



GIWEH: SDG 6
POLICY NOTE SERIES
NO. 1 /OCT 2018

Implementing SDG6.b



The case of Tunisian Water User Associations



Global Institute for Water
Environment and Health

Leadership For Positive Change

OCTOBER 2018

ABOUT THE GIWEH SDG 6 POLICY SERIES

This policy note is the first in a series analysing the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6: ensure access to water and sanitation for all. This series was initiated by Dr. Tobias Schmitz the Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health (GIWEH) to contribute to a community of practice reviewing the relationship between the theoretical aims of the SDG framework and its practical implementation. It is our conviction that case studies help to shed light on key themes related to the monitoring of SDG 6, and help to link local practices to national, regional and global monitoring. We would like to contribute to a community of practice amongst practitioners, enabling exchange of insights to support the SDG 6 agenda. To this end we extend an open invitation to all those who see this as a useful initiative to come forward and engage, suggest topics of interest, share experiences and highlight remaining challenges as the agenda 2030 is being implemented.

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The authors would like to thank Moez Allaoui, senior legal advisor to the Société Nationale des Eaux (SONEDE) in Tunisia, and Marina Takane and Fiona Gore from the World Health Organisation / UN-GLAAS for their useful comments on earlier versions of this article

Think Global, Act (and measure) Local

In order to effectively implement the Sustainable Development Goals, it is argued here that clarity is needed not just on how they will be monitored at the global level, but also on how they will be implemented at the local level. In this policy note we focus on Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6), i.e. to “ensure access to water and sanitation for all”. This goal is at the core of sustainable development, affecting (and in turn affected by) a broad range of issues such as biodiversity, climate change, energy, food, health, energy, industry, and recreation and tourism.¹ Documenting country experiences with the implementation of SDG 6 (as well as experiences with monitoring it) can be tremendously useful in creating a community of practice amongst SDG practitioners. UN-Water has produced a dedicated website to SDG 6 monitoring as well as a series of key Monitoring Guides and technical webinars for the various targets under SDG 6.² In addition to this, identifying and documenting key themes in the implementation of these targets can contribute to a learning process amongst practitioners. In this policy note, we focus on local institutions and local communities, using the Tunisian example to demonstrate the importance of local indicators and local action to measure and achieve SDG 6.

A particularly important role from the point of view of local implementation is SDG 6, target b, which focuses on local community participation in water management. We would argue here that it is with, by and for local communities that SDG 6 is being implemented, and therefore SDG 6.b is particularly pertinent as a process through which the substantive targets of goal 6 (targets 6.1 – 6.6): water for personal and domestic use, sanitation, water quality, etc. can be achieved. Of course, participation is also a goal in itself, and it is a right which is guaranteed in many national, regional and international legal frameworks³.

SDG 6.b takes its cue from the second of four ‘Dublin principles’ on water management which were incorporated into the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and which have become cornerstones of water management since then.⁴ The second Dublin principle states that “water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels”.⁵ In comparison, target 6.b on stakeholder participation is formulated slightly differently, i.e. to “support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management”.⁶ In this latter formulation, local communities are the central focus of the target, and *planners and policy makers* at different institutional levels are *not* explicitly mentioned as they are in the second Dublin principle. By

¹See for instance UN Water (2016): Water and Sanitation Interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Geneva: UN Water

² See www.sdg6monitoring.org

³In this interpretation, participation advances the ideals of democratic participation and inclusion. See: Quick, K. and Bryson, J. (2016): Public Participation. In: Torbing, J. and Ansell, C, *Handbook in theories of governance*. Edward Elgar Press

⁴ International Conference on Water and the Environment, *The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development*(Dublin, 1992); United Nations Conference on Environment and Development "Earth Summit", *Agenda 21, Chapter 18*(Rio de Janeiro, 1992). The Dublin Statement built on principles of participation already expressed at the first world conference on water, i.e. the United Nations Water Conference that took place in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1977.

⁵Ibid.

