NEET women

¹² Ayedi, S. (2014) “Giving Young People in Tunisia a Chance.”

¹³ UNDP (2013) “Civil Society and Civic Engagement in the Arab States Region”

¹⁴ Ayedi, S. (2014) “Giving Young People in Tunisia a Chance.”

¹⁵ La Cava, Gloria (2014) “Expanding the Global Youth Agenda beyond Jobs” (World Bank)

¹⁶ Breaking barriers of youth inclusion-Tunisia. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank (2014)

¹⁷ The Unfinished Revolution Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs And Greater Wealth To All Tunisians

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ World, Bank. (2014) Tunisia “Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion”

²⁰ Ibid

while 33.4 percent are NEET men²¹. Number are also high in in urban areas, with 32.4 percent as NEET women while 20.3 percent are NEET men²².

Public schools follow theoretical approaches rather than providing actual skills needed for the labor market²³. The transition from high-school to university also showed a lack in practical skills to meet labor market demands; thus the quality and relevance of this education can be called into question²⁴.

In addition, 82.5 percent of youth in rural areas and 67.0 percent in urban areas work in jobs that do not require a secondary degree²⁵. 21.1 percent of men with higher degrees are unemployed, as well as 40.8 percent of women, which brings enormous economic costs as vast amounts of human capital are wasted. Regional disparities between governorates in the costal, interior, and southern regions impose barriers to find employment. Despite Tunisian's gender equality policies, gender gaps limit equal access to economic opportunities. Less than 18.5 percent of women in rural areas and 39.8 percent of women in urban areas have a job²⁶. A gender gap also exists between different governorates, in rural areas, only 8.3 percent of young women from the southern and 15.4 percent from interior regions are working, compared with 23.6 percent in coastal region²⁷. This is because industries provide less than one-third of youth employment in urban Tunisia and less than one-quarter in rural Tunisia. So most youth tend to work in service sector, tourism, to earn their living.

Background on Youth Policy and Participation in Tunisia

1. Formal Structures for Youth and Youth Policy

Today, Tunisia has no National Youth Policy; but in May 2016, UNESCO held a forum with the participation of experts and officials from the Ministry of Youth and Sports to highlight the need to formulate policies relevant to Tunisia's reality^{28 29}. This forum yielded recommendations on political and legal frameworks, knowledge and evaluation, and participation³⁰. In addition, media reported discussions about the formation of a National Youth Council in Tunisia that will work as a catalyst to trigger civic participation of youth with the aim to affect change in their

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Youthpolicy.org tunisia

²⁹ "اليونسكو تبحث السياسة العمومية للشباب"

³⁰ "ليونسكو تبحث السياسة العمومية للشباب"

community³¹. More than twenty young men and women were engaged in developing key elements for the project and establish a road map for future steps³².

2. Youth Civic Participation

An important characteristic of a democratic state is the right of its citizens to participate in decision-making processes³³. Civic engagement is considered an integral element for youth development as it educates young people about their rights and responsibilities and helps to develop their skills in order to better benefit their community.

After several years, Tunisia is still far from achieving the goals of the revolution, which was reflected in mainstream media reports³⁴. In fact, Tunisia still faces enormous challenges in various fields related to its political, economic, and security situation that will continue to hinder the democratic development of Tunisia unless further protests and strikes occur.

Nevertheless, few positive steps are noted in the post-revolution period, noticeably, passing the new Tunisian Constitution in January 2014, which emphasizes youth participation as a key pillar of the social, economic, and political development of the country³⁵. As a result, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partnered with civil society organizations (CSOs) to affect change in the country³⁶. Since the revolution, more CSOs have been able to register within Tunisia, and the number of organizations focusing on civic engagement has increased. However, few Tunisians are active in civil society or are engaged in any form of political participation; they believe that a generation gap exists between them and the older age group who neither represent youth interests nor are trusted by youth³⁷. In addition, there is lack of coordination between these civil organizations and public authorities, which reflects their weak influence³⁸.

