

THE TUNISIA COUNTRY PROGRAMME



WHAT IS THE TUNISIA COUNTRY PROGRAMME?

The Cities Alliance Tunisia Country Programme is a partnership initiative that aims to foster strategic city planning, bring greater coherence among member and partner activities, and demonstrate the value of participatory local governance in Tunisia. It is the Cities Alliance's first Country Programme engagement in the Middle East-North Africa region.

As is the case with all Cities Alliance Country Programmes, the Tunisia partnership seeks to align urban development at all levels - national, city, and community, with an emphasis on bringing all citizens into the planning and decision-making process.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME?

Tunisia has seen significant political and social turmoil in recent years, and the Cities Alliance initiative is a clear commitment to helping bolster the democratic process and the decentralisation initiatives begun by the national government.

These initiatives include a new Constitution that fully recognises the role of local governments and the need for citizen participation. With the technical and financial support of the World Bank, a five-year, USD 630 million

Tunisia is one of the most urbanised countries in the region, with an urbanisation rate of 70 per cent. Cities account for 85 per cent of the country's GDP, with important regional disparities.

Municipal Investment Plan has recently been set up with a view to providing grants to municipalities for funding critical infrastructure projects provided they meet certain requirements.

Provide a platform for consultation

There is a lot of energy now in Tunisia behind the decentralisation process, and the government is keen to advance it. Adding to the momentum is the fact that many external donors are actively supporting participatory urban planning in country. However, there is still little communication among all of these different groups and organisations, and better coordination would increase their impact and leveraging effects.

The Country Programme is a good opportunity to build on these initiatives and bring many of the development actors working in Tunisia together through a common platform for dialogue and consultation.



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Target lagging non-coastal cities

Over the years most investment has gone to Tunisia's coastal cities, where 75 per cent of the country's urban population lives and the bulk of its industry exists. Many smaller inland cities and towns have largely been left behind, with unemployment rates far higher than those of coastal cities. The result has been large regional disparities in infrastructure, access to services, investment and job opportunities.

The Country Programme will help by building capacity within these cities to plan strategically, a key precursor for attracting investment and sparking sustainable, long-term, equitable growth. It will also open up spaces for dialogue so that city leaders and residents can work together to shape their city's future.

WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?

Several Cities Alliance members have activities underway at the national and city level to help implement the decentralisation process and support capital investment in cities, notably Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the World Bank and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

Others are also providing direct assistance to cities and civil society organisations to support local governance

As Tunisia reforms its development policies, the country can benefit considerably from Cities Alliance support. It is particularly important to clarify the issues, vision and city development strategies at the national and local level, and help municipalities develop new tools and skills for strategic and participatory urban planning and programming their investments.

Henda Gafsi, Senior Advisor, VNG International Centre for Innovative Local Governance

and involve citizens in the process, including the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Danish Cooperation; and VNG International, the international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities.

WHAT ARE THE FOCUS AREAS?

The programme is still in the early stages, and many of the specific activities have yet to be developed. It is by necessity very flexible; people at all levels are heavily involved in the decentralisation process, and things are evolving very quickly.

The Tunisia programme is being structured around three main pillars:

1. Scaling up strategic city planning

There are many different actors engaging in strategic city planning across Tunisia's 264 municipalities - external donors, city federations, local governments, communities and NGOs. The problem is that they often aren't aware of similar activities going on, and there are missed opportunities for scaling up the city planning process and learning from each other.

The Cities Alliance Country Programme will assist eight secondary cities (Beja, Gabes, Jendouba, Kairouan, Medenine, Monastir, Sidi Bouzid and Tataouine) to engage in city development strategies with the goal of strengthening and disseminating strategic urban planning in Tunisia. The National Federation of Tunisian Cities, working closely with the Ministry of Local Affairs, will provide a platform for consultation so cities can exchange views, learn from each other, and inform the national urban debate.

2. Setting up participatory approaches to city management

In the past, there was little interaction between cities, communities and the national government in terms of urban planning. Decentralisation is changing that, and the government is committed to fostering participatory city management. Local governments are

required to produce five-year municipal investment plans and provide evidence that they are building transparent, participatory mechanisms in order to receive funding for key infrastructure projects.

There is a national programme to help, but due to limited technical and financial resources this support remains in the initial phases with a focus on training staff to support local governments in building their municipal investment plans. The Country Programme will seek to bring additional resources to streamline implementation. Again, there are many different actors engaged in supporting the government in this area - including GIZ, the European Union and the World Bank - and a major component of the Country Programme is bringing them together for greater impact.

3. Informing the national urban debate

The Country Programme aims to help Tunisia prepare to deal with key issues related to cities that it will likely confront in the near future, building on the experience of national and international partners. These issues include reflection on topics such as regionalisation and the role of cities, intercity collaborative governance, gender equality in city development and city management, and the elaboration of a national urban policy.

Cities Alliance is working to develop synergies and encourage coordination among actors, for more coherent national policies.

Claire Azzabi, World Bank Tunisia Country Office

PUTTING CITIES ON THE AGENDA IN TUNISIA

The Cities Alliance has a history of supporting urban planning in Tunisia; the partnership funded a successful city development strategy in Sfax, which was used as a basis for a second strategy in Sousse carried out by MedCities.

In 2014 the Tunisian Parliament adopted a new Constitution that fully recognises the role of cities and the need for participatory local government.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) played an important role in making this happen. Shortly after the revolution which began in 2010, UCLG engaged in an advocacy campaign in Tunisia to put decentralisation on the political agenda and recognise cities as key drivers of national development.

And in May 2012, UCLG organised a national conference with the support of Cities Alliance and the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI) that was instrumental to the process that led to the drafting and adoption of the decentralisation articles within the new Constitution.



ABOUT CITIES ALLIANCE

Cities Alliance is the global partnership for poverty reduction and promoting the role of cities in sustainable development. Partnerships are critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We bring together organisations with different perspectives and expertise on city issues around common goals: well run, productive cities that provide opportunities for all residents.

Our members include multilateral development organisations, national governments, local government associations, international NGOs, private sector and foundations, and academia.

The Cities Alliance Secretariat is based in Brussels, and is hosted by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

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