⁶UN-Water, *Integrated Monitoring Guide for SDG 6 targets and indicators*.(Geneva, 2017).

contrast, however, it is not local communities but local planners and policy makers who are the focal point of the *indicator* of the target: the key indicator for SDG 6.b is the "proportion of local *administrative units* with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management".⁷

This raises an immediate methodological question as to how the indicator is related to the target: the assumption here seems to be that if local administrative units have established and operational procedures for participation in place, the participation of local communities will be supported and strengthened. It leaves out the option where water supply is *directly* under the control of local communities, such as in the context of Village Water Committees, (for water supply and sanitation) or Water User Associations (WUAs) for irrigation. Considering the fact that in rural areas, many village water schemes are managed by individuals from the community itself, and that across the world, irrigation management has in past decades been handed over to farmers themselves, this raises the question how the direct management of water by local water user groups is seen in the context of 'participation' under SDG 6. Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT) started in the 1970's and peaked towards the end of the 20th Century, and its key philosophies in fact included a drive for increased ownership, decision-making authority and active participation in operation and maintenance of irrigation systems by water users.⁸ This has little to do with local administrative procedures for participation: in many national water laws, the decision to issue a water use permit, or license, to a Water User Association is a national prerogative, or it may be delegated to the river basin/catchment level. Water User Associations may be federated upwards within a Catchment Management Forum. Similarly, Village Water Committees often receive bulk supplies from a national water utility. Therefore, participation and decision making may be layered in ways that are structured according to the logic of a catchment management area or a provincial / national structure rather than to that of a local administration. By focusing only on the procedures of local administrative units for the participation of local communities in water and sanitation management, there is a risk that the target indicator for SDG 6.b misses widespread and well-established participation practices.

Participation and decision making may be layered in ways that are structured according to the logic of a catchment management area or a provincial / national structure rather than to that of a local administration. By focusing only on the procedures of local administrative units for the participation of local communities in water and sanitation management, there is a risk that the target indicator for SDG 6.b misses widespread and well-established participation practices. It also leaves out the option where water supply is directly under the control of local communities. The measurement of participation should therefore be broadened to include other institutional possibilities

In the SDG 6 framework, the second part of Dublin principle 2 is not explicitly mentioned, i.e. that water management decisions "are taken at the lowest appropriate level, with full public consultation and involvement of users in the planning and implementation of water projects".⁹ Perhaps it is implied in the SDG target that water should be managed at the lowest appropriate level, but the definition

⁷ Ibid., emphasis added. In his comments on this article, the legal advisor to SONEDE, the national water utility in Tunisia, stated: "in Tunisia it would be very difficult now to make a link between the GDAs experience and the indicator (not the target itself). GDAs are supported by the central administration (Ministry) and somehow by the regional one (Governorate and the GDAs units within the regional ministry's offices (CRDA). The newly elected municipalities (June 2018) are not involved in the process." Moez Allaoui: private correspondence

⁸ See FAO, *Irrigation Management Transfer: Worldwide efforts and results* (Rome, 2007).

⁹This principle is known as the subsidiarity principle.

does not explicitly mention it. SDG 6.b defines local administrative units as "subdistricts, municipalities, communes or other local community level units covering both urban and rural areas to be defined by the government".¹⁰ In this formulation the emphasis appears to lie on subnational units of government such as districts and municipalities, rather than on legally registered Water User Associations.¹¹ On the Dublin principles, it is important to note also the word 'appropriate'. This suggests that to be effective, participation should take place at the (lowest) appropriate level: clearly national policy dialogues are best held at national level – although one could hold regional consultations – basin planning discussions should take place in catchment forums, municipal infrastructure planning discussions should take place at municipal level, and (rural) water delivery issues should be discussed within a Water User Association. Of particular importance here is the fact that SDG 6 reporting involves a national focal point who is expected to collect the relevant data from various ministries and other government sources to respond to UN-Water questions on progress. It is not standard practice for umbrella bodies in civil society to provide counterfactual evidence or to be included in deliberations on SDG 6 reporting.