6 percent of Tunisians are active members in civil society organizations, 5.5 percent are activists and leaders in political parties, 4.6 percent participate in civil society in other ways while 95.4 percent are absent from any form of engagement³⁹. Despite the fact that 9 out of 10 young Tunisians consider volunteering in CSOs to be a promising venue for youth to engage in active citizenship and promote greater social inclusion, only 1.5 % of urban youth volunteer⁴⁰. The frequently mentioned types of volunteering are in the fields of regional development, charity and poverty, religious affairs, science, and sports and leisure clubs⁴¹. However, one must take into

³¹ "في أفق تكوين مجلس وطني للشباب بتونس"

³² "في أفق تكوين مجلس وطني للشباب بتونس"

³³ UNDP – strengthening civic engagement

³⁴ "ما التغيير الذي يتطلع إليه الشباب في تونس؟"

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Parker (2013) "Tunisian Youth: Between Political Exclusion and Civic Engagement."

³⁸ "في أفق تكوين مجلس وطني للشباب بتونس" <http://www.netmedyouth.org/ar/news/fy-afq-tkwyn-mjls-wtny-llshbab-btwns>

³⁹ World, Bank. (2014) Tunisia "Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion"

⁴⁰ World, Bank. (2014) Tunisia "Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion"

⁴¹ Ibid.

account cultural barriers that hinder women from becoming part of society due to the conservative mentality that is still prevalent in Tunisia today^{42 43}.

3. Youth Political Participation

The political aspect of civic engagement is a critical indicator for inclusion of youth in politics⁴⁴. Although a new provision in the new electoral law emphasizes that political parties nominate at least one young candidate under the age of 35, there is still disconnect between the younger generation and the political system: most Tunisians don't follow political figures and lack knowledge about politics, especially in rural areas⁴⁵. In the latest election of 2011, youth showed the lowest percentage of voting compared to the overall population⁴⁶. The negative impression towards politics and politicians is attributed to the increase in terrorist attacks and political assassinations, which disheartened youth who had previously held optimistic views for their future. The rise in unemployment rates and index of living that excluded youth and constrained them to lower social class, the questionable activities of political parties that created doubts among youth, and the weak progress of the National Constituent Assembly also contributes to young people's negative views of the current political system.⁴⁷ For these reasons, youth do not see elections as a mean where they themselves can change policy, and they do not feel their voices are being heard. Young Tunisians believe that they cannot easily influence the political process, and as a result find the streets as a means to protest their frustrations. Lack of trust, transparency, and satisfaction with politicians and policies of the government are also a factor abstaining youth from engagement⁴⁸.

The fragility of the political situation in regions with low development affects the level of trust in public institutions in rural areas; only 8.8 percent of rural youth and 31.1 percent of urban youth trust the political system⁴⁹. On the other hand, the level of trust among young people increases to 80 % when it comes to the military, the local Imam and religious organizations⁵⁰.

The decrease in election participation is attributed to the lack of trust in the election process, the lack of knowledge about the political parties and a general lack of interest in politics and political parties. University also plays a vital role in raising the political awareness of youth and in promoting impactful political actions. Mainstream media reported that "Shabab Al Nahda" is the most active youth party

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ayedi, S. (2014) "Giving Young People in Tunisia a Chance." The World Bank, October 2, 2014.

⁴⁴ Progressive Politics (n.d.) "Political Participation and Civic Engagement"

⁴⁵ **Reference to be added.**

⁴⁶ UNDP (2014) "UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017"

⁴⁷ دراسة حول الشباب والاستحقاقات الانتخابية في تونس

حي التضامن مثالا (2015)

⁴⁸ World Bank. (2014) Tunisia "Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion"

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

in universities⁵¹. They held their first conference after their establishment as a result of the revolution and their second conference meant to evaluate their activities, projects, and programs^{52 53 54}. The party's major goals are: reinforcing the principal of democracy, improving the quality of services within the university and overcoming the social problems of students within each university institution"⁵⁵. However, there is a reported weak participation of youth in these parties⁵⁶.

4. Channels for Youth Participation in Tunisia

Despite their leading role in bringing change to the regime, the youth of Tunisia are still excluded from decision-making processes and feel left out on matters that affect them directly. This includes being excluded from opportunities to increase their economic opportunities, as well as having limited civil and political freedom^{57 58}.

