

The Participation of Civil Society in Regional Development:

An Experience of action-training in Citizen Audit
(Theoretical and practical aspects)

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**Les résultats, opinions et conclusions exprimés dans ce document
sont entièrement ceux des auteurs et ne reflètent pas nécessairement
les positions d'Oxfam**

1. The Post-revolutionary Context and the Requirement of Social Accountability:

The new post-transition context offers opportunities for effective regional policy reorientation of the country towards a reduction of regional disparities, and to a participation of civil society in the decision-making process on the regional development and the local governance.

— The new 2014 Constitution introduces new roles of the state and a new territorial decentralization conceived as a positive territorial discrimination and devotes its implementation by several articles of the Constitution of 2014. Among the most important: the financial and administrative autonomy (art. 132), the election of governing bodies of local authorities (art. 133), an owned decision-making power independent from the central authority (Article 134).

— The growing role of civil society (CS) as a partner in the reconstruction of a society based on democratic and participatory governance. The action potential of SC became concrete at critical moments of transition through constructive partnership and peaceful mobilization that can be considered as a successful social accountability process. In terms of regional development, the civil society aims at mobilizing citizens to be major players in local development, particularly in the process of decision making and the establishment of trust with the institutions and public services.

— The preparation of the 2016-2020 five-year plan that engages the government on the regional and the local levels to identify the needs and priorities of their regions and to suggest development strategies and a list of projects .¹

— The decree-Law number 41 of 26 May 2011, regarding public access to administrative documents of public bodies, states (Art.3)

1 Menchour No. 19 of July 25, 2015, sent by the Head of Government to the Ministers, Secretaries of State and Governors. It should be noted that no mention is made in this text about the participation of representatives of civil society in the process of preparation and development of the Plan.

that «any person is entitled to access to administrative documents as defined in Article 2 of this Decree, both by proactive disclosure and disclosure upon request of the interested, subject to the exceptions provided in this decree « it insists on (Art 4) the regular publication of all the information on all important decisions and policies that affect the public, the procedure followed in the decision making and control process, etc., and the publication by the administration of a guide to assist users in the application procedure of administrative documents.

It is in this context and with this reference by which citizen participation is no longer informal but institutionalized in law, that the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) with the support of OXFAM intervenes to initiate a momentum according to a double regional approach: vertically between the state and civil society and the government, and horizontally between NGOs and the civil society. The new deal of decentralization requires a mode of participatory local governance both decentralized and coordinated. Furthermore, the primary objective of this program is to increase effectively the role of the SC in regions development by promoting networking and strengthening the skills of associative actors (knowledge of the socio-economic environment, the legislative framework, regional and local power structures, opportunities and forms of participation / intervention of NGOs such as citizens' audit and advocacy).



2. The projects / programs chosen by the FTDES:

The projects that formed the subject of the citizens' audit have been united by FTDES in each governorate. These projects were chosen mainly because their implementation was delayed but not exclusively because of budgetary reasons. The objective was to bring the actors of the local civil society to get involved in order to discuss the issue, to make a diagnosis, identify bottlenecks and take.

action locally, to demand better services by asking for accounts, ensure that the government is actually using the expense effectively and keeping its promises. This requires strengthening the capacity of civil society and this is what the training program initiated by FTDES and OXFAM is trying to achieve.

The sites and projects audited are:

- The Governorate of Monastir: The fight against pollution and the preservation of the environment in the Gulf of Monastir.

- The Governorate of Siliana: The eradication of substandard housing and relocation of citizens.
- The Governorate of Gafsa / Redeyef: The construction of social housing for poor families.
- The Governorate of Kasserine: The transformation of the emergency department of the Regional Hospital into a University Hospital Service.

These governorates are classified according to Regional Development Index (RDI)² as the ones that have benefited the least from the country's economic growth in terms of standards of living: health, education, employment, etc. Thus the 24 governorates are classified as the following: Monastir is ranked the 4th, Gafsa the 16th, Siliana the 20th and Kasserine the 24th.