Secondly, to be effective in the context of SDG6, participation should relate to the *substantive* indicators of SDG 6.1-6.6, i.e. they should yield outcomes in terms of accessibility, affordability, cultural acceptability, water quality, water demand management, IWRM and protection and restoration of water related ecosystems. They are not required here as a procedural right. This is because 6 b refers to the Means of Implementation (MoI) of SDG 6: it is a means to an end. Therefore, participation should be judged in terms of whether technology choices and management have led to the desired outcomes from the point of view of users.

The integrated monitoring guide for SDG 6 produced by UN-Water indicates that target 6.b has a broad focus and supports the implementation of *all* SDG 6 targets (targets 6.1–6.6 and 6.a) by promoting the meaningful involvement of local communities. In many countries the national water law enables the issuing of licenses to Village Water Committees or to Water User Associations. These are, often by definition in law, the 'lowest appropriate level' of decision-making in water management. In any one local district, county or municipality, there may be quite many such local water management institutions providing services to users.

This raises the following question: if water user associations are user-managed entities and therefore in many instances the lowest appropriate level of decision-making, how will the various targets of SDG6 be integrated into the management principles of these organisations? If these targets are to be achieved at the national level, it is self-evident that there will be a local contribution to their achievement. In other words, for SDG 6 to be implemented in an integrated fashion, the performance indicators of local water user associations need to incorporate the full range of SDG 6 indicators. Water User Associations are the lowest level at which SDG 6 can be implemented and monitored.

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¹⁰UN Water (2017): Methodological note: Indicators and proposed monitoring framework for Means of Implementation (MoI) targets for Sustainable Development Goal 6. Geneva: UN Water.

¹¹ According to the WHO, the intention in this definition was to provide flexibility on the definition of 'local administrative units', and the intention was not necessarily to exclude Water User Associations or equivalent. Be that as it may, clarity is needed on whether these organisations are 'government' administrations or civil society organisations. The definition currently seems to emphasise government entities. For clarity, this should be defined more precisely.

A key example from Tunisia

The case of Tunisian Water User Associations (WUAs) is a case in point. After a period of centralised control of water management, Tunisia began in 1987 both to disengage the state from local community management and to increase the role of local users in water management in rural areas.¹² In 1990, local state institutions were created to decentralise support services to what were at that time called Associations d'Intérêt Collectif (AIC).^{13/14} From 1995, irrigation management transfer began in earnest, transferring irrigated areas and irrigation infrastructure into the hands of users. From 1999 onwards, the regulatory framework obliged AIC's to be transformed into 'Agricultural Development Groups', or *Groupements de Développement Agricole* (GDAs). Law no. 99-43 of 1999 provided for the creation of water management organisations in civil society in response to a request from the majority of local landowners, farmers and fisherfolk. It was also intended to diversify their financial resources to guarantee their long-term sustainability. These organisations were to have tasks serving the needs of users as well as the needs of the sector. However, the state imposed certain objectives on these organisations such as the protection and rational use of natural resources, the supply of equipment and the building of local agricultural production capacity. The state also imposed a format for the statutes of the institution.¹⁵ Since that time, the legal format of the GDA remained the institutional vehicle for user managed water in rural areas, even if this institution in many cases did not manage water for irrigation but was increasingly established to manage water for domestic purposes.¹⁶ It should be emphasised here that the regulation of participatory water management is embedded in *national* law and not in local government regulations or procedures as provided as an option in the SDG 6 framework.

Together, there is currently a total of 2736 WUAs in Tunisia. According to law, rural water users in Tunisia may establish a GDA to provide domestic/household water services, or to provide irrigation services, or both.¹⁷ Currently 1369 GDA have been established to provide water for household purposes, 1232 GDA have been established to provide irrigation services, and 135 GDA provide both kinds of services. The GDA which provide potable water provide services to some 1,6 million people, and the GDA focusing on irrigation service farmers on a total of some 200 000 ha of irrigation land. Taken together, these GDA account for some 48%¹⁸ of water utilisation in the country, and any effective implementation of SDG 6 targets in the country therefore depends on their effective management. The GDA is an example of water management at the lowest appropriate level and offers insight both into the effective implementation of SDG 6.b and the integration of SDG6 targets at the local level. With these goals in mind, we examine on the one hand the established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management in Tunisia, and the integration of SDG6 targets into the performance criteria of the GDAs.