The vulnerability of the economic situation that greatly affects youth deviates their focus from engagement towards efforts to securing stability⁵⁹. As a result, there is limited participation of youth in developing, formulating, implementing, and evaluating youth-targeted services and developmental programs. However, some implementers have helped support the transition to build a stronger foundation for demographic and economic growth in Tunisia to enhance opportunities for youth. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI),⁶⁰ as part of the US government, has supported more than 30 projects related to civil society, freedom of participation and political participation, advancing the rule of law, and increasing economic opportunity. MEPI has offered small grant programs to directly support civic roles in society. Benefited grantees, such as the Center for Arab Women Training and research (CAWTAR), work on increasing awareness about active citizenship, youth rights, and gender inequalities in civic, political, and economic obstacles. MEPI also encourages sharing ideas about social issues with national and international audiences via the internet.

One must also take into account the diversity of the situation of youth in Tunisia as well as the absence of data on the youth situation, before over-generalizing the

⁵¹ "شباب النهضة في مؤتمرهم.. تقييم ما بعد التأسيس"

<https://www.ultrasawt.com/tags/%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%87%D8%B6%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9?page=1>

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ World Bank (2014) "The Unfinished Revolution Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs And Greater Wealth To All Tunisians"

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ دراسة حول الشباب والاستحقاقات الانتخابية في تونس
حي التضامن مثالا (2015)

⁶⁰ Embassy, U. S. (2013) "Inspiring Youth"

youth situation⁶¹. That being said, the search showed that civic and political participation remains weak among Tunisian youth due to structural limitations, including regional disparities, the marginalized role of political parties and civil societies, violations of human rights, lack of communication, absence of multi-sectorial projects that benefit youth, limited involvement of youth in planning, implementing, evaluating development projects.

IV. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Stakeholder Interviews

1. Methodology

1.1 Focus Group Discussions

7 FGDs were conducted, recruiting students from schools and universities from different areas in Tunis, as well as young people involved in youth projects and organizations, from both genders, various socioeconomic statuses, and different ages.

Focus Group	Date	Description
Youth of radio web Mornaguia	03 – 03- 2017	Age: 17 to 20 Specificity: animating a radio web where young people build all the media materials wherein they treat their community issues and involve youth participation in local development. Breakdown by gender: 6 girls ; 4 boys This group contains unemployed young men Mornaguia is a rural zone.
Youth of the JCI “Les berges du lac”	04 – 03- 2017	Age : 20 to 24 Specificity: The JCI, as an NGO, Brings together young citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 who work for the well-being and development of their city. Breakdown by gender: 4 girls ; 4 boys

⁶¹ دراسة حول الشباب والاستحقاقات الانتخابية في تونس (2015) حي التضامن مثالا

Students at the Institut supérieur des sciences humaines appliquées à Zaghouan	06 – 03- 2017	Age : 18 to 20 Specificity: This FG brought together students in the sciences of education, a new branch created within the framework of the school reform. Zaghouan is a city 60 km from Tunis and the students come from different regions of Tunisia: Monastir, Sfax, Le Kef, Kairouan and Kebili Breakdown by gender: 7 girls
Youth of “I debate”	11-03 2017	Age: 19 to 23 “I debate” is a group of young people gathered around a coffee talk concept to discuss issues that directly affect young people and propose appropriate actions. Breakdown by gender: 2 girls and 4 girls.
Youth of the UGET (Student union)	08 – 03 -2017	Age: 19 to 22 Specificity: This FG brought together students engaged in the general union of Tunisian students and consider themselves as militants for students rights Breakdown by gender: 5 girls; 3 boys
Youth of Khaznadar Pilot Middle School	10 – 03- 2017	Age: 15 Specificity: This FG brought together pupils who are active members in a Civic Education and Citizenship Club Breakdown by gender: 4 girls and 4 boys

1.2 Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were held in order to reflect on the state of Tunisian youth with regards to their participation in decision-making, as well as the current and projected policies to adopt in order to improve the level of participation of young people in decision-making, including:

- President of Youth Can (civil society organization)
- Member of the Executive Board of Afek Tounes (Political party)
- PDG of the Observatoire national de la jeunesse (ONJ) – Government
- Member at the national assembly, interested in youth issues
- Program coordinator at the IADH (civil society)
- Member of CAWTAR, as part of the SAHWA project

2. Findings

During the FGDs, young people were asked about their perception of their general situation with regards to their level of participation in decision-making, and the motives and barriers encountered in the process of participation in decision-making.