3. The approach:

- In each governorate the FTDES identified the NGOs concerned with the type of project to be audited and those who are simply concerned with the citizen engagement, the state, and the future of the public service.
- In the initial stage, the various representatives of civil society (35 organizations in the four governorates forming a network), held

2 See document of the Ministry of Regional Development and Planning on «The Indicator of Regional Development: pointing the difficulties to guide efforts and monitor progress» (September 2012)

regular meetings and debated the role of that the State holds in regional development, the role that the local government and administration are charged with, which is ensuring the dissemination of a new culture of participation in ownership and the enforcement of the legislation in accordance with the principles of the new Constitution of 2014.

- On the project to be assessed and the possible actions to be undertaken especially the access to information.

In a second step, trainings are provided to equip the civil society actors with the adequate tools and capacity to decide and intervene.

- Several trainings were organized to provide a better understanding of regional development agencies and facilitate the involvement of associations representing citizens, and in monitoring decision making projects parallel to the collection process and contacts.³

- The program had two axes: a reflection on the social and economic situation of each governorate, and the new Five-Year Plan 2016-2020, its orientations and its possible contribution to the reality of each region. In the process of the Plan, the involvement of civil society has been of particular interest. The second axe was the knowledge of frameworks within which civil society could intervene to influence the decision-making process of regional development: the Regional Council, local councils and

3 The first training cycle concerned citizen network of:

- Gafsa: 6 and 7 October 2015 in the premises of the PASC association; 12 people (including 3 women) participated in this training distributed to the headquarters of the governorate and the other delegations, with a preponderance of the delegations of the mining area.

- Monastir 8 and 9 October 2015 in the premises of FTDES, 15 people (including 7 women) participated in the various delegations.

- Kasserine: 13 and 14 October 2015 in the premises of FTDES, 19 people participated in this training distributed to the headquarters of the governorate and the other delegations. The group is composed in a balanced way according to age and sex.

- Siliana: 15 and 16 October 2015 in the premises of FTDES. 13 people attended the training came from the headquarters of the governorate and the other delegations. The group was mostly composed of young participants but the participation of women was low.

rural councils, advisory committees of regional development. Group interviews were held with representatives of regional authorities on the procedures and the preparation of budgets in particular.

- Based on the issues identified by each regional team⁴ a second training course for the field teams took place and it was on citizen audit.

4 The citizen audit the training sessions were held between the 12 and 19 November 2015.

4. The citizen audit: a new culture to be developed:

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Why shall we do citizen audit?

- Because it is continually and increasingly thought that in a democratic country, a «good government» should involve the maximum number of citizens in the decisions making processes, give them a voice and engage them in «real public debate»
- In Tunisia, the 2011 revolution and the transition revealed that our institutions and our public services are centralized, hierarchical, that the process of decision-making is pyramidal, leaving considerable autonomy to decision makers.
- Citizens have long been treated as administered, users, taxpayers or perceived as passive and submissive consumers but rarely as responsible citizens.
- In the current context of transition towards democracy, «intermediate bodies», the components of the Civil Society and the associations representing citizens are young, inexperienced or have lost credibility among citizens (as they endorsed the previous dictatorships).
- Investing in the public space, the Tunisian citizen wants to be part and have an influence on the stakeholder decisions, claims the right to examine the management of public sectors, and requests good quality public services that contribute to the improvement of governmental accountability or «social accountability». The latter is defined as «an approach to building accountability that relies on civic engagement, and in which ordinary citizens and / or institutions of civil society participate directly or indirectly in the accountability requirement.»
- Hence, the consultation, public debate, and arbitration procedures that have developed over the last five years. The elections can also be considered as one of the mechanisms of accountability. Accordingly,

in Tunisia, the last parliamentary elections of 2014 were an inductive sanction of the social accountability process and delivery of the government during the period between the elections of 2011 and those of 2014.

- The citizen audit constitutes a part of the accountability procedures aiming at bringing the government and the local authorities to take the interests and demands of citizens into serious considerations.