Tunisia is considered to be one of the most arid countries in the Mediterranean, suffering from acute water scarcity. The annual water supply available in the country represents 4,864 million m³ per year

¹²IMWI (2017): *Groundwater Governance in Tunisia. A policy White Paper*, pg. 16.

¹³ This is not new: before this time, there were other types of farmers associations involved in water management at the local level in the oases and other areas and this since the 19th century.

¹⁴I.e. Associations for Collective Interest

¹⁵Government of Tunisia (1999) : Loi no. 99-43 du 10 mai 1999, relative aux groupements de développement dans le secteur de l'agriculture et de la pêche.

¹⁶Mouri, H. and Marlet, S (2006) : *De l'association d'intérêt collectif au groupement de développement agricole : le changement institutionnel et son impact sur le fonctionnement des périmètres publics irrigués Tunisiens*. Montpellier, France: Paper for Wademed Conference

¹⁷Thus, a GDA does not need to be agricultural, despite its title.

¹⁸ GDA occupy some 200 000 ha of the 416 000 ha irrigated in the country. The agricultural sector accounts for 80% of total water use. See BPEH (2015) Rapport Nationale du Secteur de L'Eau.

and is less than 500 m³ per inhabitant per year (representing ‘absolute’ water scarcity).¹⁹ With the national population expected to grow to approximately 13 million in 2030, the availability is expected to drop to 360m³ by that year despite the fact that water utilization has currently grown to 95% of available supply.²⁰

To optimise water utilisation, Tunisia embarked on a strategy of Integrated Water Resources Management since 1990, and within this strategy, Water Demand Management (WDM) has been its main strategic objective.²¹ The government hopes to reduce agricultural water demand to 73,5% of the total by 2030, enabling the percentage of water utilised for drinking water to increase from 13,4% currently to 17,7% in 2030. In turn, participatory management of hydraulic infrastructure and the involvement of citizens in national efforts to conserve water is a key element of WDM. In a context in which the network losses in the transport and distribution of irrigation water are of the order of 35%, the rehabilitation and modernisation of irrigation systems has become a national priority.²² Between May 2013 and July 2017, the government implemented a programme to revitalise the GDAs as part of the National strategy for sustainable management and utilisation of water systems (the NSP).²³ The goal of this programme, known as Mission 2 of the National Sustainability Strategy, was to professionalise 193 of the 2736 GDAs in Tunisia. The reason for this is that many GDA suffer from internal problems of various kinds inherited from the period before the Tunisian revolution of 2011: indebtedness to bulk water and electricity providers, outdated and malfunctioning supply infrastructure, insufficient technical, financial and administrative capacity, and unclear or disturbed institutional relations between water providers and water users. A survey from 2006 revealed that only 17,25% of GDA providing potable water and 36,60% of GDA providing irrigation water could be judged to be performing ‘satisfactorily’.²⁴ All of these themes are central to participation and to the enablement of user-managed water services. For instance, for a GDA to receive investments in infrastructure upgrades, capacity building or other forms of support, a management contract is entered into with the Regional Commission for Agricultural Development (CRDA), a devolved extension service of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries at the level of a governorate.²⁵ Thus, participation in (improved) water management is conditional on a range of technical, financial, administrative and social conditions that are put in place through such a contract at the interface between a GDA on the one hand and government on the other.²⁶ At another level, there are many irregularities in relations between GDA and their beneficiaries. For instance, many GDA exist without having a GDA Board that has been elected by users, and GDA do not always have a clear contract with

¹⁹ This is the highest level of water scarcity on a five-point scale developed by the Swedish scientist Malin Falkenmark.

²⁰M. Louati and J. Bucknall, ‘Tunisia’s experience in water resource mobilization and management’ *Water in the Arab World*(2009), page 157. The mobilisation of this level of water resources was achieved through two ten-year programmes, 1990-2000 and 2001-2010.

