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VOICES FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION TUNISIA

Factsheet

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VCA CONTEXT, IMPLEMENTATION AND GOALS

Four of the six VCA alliance members are present in **Tunisia**: Hivos, SouthSouthNorth, Akina Mama Wa Afrika and WWF. WWF-VCA interventions are carried out in two main sites, the **Kerkennah Islands** and **Beni Khedache**.



KERKENNAH ISLANDS

The Kerkennah Islands are one of the most vulnerable areas in the Mediterranean. It is made up of a group of 10 islands, 20 km off the coast of Sfax in Tunisia. The islands are low lying, at a maximum of 13 meters (43 feet) above sea level.

BENI KHEDACHE (THE OASIS)

Beni Khedache is a rural region located in the northwest of the governorate of Medenine. It covers an area of 1356 km² divided into 13 Imadas (administrative district), including 12 in rural areas and about 24 rural settlements. Beni Khedache is home to many ecosystems such mountains, plains, oases and pastoral zones.

POPULATION

Tunisia is a North African country, with a total land area of 155.360 km². It is located on the Mediterranean coast, bordering the Sahara Desert. Tunisia is one of the least populous countries in North Africa. The population density is 76 persons per km² for a current population of 11,971,6103. For which 21% are youths and 50.4% are women.

In Tunisia, women, especially rural women, are particularly vulnerable and likely to be marginalized. Women face discrimination in accessing land, financial services, social capital and technology. Although they do not own land, women are very much involved in the agriculture sector. Yet, the women working in the agricultural sector receive a daily wage of not more than 10 Tunisian Dinar (3€). They are also more likely to suffer from the adverse impacts of climate change. For example, the impact of climate change has affected the livelihoods of 20,000 women clam harvesters in the Gulf of Gabes.

Beni Khedache has approximately 26,000 inhabitants with an working population of about 4,700 people. Most of the unemployed are women, with no social support and are often deprived of their inheritance rights.

With the increasing droughts and lack of clean water, many islanders were forced to leave the Kerkennah Islands for the mainland. The islands have a permanent population of 15,500 inhabitants, 50.1% of which is female.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

Beni Khedache and Kerkennah islands have a pivotal role in Tunisia cultural and economic progress. The diverse natural environment provides a wide range of services across several sectors. The socio-economic and environmental implications of climate change in Tunisia will particularly affect water resources, the agricultural and fishing livestock, ecosystems, coastal zones, health, and tourism sectors

43% of the population in Kerkennah relies on fishing and agriculture as a source of income while in Beni Khedache 67% of the working population are involved in agriculture and tourism. The oases represent 9% of irrigated areas and 0.8% of the country's agricultural area, with 10% of the Tunisian population depending directly or indirectly on oasis agriculture. The economic impact of the oasis agriculture can be seen during the extreme heat of the summer of 2021 which negatively affected the quality of agriculture production and led to a decrease in income (up to 50%). The extreme heat has also led to a reduction of income for the tourism industry.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Tunisia is considered to be one of the countries most exposed to climate change in the Mediterranean and is experiencing adverse impacts from increased temperatures, increased aridity, reduced precipitation, and rising sea levels. This is due to the location of Tunisia, positioned between the inter-tropical regions and the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, which makes its climate particularly vulnerable.

The inhabitants of the Kerkennah Islands are on the front lines of climate change. It is expected that by 2050, sea level will rise at a rate of 75 to 135 cm per year, completely submerging the land. The population there heavily relies on the

tourism industry which is severely affected by the impacts of climate change.

The rising sea level impacts the degradation of beaches, coupled with the increase in overall temperature, this has caused a decline in revenue from seaside tourism. According to a report by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the sustainability of fishing practices unique to the island (e.g. Charfia fishing) is also threatened by sea level rise. In addition, the increasingly dry climate aggravates the existing water scarcity issues that affects soil salinity levels, and in turn has a detrimental impact to fishery resources, food security and livelihoods of the population. The ongoing drought has also caused a decline in vegetation and the desertification of bordering regions of sub-Saharan bioclimate zones.

For the Tunisian oasis zone, an average warming of 1.9°C by 2030 and 2.7°C by 2050 is predicted, with a decrease in precipitation of 9% in 2030 and 17% in 2050 and an increase in evapotranspiration of 8% in 2030 and 14% in 2050. In addition, the Oases also faces challenges relating to the overexploitation and degradation of the quality of water resource and soil salinity levels.

SCOPE OF THE VCA PROGRAM

VCA is facilitating processes to allow for local communities to actively participate in our work in ways that are inclusive and effective. For example, VCA partners have convened local climate coffee talks which culminated into national workshops with diverse community groups such as women, fisherfolk, farmers, local authorities and climate experts. In these regional dialogues and knowledge hubs, participants discussed key topics to advocate for the inclusion of climate justice within the national climate policy. Together with its local partners, WWF-NA is systematically compiling different local climate solutions that can be used as concrete policy evidence for lobbying and advocacy and to identify potential solutions to scale up.

For instance, the the local communities in Beni Khedache have valuable local knowledge on rainwater water management like jessour techniques and the construction of Majjens for rain harvesting. These local solutions have helped the community adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change like droughts and desserfication and extreme weather. It is therefore important to support and enhance the communities capacity to strengthen their resilience to the impacts of climate change. The compilation of local solutions and collective discussion amongst VCA partners will ensure that local solutions will be included in policy decision making or matched with other donors. For example, WWF NA has already had an agreement to fund nature-based solutions through a WWF France collaborative program with a supported fund from Agence Française de Développement.

TUNISIA IN 2026: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE THROUGH THE VCA PROGRAMME

By 2026, Tunisia aims to have strengthened the capacity for the local population of the Kerkennah Islands and Beni Khedache, CSOs and local entrepreneurs to effectively participate in shaping the tangibility of local solutions through an inclusive civic space that is equipped and empowered to influence decision-making.

The partners are facilitating local communities to document their knowledge systems through storytelling to amplify and connect them to key decisions making spaces, especially those related to financing. It is also envisioned that the program will strengthen the connection between local government entities and local civil society to scale the implementation concrete and local climate solutions.