4.1. What is a citizen audit? A Theoretical Framework.

- The citizen audit is a citizen approach of contestation and questioning of the injustices and inequalities (between regions, social groups, men / women, etc.) and aims at giving people the power of decision in all matters and issues concerning their daily life and their future. It provides them with the necessary means to understand, decide, find solutions and be able to act.
- The main goal of citizens' audit is to raise the awareness of the population in order to achieve democratic public choices through sharing decision-making and the benefits of development.
- It is also and simultaneously a popular awareness education approach that starts from the premise that it is not enough to address individual behaviours as the sources of problems as these problems are the result of structural factors such as inequality and injustice.
- This is a highly political approach which aims at helping the populations (often disadvantaged) acquire power over their lives through debates and awareness rising, while developing their collective and personal capacity to be in charge of their own lives. It is also quite common for a citizen audit to involve a prior empowerment of people.
- The citizen audit helps to get rid of stereotypes invented by the media and political discourses.

4.2. What a citizen audit is made of:

The citizen audit is built on two powers: the power of information and power of mobilizing civil society

Just before informing the citizens and getting them acquainted with the facts, collecting the necessary data to demonstrate the delays, failures, injustice, illegality, illegitimacy must be collected.

- The research and information analysis require technical expertise. This is usually the work of experts. It can be achieved by asking questions about the legitimacy of measures / public policies made. Did they serve the interests of the population or targeted audience? In some cases it must be able to access public accounts or agreements with financial institutions (IMF, EC, WB, etc.)
- The expert works with the organizations of civil society and the representatives of citizens. Sometimes, public service officials who are convinced of the contribution and effectiveness of democratic participation, support this assessment for the purposes of public interest.
- The citizen audit (data collection, analysis and report) must be accompanied by the dissemination of information (as arguments) and actions of change in the benefits and services. It is therefore to use the information to push the government to undertake reforms.
- Alongside advocacy, citizen audit supports, on the basis of information collected and widely disseminated the commitment of a citizen social movement.

4.3. Examples of areas of application of the citizen audit

The citizen audit was mainly applied in the economic field but has also been very useful and productive in the social and political field.

- Example: Citizens' audit of the quality of democracy in Costa Rica (98-2001) is a participatory evaluation of political life by a broad public debate

on democratic practices and especially on the functioning of democracy in the daily lives of the people.

- Conclusion of this audit: there is a lack of citizen participation in public policy and in social and political organizations.
- Questioning the utility of public service (accountability6): initiate a broad debate on the role of public service regarding liberal policies.
- Generate popular resistance to defend public services against all threats (privatization, corruption, etc.)
- Advocate for the public service to be effective and democratic (accessible to all social categories)
- Facilitate social appropriation of public service.



4.4. The tools of citizens audit

The tools of citizens' audit vary according to the context and the recipients. Citizen audit can be achieved through protesting or interactive partnership methods.

- Reports
- Street actions (against the auction of public goods, for instance)
- Leaflets
- News and press articles.
- Petitions to be signed directly or online.
- Public demonstrations (for example, the demonstration on July 2, 2015 at the Bastille against the austerity measures imposed on Greece)
- Marches (example: Global March Against Poverty)
- The Evaluation Notebook used by municipalities in many countries.
- The community cards method developed in the health centres to increase accountability based on local participation.

- Participatory budgeting.
- Etc.

Many NGOs and pressure groups have specialized in citizens audit, such as, Le Collectif pour un audit, citoyen de la dette, Attac, Alternatives économiques, etc.

4.5. The Articulation and Evaluation of Citizen Audit

The citizen evaluation is an objective and independent assessment of the activities carried out or in progress, which provides information about the degree of achievement of objectives and the contribution of all stakeholders (including citizens) in decision making and monitoring.