²¹Tunisian Republic, Bureau de Planification et des Equilibres Hydrauliques, *Rapport National du Secteur de l’Eau. Année 2015* (Tunis, 2016). Water quality is also a key concern, as more than 53% of water resources have a salinity higher than 1,5 g/l

²² Ibid.

²³Mise en œuvre de la stratégie nationale de pérennisation au niveau des projets d’AEP et d’irrigation de petite et moyenne hydraulique

²⁴Ministère de l’Agriculture, des Ressources Hydrauliques et de la Pêche (2014) : *Rapport National du Secteur de l’Eau. Année 2014* (Tunis, 2015).

²⁵ Although the title suggests that this is a commission, it is in fact an office with delegated tasks.

²⁶In many cases a donor may also be involved in this relation, investing in upgrades and capacity building under certain conditions

users which defines the supply area and mutual obligations of service provider and beneficiary.²⁷ These are issues of participation on the interface between service provider and user.

The Integrated Monitoring Initiative and the SDG 6b framework for monitoring stakeholder participation

For each target under SDG 6, UN-Water has produced guidance notes and summary documents on indicators and measurement for national governments. Whereas the Millennium Development Goals only embraced drinking water and sanitation, the SDG 6 framework has a considerably more ambitious scope, including aspects such as water quality, water demand, integrated water resources management and the protection and restoration of water related ecosystems. This involved an expansion of the group of UN bodies with water related mandates from just UNICEF and the WHO to include UNECE, UNEP, FAO, UNESCO, UN Habitat and the WMO. Initially known as the Global Extended Monitoring Initiative (GEMI), this initiative is now known as the Integrated Monitoring Initiative (IMI). Amongst other things, the IMI has developed an integrated monitoring guide for SDG 6.²⁸ Through the UN-Water GLAAS initiative, WHO has led the development of a (draft) guide specifically for measuring and monitoring ‘Means of Implementation’ targets 6.a and 6. b, in collaboration with co-custodians OECD and UNEP.^{29/30} The level of participation in water and sanitation management in Tunisia can therefore be assessed by applying this framework. Annex 1 of the UN Water guidance note on SDG 6 b contains the following central question from the UN-GLAAS survey used in the monitoring of target 6.b:

“Are there clearly defined procedures in laws or policies for participation by service users (e.g. households) and communities in planning programmes and what is the level of participation?”³¹

Two questions form this definition, a binary one on participation procedures and an analytical one on the level of participation. ‘Participation’ is defined in this instance as “a mechanism by which individuals and communities can meaningfully contribute to decisions and directions about WASH and water resources.” Note that in this question, the reference to local procedures is absent and it is ambiguous whether the methodology is referring to national or local laws or policies. However, the formulation of the indicator reveals that it refers to *local administrative units*.³²

Levels of participation are defined as follows:

Low: information is provided without the possibility of influencing.

Moderate: consultation (information is provided and open to comments and suggestions that may be taken into consideration).

²⁷ In the case of GDAs focusing on WASH services, this type of GDAs are strongly supported by the Ministry, the water systems are designed, financed and realized by it. The Ministry provides administrative support and capacity building programs as well and realize the heavy maintenance works. There is therefore a strong dependency relationship and GDAs cannot (yet) be seen as independent entities in civil society.

²⁸ The “Integrated Monitoring Guide for SDG 6” lays out the measurements and methodology for the targets and indicators included in the framework proposed by an IAEG-SDGs report (report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators).

²⁹ http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/investments/glaas/en/

³⁰ UN-Water (2016): *Methodological note: Indicators and proposed monitoring framework for Means of Implementation (Mol) targets for Sustainable Development Goal 6* (Geneva, 2016).

³¹ *Ibid.*, page 17.

³² Since the UN-GLAAS survey response is put together at the national level, for many countries this question would be applied at the national level, i.e. national policies and plans.

High: joint decision-making.