2.1 Understandings of youth participation in *Tunisian youth*

In attempting to define the concept of youth participation in decision-making, young people in the FGDs showed a wide range of understanding of the concept. For one 15-year-old student, participating in decision-making means having the possibility to make a choice. On the other hand, young people are conscious of the fact that making a decision is a matter of responsibility, which necessitates assuming responsibility for the consequences of those decisions. A 19-year-old female student stated that in order to make a decision, one must be able to say yes or no when it is necessary, and most importantly, without any constraints.

A 15-year-old young male student stated that he thinks that a good decision must be taken with the consensus of all stakeholders, and should both respond to their needs and fulfill their aspirations. According to this conceptualization, it follows that decision-making is understood to be intrinsically related to the conditions of the group concerned. Thus, in order to ensure its effectiveness and its relevance, that group must be involved.

2.2. Youth participation in decision-making from the perspective of Tunisian youth

Young people attested that they find that ambiguities exist around the use of the terms “participation” and “decision-making” together. Many young people

considered that these terms represent two different concepts that correspond to different degrees of freedom to decide. For young people, the idea of participation invokes engaging in a process that is already in execution. This involves exclusion from planning, which is the highlight of decision-making. Within the same logic, a 23-year-old female student links decision-making to action. For her, a young person capable of carrying out actions is a young person capable of making decisions.

With regards to their perceptions around their own decision-making abilities, "*We accomplished the revolution but it was stolen from us*", was a sentiment echoed by many of the young people in the FGDs. Youth in Tunisia consider themselves as having lost a big opportunity to take greater control of matters that affect them directly. Moreover, the participants considered that Tunisian politicians were unable to take charge of the mass of young people during and after the revolution, and believed strongly that politicians only wished to use young people for their own political and electoral interests.

Many of the young people interviewed characterized the revolution as difficult to grasp, especially in relation to the many issues that affect them directly in its aftermath today. For youth, the revolution took place as a demand for dignity, freedom and justice. In the FGDs, the interviewed youth expressed disappointment with and disillusionment in the revolution, using statements such as "*In the end, nothing has changed! We always repeat the same practices: to use young people for political purposes and ascension of power*". The majority of young people interviewed in the FGDs specifically pointed to the difficulty in understanding how a youth-led revolution had led to the election of a 90-year-old president. This generational gap is a general source of unease among the Tunisian youth.

2.3. Youth participation in decision-making from the perspective of stakeholders:

Stakeholders showed general consensus around the existence of myriad issues that currently inhibit youth participation in decision-making. Youth leaders who were interviewed in the framework of the study acknowledged the inability of Tunisia to draw up a clear strategy on youth issues. The blame was placed on the instability within the ruling party "Nidaa Tounes," which profoundly affected the perception of the party's ability to lead the country and its young population. Moreover, the post-revolutionary transitional context has affected channels for youth participation: several youth centers have closed, leaving a large category of young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, behind.

Another obstacle mentioned was the marginalization of young people by adults. Interviews with the leaders of the political parties revealed that the political elites are aware of the current state of youth in Tunisia. The argument that continues to be advanced, however, is that "young people are still young", i.e. that young people are

not yet capable of participating in decision-making. This mentality contrasts expressions such as "young people are the future of tomorrow», «young people constitute the nursery of the country," which form the main discourse of current political circles. Despite such statements, the marginalization of young people persists within political parties, especially at the national level, where young people are absent from the higher authorities that lead the political parties and excluded from voters' lists.

2.4. Influencers of youth participation in decision-making:

2.4.1. Family:

The family was shown to have the potential to offer an ideal space for initiating decision-making within participative approaches that involve all members of the family. Simple examples from the interviews of young people reflect the implementation of this decision-making process on a narrow family scale, ranging from managing pocket money, scheduling vacations, and even addressing more important questions relating to real estate investment projects.

Four young students admitted that the political choices or engagement of their families has played a decisive role in their own decisions to be active in civil society, or in their joining of the same political party as family members.