The general steps of the evaluation are:

- The benchmark according to which the citizen evaluation is made: The Constitution, international conventions ratified by the country, legislation, development plans, and other documents that institutionalize citizen participation by including it in the law and imposing administrative services to involve social actors within the different stages of the planning process and the implementation of public policies.
- The inventory is made on the basis of a questionnaire or a reading grid of strengths and weaknesses.
- The goals: what is intended to be accomplished through this project should be clearly identified.
- Performance indicators (quantitative and qualitative) are important for the evaluation of the objectives achievements.
- The recipients; the target groups of the project: it is about identifying their characteristics, their living conditions, their problems, the degree of satisfaction and the strategies adopted to face these problems. The degree of involvement of stakeholders (project manager, administration, politicians, experts, the public residents, NGOs, interest groups).

- The impact of the project is done by evaluating all the generated social changes on the direct or indirect beneficiaries as well as on the environment and society in general (economy, environment, and governance).
- The evaluation requires the monitoring of the important indicators developed, in order to bring corrections and guidance during the implementation process.

4.6. Guidelines for assessing the success of a project

- **Creating a balance sheet by asking questions such as:**

- _ Are the actions satisfactory (from the perspective of developers and recipients)?

- _ What were the strengths / successes?

- _ What mistakes were made?

- _ How to reduce or avoid weaknesses?

- **Assess the achievement of objectives under the criteria of relevance / effectiveness / efficiency) and check that the original objectives of the project have actually been achieved:**

- _ What objectives have been achieved and what objectives have not been achieved? Why?

- _ Compare the current situation to the past situation (before the launch of the project if possible).

- _ Draw constructive conclusions and recommendations for the future.

- **Seek external advice to the project and consider the different opinions of actors (beneficiaries, volunteers, partners and other local civil society actors and institutions). They can provide a fuller lighting and contribute to an objective assessment of a citizen project.**

4.7. Overview of information collection procedures for citizen reports / Public Institutions

- Self-assessment: This is a direct assessment of the experience of the service manager in order to objectively find out what the 'client-citizen' wishes.
- Internal listening: of the executives and the agents by / for themselves (it is little used because officials fear the excessive demands of «the base»)
- Email and phone calls scanning.
- The satisfaction survey: important but not widely used in the public sector. This is an interesting support to be developed in the citizen audit.
- The survey of expectations allows adapting the service to the needs of citizen-clients.
- The observation of practices: observation is achieved through discussions or better through video. This process is widely used in urban development projects (schools, business areas, leisure areas)
- Consultation with stakeholders: the creation of consultative

committees proved to be a useful method but these commissions often serve as alibis to endorse an already-made decision.

- The public debate: it is a democratic exercise recommended in the form of an open debate in order for major projects to discuss their opportunity, their economic and social costs, alternatives, etc. In several countries major public debates were engaged on important issues. Examples:
 - Debates on GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) (citizen panels in Switzerland in particular).
 - The debate over school which led to reforms or on the health system.

Despite the popularity of this major public debates approach it was concretely showed that the general public has been little involved. Furthermore, in order for this approach to be effective, it must be complemented by other forms of public involvement.

5.Results of citizens audits

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The work of field teams in the four governorates has made the access to information possible, it is quite usual and very common for the actors of civil society to face the problem of inaccessible information, especially when these information are on the practical aspects of the work and functioning of councils (rural, local, regional) and on very important financial information such as budgets and completed development projects in progress. The importance of knowing the history of the region, its potentials, and how they can be used for the current development.



5.1 The program of rehabilitation / reconstruction of houses destroyed by floods in Redeyef

The City of Redeyef experienced a real natural disaster in September 2009: Floods that swept away everything in their path, caused fifteen victims and destroyed many houses and thus left dozens of families homeless.

The ravaged Mining Basin city was already suffering from pollution, unemployment, the lack of infrastructure, chronic under-development. In this small town of 26,000 inhabitants, the social and economic problems have become intolerable driving citizens, men, women and youth to revolt in 2008, these revolts shook the entire Gafsa mining region and it was severely repressed. However this revolt paved the way for the 2011 Revolution.

To mitigate the loss and damages caused by the floods, public aids were granted to the victims and especially to the families who lost their homes.