This framework can be used to measure two instances of participation in GDAs: namely (i). the existence of (local?) laws or policies describing the amount of control that an individual water user can exert over the procedures immediately influencing his or her water use, such as water prices and the election of the GDA board; and (ii). the amount of influence that the GDA community can exert over decision-making in higher levels of the decision-making hierarchy. The former could be described as ‘horizontal participation’, and the latter as ‘vertical participation’. These instances fit 6.b as well as the second Dublin principle: the establishment of participation procedures for communities, and participatory approach at all levels.

To analyse the extent to which SDG 6.b is included in Tunisian policies for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management in Tunisia and how they are integrated into the performance criteria of the GDAs, the UN-Water framework definition of participation operationalising the SDG is compared to the ideas in the annual national water sector reports of 2015, and the so-called ‘Mission 2’ report which stipulates performance criteria for the GDAs.

SDG 6.b in the National water sector and the Mission 2 of the National Sustainability Strategy

The Tunisian annual national water sector reports highlight the central position of participation in water management: not only is it an end in itself to empower water users, but the government actively seeks participation as a means to establish good governance and sustainable water management.³³ The main institutional vehicle for this transfer is, as mentioned, the GDA, which is intended to represent individual water users democratically. Whereas the previously existing irrigation bodies (Associations d’Intérêt Collectif or AIC) still featured strong government influence in water management issues, the GDA were in theory intended to be managed democratically. Certainly, the current government intends this to take place. To what extent do current GDA policies and practice correspond with the SDG 6.b targets as explained by the UN-Water methodological note?

In 2015, the annual national water sector report claims that “the water system is managed in a participatory manner [by the GDA]” implying that the GDA system itself is participatory in nature.³⁴ However, in practice, current GDA management is riddled with problems of inclusivity and representation, which can include undemocratic board member appointment, communication shortcomings between levels of the management hierarchy, irregular reporting to users on operation and maintenance practices, and even lack of clarity on the supply area and the delineation of the users served by the GDA³⁵. In addition, many GDA have low levels of technical financial and administrative capacity, a backlog on maintenance, high levels of system losses and low rates of cost recovery leading to financial problems. As these issues severely limit efficiency, and lack of participation has been recognised by government officials and scholars alike to be a major source of popular discontent and even mistrust of the GDA system, the government has initiated a range of projects which aim to rectify

³³See Tunisian Republic, Bureau de Planification et des Equilibres Hydrauliques, *Rapport national du secteur de l'eau : Année 2014* (Tunis, 2015), page 18. The Tunisian constitution also mentions in article 44 that water resources conservation is the duty of both the state and civil society.

³⁴Tunisian Republic, BPEH, *Rapport national du secteur de l'eau : Année 2014*. Op. Cit., pg. 3.

³⁵ In addition, GDA have limited female representation and limited youth representation

these and other shortcomings.³⁶ In the first phase, from 2013 to 2016, technical assistance was provided to uplift the management and ensure the institutional sustainability of GDAs - 165 GDAs providing drinking water services and 58 GDA providing irrigation services. From 2016 onwards, GDA have been prepared for access to a good governance fund (dons de bonne gestion) which is intended to reward improvements in management. Key indicators being monitored at national level include the number of GDA having an operational board elected by users, the number of GDA having clear management contracts defining the area of operation and the clients, and GDA which have a form of financial reporting.³⁷ These indicators are key to the national framework used to evaluate participation *within* the GDAs.

Concerning participation - in the 2015 National water report - there is extensive mention of vertical participation. More than 6 water-related meetings were held in which national strategies were discussed to which water users were invited to exchange their views and participate. According to this report, the annual meeting for technical and financial partners in the water sector (PTF) included GDA members and UTAP representatives to discuss strategy.³⁸ Two meetings were held for the National Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of the GDA Promotion Strategy in 2015. In discussing the water strategy for 2050, water users were consulted extensively because: "The process of elaboration of the chosen "Long-term strategy" is a participative process in order to guarantee the adherence to and the appropriation of the strategy by all key actors involved."³⁹ Finally, the government installed the Water Forum, a platform for dialogue and consultation between the various stakeholders who use or manage the water resource in a given region in order to discuss and implement a common action plan for the efficient and sustainable management of available water resources.⁴⁰