From a gender perspective, the family can also play an important role in promoting women in decision-making. The FGDs demonstrated that families had the potential to contribute to the breaking of cultural and societal taboos related to issues of women in decision-making. Three young women in the FGDs confirmed this idea, agreeing that their success in being independent and autonomous in their decisions is due to the role of their families. They link their families' roles to education and upbringing based on respect, trust, discussion, and above all, responsibility. One young woman stated: "*In my family there is no difference between a boy and a girl!*"

2.4.2. School:

Youth in the FGDs expressed that school is problematic for them: it is not seen as a source of fulfillment for young people, but rather, as an obligation. Two 15-year-old students confess: "*Education is important but not the diploma, we see it among our friends, many are graduates and have been unemployed for a very long time*". They add: "*We are in school but we do not like to be there because we feel bombarded by knowledge that does not relate in any way to reality*". One of the students insists that: "*At the moment, the school is oppressive, and does not help the student to be creative and participative.*"

These statements show a general disillusionment and frustration with schools as educational institutions, as young students observe the mismatch of the knowledge they are taught to their own lived realities. Even more detrimental is young

students' observations that educational degrees do not seem to be helping their fellow peers with matters of employment, further contributing to the distrust in the schooling system.

In contrast to the younger population, the coordinator of the New Leaders Program at the Arab Institute of Human Rights (IADH) explained that the "New Leaders" initiative is attempting to integrate citizenship and human rights related projects within schools to motivate students and equip them with better knowledge and skills for participation: *"We deeply believe in the role of school in preparing the citizens of tomorrow, with excellent life skills. It is in this sense that the "New Leaders" program is working on the establishment of educational clubs for citizenship and human rights in schools, in partnership with the Ministry of National Education».*

2.4.3. Civic Participation:

Young people expressed during the FGD sessions that the majority of young people who reject participation within political parties have turned to civil society and voluntary work. Civil society has enabled young Tunisians to put into practice knowledge acquired during training sessions in relation to capacity building and the acquisition of soft skills and leadership. A 24-years-old member of the JCI Les Berges du Lac explained: *"I do not believe in change through politics. I am for the change that affects individuals and this is what I achieved by joining JCI: working in JCI allowed me to change in myself and everyone in my group of friends noticed this evolution. I became more serene, more focused on goals but also, I gained a lot in soft skills namely communication, debating, negotiation and teamwork».*

Another young male shares the same opinion: *"Political parties are not ready to fight for youth; all they do is mobilize them for electoral needs. On the other hand, civil society offers a better framework to accompany any young person wishing to be active and who has ideas to realize. He will find training sessions to improve his capacities and several associations with various objectives to which he can adhere, according to his own preferences."*

In Tunisia, civil society presents itself as a space alternative to the family and the school, where the young person is called upon to be participative and creative, and endowed with decision-making capacities that are perceived to be beneficial at both the individual and professional levels.

A young university lecturer says: *"I grew up in a family strongly engaged in politics but I chose to be active in civil society. I am currently the coordinator of a program carried out by the University of Denver on the construction of a resilient social contract. As part of my mission, I am collaborating with youth from the popular district "Douar Hicher" and with local authorities to produce a report based on listening, cohesion, and the sharing of the values of living together ".*

For one young male, civic engagement is an important personal issue. He is unemployed and views civic participation as a strategy of professional integration. His involvement is an opportunity for him to make use of his knowledge and skills. He says, *"My experience in civil society began when I learned that for my studies in the US I had to do associative activities, but since I have been involved in these two aspects of my life [education and civic engagement], I want to continue to conduct them in parallel"*

Other young people participate in civil society as a result of finding genuine enjoyment in and commitment to their perceived contribution to society. A young woman says: *"I like charity work because it allows me to help people in need, to change as much as possible their quality of life. I can always find a cousin, an uncle or a friend of the family who can help us in the organization of a caravan or to get an administrative authorization"*.

Some participate in civil society after following suit of their peers and social environment. One young person said, *"My friends are committed in the association, then I said to myself, why not, and I came with them"*. One young woman mirrors this type of involvement: *"I never thought of committing myself to anything. In fact, I grew up a spoiled child; it was my older sister who pushed me, after I went to the university. I followed her because I knew her and her circle of friends who are active in the JCI and it completely changed me, for the better! "*

2.4.4. Political parties and student's Unions:

The FGDs revealed that engaging in politics was perceived as something rare and even unthinkable for young people. Many said they were "apolitical" to "avoid problems," while others were committed to the "risks and perils" that accompany political participation.