The project that the FTDS volunteered to audit, it is a project that targets this category of families in Redeyef. The first step was for activists of the FTDS to call on all the associations concerned with local governance in order to build a network of partners associations 7. The diagnosis they led resulted in the following findings:

The first challenge was bringing together the associations and mobilizing them for the cause. In most associations, the activities are carried out by one person who cannot get involved in all actions. The FTDS launched a call for all associations working in the delegation of Redeyef. The number was really significant at the beginning, but there was disaffection and consequently a decrease when the fieldwork began. Among the most assiduous we noted «the Association of Housewives», «The Young Chamber of Commerce of Gafsa» and others.

From 2012 the representatives of civil society and citizens have noticed a big delay and irregularities in the implementation of the program of «Assistance to families whose homes were destroyed or damaged.»

The main points of the statement are:

- _ The list of beneficiary families was not displayed at the Delegation of Redeyef.
- _ The amounts received by the families (as indicated in the supply of construction materials) do not correspond to their socioeconomic level.

- _ The coordination was made with the traditional officials, representatives of the populations (the «omdas») who had a suspicious reputation.
- _ The project is under the monopoly of a single supplier for the city of Guéthar while several suppliers from Redeyef were closer to the citizens and could provide the same service but with fewer costs.
- _ There was a manipulation of the receipts that were sold and resold which was not the purpose of aid.
- _ Civil society representatives have not been involved in monitoring the implementation of the project.
- _ No control by the public authorities was carried.

The team which was charged with carrying an inventory and a monitoring of the program faced several challenges including the access to the necessary documents and data. In 2015, the program received a first budgetary tranche of 400 000 DT for the development of 70 homes for needy families in the neighbourhood of the barracks (Hay etthakna)

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Suggestions:

The strengths of this first experience and of the representatives of local civil society (the network of the FTDS and its partners were able to build bridges with the government and the political authorities (including the delegates and the governorate) to enforce the interests of the population. This first step must be followed by others that require either:

- _ Make a plea in order for the representatives of civil society to get involved in the distribution of the 2nd tranche of the program which has to meet the criteria of transparency and social justice.
- _ Increase the number of beneficiary families and expand the program to other neighbourhoods that have similar socioeconomic conditions.
- _ Involve the local associations which defend citizens' interests in committees of equipment, housing and land, and the Social Affairs in order to give more credibility and transparency in the management of local affairs.



5.2 . The project of fight against pollution in the Gulf of Monastir

The FTDES, has always considered the fight against the serious degradation of the natural environment as a national priority, and has continued to draw attention to abuses that have affected all environmental settings, and the lack of responsibility and environmental awareness of citizens, of public corporations and of the state towards these new environmental challenges.

A decade of civil society work, scientists and citizens have also raised the alarm over the «ecological disaster» affecting the Gulf of Monastir and citizens are mobilized to denounce the failure of public authorities to find solutions and offer real alternatives. For example, Kahena, the project that provides a solution to the pollution in the Gulf of Monastir, by proposing the separation of industrial water, wastewater and proposing the refusal of industrial water in industrial activities and in the culture of trees and timber production.

In 2012 the FTDS together with a network of partners (including the UGTT and Doustrourna) tried to take control of the situation and made a survey

of the most affected places by pollution (Frina, Ksibet El Mediouni, Khéniss, Lamta). Several field observations and interviews with various parties that were affected by the problem in 2013 resulted in a report that pulls the alarm and point to the economic, social, environmental and health consequences of the disaster.

Since the 80's many textile industries⁵, industries have been dumping chemical industrial waste (including the water used to wash the jeans) into the river Khénis.

In 1990, the ONAS built three sewage treatment plants to collect wastewater and discharged it directly without treatment into the sea. This pollution has destroyed marine life, it transformed the bay into a true «graveyard of marine biodiversity.» It also destroyed the activity of fishing which is the only resource of many families reduced to poverty (4000 fishermen make their living from the Gulf of Monastir). Smallest fishermen who fish on the coast are the most affected.

The pollution has an impact on people's health namely, causing children skin diseases as they continue to bathe because of the lack of official information about the dangers they are facing.

The Kahena project reflects the feeling of responsibility that holds FTDES for defending the right of every citizen of a healthy environment and sustainable development. The goal is to push the ONAS to use the wastewater in recycling and valuing it for reuse in agriculture for example.