Following the UN-Water definition, these efforts put the participation level of Tunisia's national decision-making somewhere between the highest and second of the three echelons: between consultation and joint decision-making. The final report of Mission 2 further clarifies this position. It describes the efforts made to revitalise the GDAs, not just by enforcing participation standards, but through other improvements such as technical and financial aid. Part of this process was the creation of a list of indicators of good governance. These indicators can be compared to the UN-Water structure to measure 6.b target appreciation. In addition, the indicator list was constructed as part of the GDA amelioration process: the indicators followed from the input of the water users who were asked to name the problems they were experiencing with the functioning of their Group. Not only the outcome (i.e. the list) but also the process in which it was constructed is an indicator for SGD 6.b target fulfilment.

Mission 2's final report describes at length that the process which preceded the implementation of the plan included a great deal of participation by the key figures of GDA management. On numerous occasions these people were asked to input their views of the project and the way it was being implemented. This led to an accurate view of the most prevailing issues based on a participatory

³⁶ See for example P. Minoia and F. Guglielmi, *Social conflict in water resource management and its environmental impacts in south-eastern Tunisia* (2009), page 258; or W. Ghazouani et al., 'Farmers' practices and community management of irrigation: Why do they not match in Fatnassa oasis?' in *Irrigation and drainage*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2012), 39-51, page 39.

³⁷ Bureau de Planification et des Equilibres Hydrauliques, *Rapport national du secteur de l'eau année 2016* (Tunis, 2017), page 88. These are indicators used to monitor what, in Tunisia, would be considered 'operational' mechanisms for participation at GDA level

³⁸ Bureau de Planification et des Equilibres Hydrauliques, *Rapport national du secteur de l'eau année 2015* (Tunis, 2016), page 20.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, page 21.

method. An example of this process is Activity a.3 of the pilot phase, in which 60 local GDA members were asked to identify prevailing problems and possible solutions in their GDA, and in which their engagement in the amelioration process was assured.⁴¹ Another is Activity b.4 of phase B in which CRDA members and GDA representatives exchanged ideas and planned the practical aspects of the project implementation.⁴²

A limiting factor to the ideal of joint-decision making (level 3) in the proposed methodology rather than just consultation (level 2) is that the grand strategy in formulating the goals of this project was done before the activities listed above. Before a.3 and b.4, there were other meetings in which policy was formed without, while the first GDA-representing key persons were introduced after those plans were formed. The Dublin principle of participation at all levels was therefore not fully attained. Some might argue that the CRDA or ministry representatives are elected to represent the water users, but the aim of SDG 6.b is to include a more direct part in policy planning. The question in the UN-GLAAS survey explicitly refers to the role of service users in *planning programmes*.⁴³

One of the main problems following from the planning phase was the undemocratic process of ‘electing’ board members. The final report shows that only 54,2% of GDA boards were elected rather than appointed in 2014 (now above 73%). In terms of vertical participation, this is a crucial component in implementing 6.b, as Mission 2 works with key persons, who are usually selected from board positions. To include the lowest echelons in the management hierarchy, solving this issue should be of primary concern.

The list of indicators corresponds largely with the UN-Water framework. Relevant sections include the percentage of GDAs which: have elected board members rather than appointed ones; have not held general assemblies for more than 3 years; or hold board meetings. Following from the data in the list, these numbers have improved significantly, indicating the priority that these points must have had in the process (see table 1). This view is supported by the accompanying text, which describes the efforts the organisers went through in Mission 2 to effectively improve GDAs trailing in these categories.⁴⁴

Indicators for drinking water GDAs	End of 2014	June 2016	Evolution
Legal status of the board (% of elected GDA board members)	56.1%	72.9%	+16.8%
% of GDAs more than 3 years behind in organising general assemblies	76.7%	29.5%	-47.2%
% of GDAs which organise board meetings	23.4%	55.1%	+31.8%

It is clear that there are policies in place to ascertain the participation of water users through the general assemblies (the aim to increase the number of annual meetings) and through the democratisation of board membership and subsequent representation of members to the higher echelons. However, in a list of over 40 indicators, only three have direct impact on participation. Obviously, increasing participation levels is not the only goal of Mission 2 but with the frequency of it being mentioned in the national water report, participation seems to be underrepresented in the indicator list, especially in terms of the solidity of the GDA’s legal position. Many of the government’s

⁴¹Tunisianrepublic, Direction Générale du Génie Rural et de l’Exploitation des Eaux, *Stratégie nationale pour la pérennisation de la gestion et de l’exploitation des systèmes d’eau* (Tunis, 2017), page 18.