Not all of the youth in the FGDs were fazed by the political system. In the case of one of the young participants, the choice to participate in politics comes from her exposure to her family and her parents' community involvement: *"I grew up very close to the political milieu. When I was little, my parents took me with them to the meetings. Now, it is by force of circumstances that I joined the same political party, like my parents. It's almost obvious and natural! "*

One 24-year-old activist in the civil society explains that the role of political parties is primarily to anchor the participation of young people in decision-making, although the opportunities currently offered to young people are currently very limited.

Although student unions are very similar to political parties in their hierarchical structures, FGDs revealed that student union activism pushes young people to form a homogeneous bloc and to act as a compact mass. One student confessed that in

union activism, voices are “mixed” and thus the lines between leaders and followers are blurred. He attributes this to the fact that student activists in these unions are often animated by the same cause.

2.5 Obstacles facing youth participation in decision-making

As revealed in the findings, several obstacles and challenges confront youth participation in decision-making in Tunisia. Those are:

2.5.1. Political obstacles:

The political obstacles were mainly explained by the governmental stakeholders, who consider the fact that young people, in general, are aware of the importance of their participation with regards to public life, and are unhappy with the lack of institutional structures to exercise their social rights as citizens.

One stakeholder (35 years-old) estimates the reasons young people fail to be attracted to political participation: *"Political commitment at the moment has little meaning because of the absence of a political project in all the current parties. There is little interest, because the way parties are structured and organized does not encourage young people. There is little participation due to the fact that the whole political class has demonstrated, since the revolution, its failure to reform, or to produce a vision for the future of the country"*.

Another stakeholder (37 years old) acknowledges the disinterest of young people in engaging in politics, but is not disheartened. *"It is necessary to compensate for the resignation of the young people,"* acknowledging the responsibility for actors in the political system to make up for their failings with regards to youth.

The latter stakeholder believes that *"The engine of Al Jomhourî [political party] is the young people. Yet, in political debates and other major events, they are hardly ever seen. It regularly offer to place young people in the spotlight but the media often refuses. They want the headlines"*. This statement refers to the assumption that young people lack credibility of, which often results in their underrepresentation in the media. This interviewee explains that young people are not always in agreement with their elders, and believes that in the end *"there is a partisan discipline"* to respect: *"We have freedom of action without being antagonistic"*.

2.5.2. Economic obstacles

The situation of young people has also led young people to be mainly concerned with unemployment, leaving them with less motivation to engage in pursuing

meaningful participation, and further marginalizing youth of lower socioeconomic status.

On the concept of economic obstacles hindering youth participation, a 24-year-old female member of the JCI Les Berges du Lac said: *“We have a big problem in recruiting young people and mobilizing them in community work. There is a big confusion in the circle of young people around the two key concepts that form the basis of voluntary work, unpaid voluntary work and the volunteering. Most associations in Tunisia are in lack of financial resources to pay young people. So, they reject joining a non-compensatory work”*.

FGDs with young people have also shown that level of education is a factor which can be an obstacle to the participation of young people in decision-making. This is reflected in the discourses of young people themselves who admit that civil society is more open to young people with a certain level of education, making it more difficult to penetrate for young people with a low level of education.

2.5.3. Social and cultural obstacles

Many social and cultural barriers were described by young people in the FGDs, who revealed several different factors that interfere with their participation in decision-making.

One main barrier is the cultural discourse that characterizes young people as immature and incapable of participating in decision-making, further discouraging, disempowering, and marginalizing youth.

A 23-year-old programme coordinator and a civil society activist adds: *“The problem of Tunisian youth is a problem of civic education: Young people do not have the spirit of voluntary work. For years, they were circumscribed in the very limited spaces of the family, the school and they were overwhelmed by football. There was no civic activity that prepared them to be citizens and to be active and participative”*.

In the family context, and especially in rural and inland areas of the country, a symbolic "segregation" based on gender continues to exist, whereby young girls encounter greater difficulties in participating in the public sphere, such as accessing youth associations or spaces.