The FTDSE and its partners, as representatives of civil society, organized popular mobilization and called local civil society to get involved (marches, petitions to sign, sending nearly 5,000 invitations, etc.).

5 The 37 companies operating in the region following the 1972 law on export industries.

The protest movement that has had a special significance after the 2011 revolution contributed to the recognition of citizens' representatives as partners in decision making and that any action taken by the government will be in consultation and with the agreement of associations representing the interests of citizens and organized in coalition.

The strengths of this experience:

- Teamwork helps to give more strength to the advocacy actions with the authorities to obtain more information.
- Citizens were able to express their opinion in this project.
- Teamwork encourages citizens to hold the responsible accountable and to express their opinions.

The weaknesses of this experience:

- The reactivity of local officials is insufficient.
- The duration of the audit in 2015 was too short.
- There were organizational problems that should not happen again.

Recommendations:

The creation of a new legal framework that implements all the rights enshrined in the Tunisian Constitution including the right to the environment and development. It is obvious that the civil society pushes a new development model that reconciles the constitutional gains and the economic and social choices.

Disseminate good practices like the Kahena network for instance to create additional treatment sewage stations.



5.3 The Transformation of the Emergency Department of the Regional Hospital in Kasserine into a University Hospital Service

Regional imbalances in infrastructure, equipment, personnel and financial resources of operation, has been the object of popular demands in many parts of the country and staff strikes against work and health conditions. In the governorate of Kasserine the emergency support is not up to the demand especially in the areas affected by chronic poverty. Shortages plaguing the governorate of 439,243 inhabitants make the access to healthcare inadequate and unsuited to the needs of the people especially the most disadvantaged.

In addition to this old situation, there are terrorist threats, the increasing attacks and the arrival of wounded people to the emergency department of the Kasserine Regional Hospital while its means have not experienced significant improvement.

It is against this problem and for greater justice and equity in the access to healthcare that FTDES mobilized by building a network in order to identify

the causes of the problem and delays in government commitments.

First stage of the citizens' assessment was gathering information on the situation through resource persons who are informed on the matter who can be:

- Different associations' members that make up the networkdes
- Representatives of local civil society active in FTDES, the UGTT...
- Representatives of associations in Kasserine who advocate for or are interested in the rights to healthcare: Association pour la santé génésique (Association for Reproductive Health), Association tunisienne des insuffisants rénaux (Tunisian Association of renal impairment), Amal Association, Association Tigar, Fikra Association, Association Andalus

Second Step:

Once this first circle of sensitization was done and implemented and the collection and advocacy action of the FTDES team and its partners has expanded to a second circle through contacts and information seeking from:

- Health unions.
- National Guard since the hospital receives the wounded and the martyrs of the terrorist attacks in the region. du problème des hôpitaux à Kasserine (Telvza TV, hiwar tounsi, eljanoubia..).
- The written media, journalists and the media who had already

talked about the problem of hospitals in Kasserine (Telvza TV, Hiwar tounsi, Eljanoubia ..).

- Bloggers (Jaw Gsarnia, Rabia Gharsally, Hatem Salhi)

Third Step:

After acquiring the necessary empirical data from the various actors of civil society, the evaluation team did interviews with:

- Doctors
- The administrative body (Regional Directorate of Health and hospital management)
- Some patients who know the conditions of the hospital very well.

Training sessions which were carried out by field team at the same time as this process, provided participants with tools to better collect, communicate and mobilize other local stakeholders. Other associations were involved and have organized into a network to have access to more information from citizens (meetings are organized for this purpose by engaging in early mobilization)

The result of this citizen evaluation process was:

- A better understanding by civil society of the health system in Kasserine and its ability to meet the needs of the population: «We discovered health information in Kasserine since 2012. Among others, we include: accidents, terrorist attacks, and the crisis, the difficulties of maternity service that has marked the media, the

problem of vaccination in 2015, and the problem of water pollution in the departments within the hospital in 2015... All these problems have pushed people and associations to denounce the difficulties facing the sector in the region and the urgent need for change. We can allow ourselves to say that the method of work was relevant «(testimony of a team member).