The way cultural and social notions of gender can come into play in determining a young person's level of participation are expressed by a 19-year-old student, who says: *“I come from a rural area which is especially conservative, where the girl faces difficulties in being present in public spaces, which is thought to be very masculine. I have to fight to face hard conservative ideas. I revolt and say no to any decision of my family that aims to prevent me from being active in the civil society. I am now a*

member of the Tunisian Scouts and the Red Crescent and I am still looking for associations that could enrich my personality ".

2.5.4. Structural obstacles:

The presence of structural barriers was expressed by representatives of NGOs during stakeholder interviews. While Tunisian youth are often described in mainstream discourse as passive with regards to participation in decision-making, stakeholder interviews revealed that civil society itself suffers from certain shortcomings which can compromise its own mission⁶²: One stakeholder believes that one of these problems is that several sources of international funding are being provided to various national associations and NGOs to address various issues. As a result, studies and reports are provided to funders but are not disseminated publicly.

2.6 Success stories of the involvement of youth in decision-making:

2.6.1. Youth activists in radio-web Mornaguia

Radio Mornaguia is a radio web broadcasting from a youth center. Mornaguia is a rural area, located 30 km from Tunis. The Mornaguia youth center is considered one of the most active of its kind in Tunisia. Indeed, in parallel with the various youth clubs, it hosts a radio-web which was created within the framework of the Agora project, promoted by the National Youth Observatory.

The radio team is composed entirely of students whose age range is between 15 and 22 years. The young people perform all the tasks related to the media work, under the supervision of two facilitators. Young activists in the Mornaguia radio-web participate exclusively in local media. They aim to create direct, sustainable change in their region, which they consider to be marginalized by decision-makers. Various themes ranging from politics, culture, social and leisure are discussed with the intention to appeal to young listeners and young people as much as possible. The Radio web Mornaguia team is currently working on a project called "Mourassiloun" (Reporters), which is still trying to probe into the concerns and problems of the region⁶³.

⁶² - <https://cerclechercheursmoyenorient.wordpress.com/2013/07/24/nouvel-article-le-role-de-la-societe-civile-dans-un-etat-en-transition-cas-de-la-tunisie/>

⁶³ - The YouTube channel of Radio web Mornaguia
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpIg40BelnWXQ4BbNZrjCzQ>

Radio-web Mornaguia has managed to survive despite material and logistical difficulties related to broadcasting. Contributing to its success has been the efforts of the facilitators helping young people with radio work and community outreach. Radio Web Mornaguia is, in this sense, an example of a success story with regards to the roles played by youth as decision-makers and partners with adults, as well as beneficiaries, placing them high on Hart's participation ladder and also placing them in the position of leaders.

2.6.2. Youth activists in The Chebba Fans' Association

Chebba is a coastal town in the government of Mahdia, located 300 km from Tunis. Its local economy is based on olive trees and fishing, with a large number of its residents living as immigrants abroad. The Chebba Fans' Association is an ecological association run by youth that works towards bringing together the city's youth and promoting civic activities to preserve the city's public spaces and restructure its institutions, including its youth center, culture center, public library, and local hospital.

The youth group holds several considerable accomplishments, despite limited financial means⁶⁴. All the members of the association are implicated in planning and decision-making during full discussion sessions. Moreover, the Chebba Fans' Association is distinguished by its involvement of all members of the local society. It calls for a strong sense of belonging identity and community, disseminating a discourse based on the logic of administrative decentralization and the capacity of the community to take charge and self-develop without waiting for government initiatives. For the members of this association, every Chebbien is responsible for his city and none is sidelined in the process of its development.

V. Analysis

The analysis of the findings of the case study aims to answer the regional analysis three main research questions:

1. What is the degree of Tunisian youth participation in decision-making processes, particularly youth development policies, and how?
2. To what extent do youth perceive that participation in decision-making processes is likely to improve the quality, responsiveness, impact, and viability of development policies?
3. How can youth participation in Tunisia be enhanced, and whose responsibility is it to ensure a larger space and stronger role for youth?

⁶⁴ - <https://web.facebook.com/AFChebba/?fref=ts>

1. The Degree of Youth Participation in Decision-Making in Tunisia

The findings of the background search and FGDs with youth pointed to generally low levels of political and civic participation, and even lower rates of youth participation in decision-making. In this case the framework of Hart's Ladder of Participation and DFID's three-lens approach, which refer to youth in partnership and leadership positions and youth engaging in decision-making, are used to evaluate the degree of meaningful participation in Tunisia.

In terms of policy, Tunisia still lacks a national youth policy. As evidenced by the background search, young people were involved in the "road map" to the formation of the national youth council, but their participation remained at a consultative level. In this sense, young people have not achieved full participation in policy-making, nor have they assumed partnership or decision-making roles, keeping them in low levels in both DFID's three-lens model for youth participation in development, as well as on Hart's ladder of participation.

In practice, there were very few instances of youth taking on leadership roles, although the two success stories gleaned from the interviews and focus groups showed promising initiatives where youth were engaged as partners, decision-makers, and beneficiaries. In general, there is lack of documentation of initiatives, as was found in the background search and as was hinted by one of the stakeholder interviews.

Young people in Tunisia are generally preoccupied with their current economic situation, leading them to choose to focus on school or employment and to eschew any other kind of engagement or participation. A lack of trust in politicians, especially in rural areas, and the widespread disillusionment after the revolution has also discouraged many young people from participating in the political sphere. This distrust often takes the form of a general belief that youth are only used by politicians to gain electoral votes. Stakeholders agree that the lack of policies or structures have led to the alienation of youth from the political sphere. In turn, youth who do participate usually find their contributions marginalized. In addition, the hierarchical structure of political parties is a major obstacle to young people's participation in decision-making process.

Despite this distrust, some youth in the FGDs revealed that they continue to want to participate in political life. These young people are motivated by different reasons, such as following suit of their families. The distrust in politics has also shifted some young people towards civil society. FGDs revealed that young people found a more accommodating space for their participation in civic participation as opposed to political participation. In addition, young people viewed civic engagement as beneficial for their personal development, as well as for the development of society. As many initiatives for youth currently focus on skill-building and training, the FGDs revealed that youth saw civic participation as providing a channel for using the skills and knowledge.

The low level of civic engagement can be attributed to barriers that make it difficult for young people to afford to work as unpaid volunteers. Civic participation was revealed to be more easily accessible for those from higher socioeconomic status than lower. In addition, and from a gender perspective, women in rural areas in

particular face difficulties in participating in public spheres, as their participation is often viewed as “taboo.”

2. Youth Perceptions of the Role of Participation in Decision-Making in Development

As evidenced by the FGDs, youth are aware of the importance of youth participation in decision-making. They actively express their desire for a chance to participate in decision-making, and express that having their voices heard will be beneficial both to them personally and their place in society.

Specifically, young people expressed their belief in the importance of their participation in civil society, especially in terms of its benefits to the community. The two cases of success stories illustrated the meaningful and effective work that youth are able to produce in decision-making and partnership roles.

Unfortunately, what both the case studies and the regional analysis revealed is that there is still a great dearth in the amount of literature documenting the effects and consequences of youth participation for development. Better documentation of project outcomes is needed in order to identify best practices for youth participation in Tunisia.

3. Enhancing Youth Participation: Main Actors and Stakeholders

Young people in the focus groups contended that participation is important for social development, as well as their own personal development. The case study has shown that several spheres influence youth participation, and that the responsibility of enhancing youth participation in Tunisia is multifaceted and does not fall on one actor alone.

The results indicated that the family is an important determinant in youth participation, and can be a positive influence but can also be a very restrictive barrier. This shows in the case of young women, and especially those from rural areas, who often find their participation restricted by cultural notions prohibiting women from public spaces. Interventions on the importance of youth participation targeting families could be a first step towards enhancing youth participation. The FGDs also revealed that families, as well as peers and friends, were often encouraging factors in terms of choosing to engage in politics or in civil society. Other societal factors to be considered is the characterization of young people as inept, which holds back both the youth and the society from accepting young people in decision-making roles.

Stakeholders agreed that a large amount of responsibility lies on the Tunisian government, with one interviewee noting the importance of taking steps to gain trust. This could be a step towards allowing youth to be more prominent in government institutions and political parties that currently lack youthful attendance.

In order to continue to enhance participation, structural problems must be overcome in order to make documentation of practices available, in order to form a knowledge base of good practices that is accessible by all. In addition, positive youth-adult relationships, such as those in the successful cases, must be fostered by continuing to integrate youth into clear leadership roles, and by supporting young people's decision-making abilities.

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