- The associations know their rights vis-à-vis regional structures very well (the regional council, local council, regional development committee) and have especially acquired concrete means to communicate, and to prepare a case and defend it.
- The network building of associations involved in the fight for health rights and mobilized to ask for a quality public service.
- The team responsible for the citizen audit considers itself entitled to propose a solution; the transformation of the emergency service into a university department that would offer better support and meet the needs of every citizen.

Strengths:

A broad mobilization of the civil society and a consensus on the issue of health rights.

It is well reflected through this testimony «Everyone agreed on the importance of changing and renovating the hospital and especially the emergency department ». Citizens, civil society, unions, doctors and even the hospital management, all support this project. Even the security forces who have always been there for us on the borders and in Kasserine Mountains appreciate our idea, especially because they are the most threatened by terrorism. «The partners involved in the evaluation suggested repeating the same citizen citizens' audit experience with

other departments of the regional hospital in Kasserine.

The experience of this citizens' audit had a demonstration effect as many local associations wanted to follow the same approach in the regional development sector by applying it to business enterprises in the region as the Société Nationale de Cellulose et de Papier (National Society of Cellulose and Paper) which is one of the major industrial centers of the country and whose economic and social importance for Kasserine (but also for the neighbouring governorates of Sidi Bouzid and Kairouan) is well established as it represents the livelihood of more than 8,000 families.

Les points faibles :

The duration of the experiment was inadequate: there was a good mobilization to raise awareness of the problem, to collect field information but the access to governmental information is not complete and the debate between associations and institutions is not enough.

Citizens' actors of civil society would have appreciated to have the time and the opportunity to conduct regular meetings in order to propose and discuss the best solutions. They wanted to gather around the same table together with all stakeholders: doctors, lawyers, civil society, hospital management, etc., in order for the decisions to be participatory and for the public authorities to start *respecting them*.

Recommandations :

The creation of a database that keeps all the information collected available.

Ensure greater transparency in the flow of information for citizens through social networks such as building awareness and the mobilization of citizens.

To better understand the needs and the satisfaction degree when it comes to healthcare by conducting action research, satisfaction surveys with citizens, qualitative and quantitative studies, and by encouraging discussion groups.



5.4 The Eradication of Substandard Housing and Relocation of Inhabitants (Makthar-Siliana)

The attention paid by the local civil society about this project highlighted that, like many other development and public projects program, it suffered from a large delay in its implementation which has resulted in serious consequences for the daily lives of many citizens .⁶

The project, subject of the citizen audit, is a project to redevelop and eradicate substandard housing and relocate the affected families (delegation Makthar). The team of FTDES and its partners (LTDH UGTT Doustourna network, association Phénix (Phoenix Association), Zama association, (association de développement du Nord (Northern Development Association) chose to mobilize in favour of this project for two reasons:

- **The realization of this project has been blocked since 2012, while the budget is available; the citizens were not informed of the reasons.**

6 In December 2015, the Head of Government announced to Ministries Council the measures in favour of the governorate of Siliana including «the construction of 5053 housing in the next five years, while solving the problems of land besides expanding urban areas on the lands surrounding the town of Siliana.»

- **Some homes were destroyed but the people have not been resettled and have been living in very difficult conditions for months.**

Eighteen families have witnessed the destruction of their homes and are completely uprooted. Some live with their neighbours, school dropouts increased, adolescents were placed in other families and young people have left the area for more industrialized regions. Interviews with the concerned citizens revealed that STEG electricity counters were removed during the process but the payments are always required and fines for unpaid bills are still being sent.

The team activities began in October 2015 to review the problem by conducting a series of individual and group interviews with local authorities either:

- **Policy Makers at the administrative and sector level (regional planning, regional development)**
- **Regional political authorities (mainly in the governorate of Siliana).**

Despite the declarations of intention and apparent good will of the public and political power, the civic team could not get to the information or explanations about the delay in the project in Makthar. True information on the project in question was obtained through personal contacts of the members of the FTDES team or its partners. They were limited to explanatory hypotheses: a lack of political will? Manipulation and corrupt practices in public deals? Land problems (difficulty of building on an agricultural land)? Etc. ?

These resistances show that the administration has not kept pace with the legislation that recognizes since 2011, the right of public access to documents held by public bodies (Decree-Law No. 2011-41 of 26 May 2011). This obstacle has not allowed the team to develop a plan of action and advocacy to advance the cause of citizens affected by administrative delays.

Strengths:

In terms of citizen participation, the actors of the local civil society and in particular the activists of the FTDES identified positive points in this first citizen evaluation experience which are:

- **They were able to establish links between each other and to be organized to work together on an urgent matter of social rights.**
- **They conducted a debate that lasted long enough to exchange experiences, views and reach consensus.**
- **They learned about the management and distribution of national and regional budget.**
- **They developed communication and negotiation skills.**
- **They were able to access the «rising» information of citizen base, and to allow people to express their demands and their (dis) satisfaction.**

Points that must be improved:

- Establishing a relation between civil society and the administration based on accountability and responsibility of citizens and their representatives.
- To have the necessary data and objective knowledge of the causes of delay in the implementation of projects to make effective advocacy.

Conclusion:

- What emerges from the diagnosis: observations, interviews (political and administrative authorities, civil society, concerned citizens), written documents, audio, photos, etc.
- Delay in completion of projects (sometimes severe consequences on citizens including women and children)
- Poor stakeholder's coordination on the same site or project.
- Involvement of the very rare or nonexistent civil society.
- Continuous practices of cronyism and corruption, lack of transparency.
- Sometimes the awareness of the need to change but the lack of resources.

6. Lessons learned from this experience

The citizen audit is, like other tools (participatory budgeting, evaluation report, etc.), a social accountability initiative that requires commitment and vigilance of the citizens and their representatives, to monitor and control public action and contribute to built a better and more efficient governance. This first experience of training-action for the citizen audit conducted by the activists of the FTDES and its network in four governorates was an opportunity for:

- The associations have learned to work in teams in order to solve problems.
- There were a learning process and accountability strategy more suited to the context.
- Creating new links between public institutions and civil society.
- Building coalitions or «fronts» for advocacy work at the local and regional level.
- The methodology of the citizen audit appeared as a resource and a useful tool to be developed.

Moreover, this initiative is a project of civil society which is quite recent in Tunisia and has not failed and aroused a strong resistance from state actors and public administration, who feel that their authority is being questioned. But the process has begun and the medium and long term can bring change. The motivation and capacity building of representatives of citizens representing the 35 associations participating in the project and their motivation is an asset to boost their environment especially as some participant) are both working in public structures (local or regional council) and active with associations.

Accordingly this first experience can have a positive impact on other regions or other projects, such as the creation of «Regional coordination

of civil society on development» or the application citizen audit to other development projects.

Recommendations:

- Encourage the participation of women who are often more aware of everyday problems. Women are underrepresented in local governance (not more than 10% in special delegations) although the participation in the closer management of towns to the citizens mainly involves women and can be a favourable space for the exercise of active citizenship and access to decision-making in community affairs.
 - Establish a regional head of the civil society and strengthen the civic engagement of citizens and their representatives.
 - Mobilize the media who do not get involved in this issue and that could support the demands of citizens.
 - Continue to hold the government accounts and public authorities concerning the application of laws (including those on access to information) and the adoption of fair and effective measures.
 - Multiply public debates, workshops and consultations, which promote partnership and interactive dialogue with civil society.
 - Build capacity and strengthen the training of local authorities to promote the understanding and the implementation and institutionalization of social accountability.
 - The FTDES is invited to continue the mobilization for a regional development based on greater economic and social justice, which gives young Tunisians wherever they are, confidence in the future.
- sont des atouts pour dynamiser leur environnement d'autant que certains participant(e)s sont à la fois dans des structures publiques (conseil municipal ou régional) et dans des associations.