⁴²Ibid, page 33.

⁴³ The draft Water Act of 2016 states that “Water Councils” should be established in every governorate. Normally, part of their members should be elected local and regional officials

⁴⁴Ibid, page 8.

aims are directly or indirectly impacted by the level of participation, so following more closely to SDG 6.b targets will benefit the Government's goals as well as those of the SDG community.

Finally, it should be noted that the criteria used to judge the performance of GDAs in Tunisia do on the whole not correspond to the substantive targets of SDG 6. The focus is primarily on governance indicators, looking at operational procedures, legal and administrative processes, financial accounting and reporting, etc. Notable exceptions are financial issues (which feature as an accessibility criterion) and system losses (which can be used as an indicator for SDG 6.4, water use efficiency).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ BPEH (2017): Stratégie Nationale Pour la Pérennisation de la Gestion et de l'Exploitation des systèmes d'Eau. Tunis : BPEH (Mission 2).

Conclusions

We have argued that in order to effectively implement the Sustainable Development Goals, clarity is needed not just on how they will be monitored at the global level, but also on how they will be implemented at the local level. In the ideal case, there is an iterative relationship between local implementation practises and national monitoring such that local realities are captured as well as possible at the national level. We hope to have shown that the case of local water user associations can be instructive in shedding light on the dynamics of participation in water management. At one level, participation is a process through which the substantive targets of goal 6 can be achieved. At another level, participation is also a goal in itself that is separate from the substantive targets. Thus, in Tunisia, the GDA is seen as a key vehicle through which to achieve resource management goals such as the reduction of agricultural water demand. At the same time, the GDA is a vehicle of public participation and GDAs are crucial to the new democratic ideals of the Tunisian State.⁴⁶

A key issue to be clarified with regard to the SDG6 indicator framework moving forward is the institutional interface at which participation is being measured for SDG 6 b. Participation can take place at different levels, such as at national level (in the annual national sector reviews), at the catchment level (in river basin forums or catchment management agencies), between local government and local water user associations (municipal infrastructure planning), and between local water user associations and the users they serve (in civil society). Currently the SDG 6 b indicator focuses on the proportion of local *administrative units* with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management. It appears to leave out both the national interface and the local interface between water users and the associations supplying their water. For the Tunisian government, efforts are being made to improve participation at the interface between GDA and users. are taken at the lowest appropriate level, with full public consultation and involvement of users in the planning and implementation of water projects. This in turn is seen as essential to the national water demand management strategy. To be effective, participation should take place at the (lowest) appropriate institutional level, in line with the Dublin principles. Secondly, to be effective in the context of SDG6, participation should relate to the *substantive* indicators of SDG 6.1-6.6. Participation should be judged in terms of whether decisions have led to the desired outcomes from the point of view of users.

Having applied the UN-Water framework, it can be affirmed that Tunisia has measures in place to make real progress towards implementing SDG 6.b. These measures, however do not exist at local government level but at national level on the one hand and within the GDAs on the other hand. In reality, much more must be done to make the general assembly, the most important institution for instigating horizontal participation in the GDA, more potent. One way which does not resonate in the final report for Mission 2 is to strengthen the legal basis for the Assembly with regards to the regional CRDAs and the national Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries. The UN-Water framework clearly puts emphasis on laws and policies, and as of yet there still are remnants of historical inequalities and power discrepancies between the government and the GDA members which need to be addressed if the Irrigation Management Transfer in Tunisia is to be successful. This will also support and hasten progress towards SDG 6.b.

⁴⁶ The Ministry objective today is to make GDAs shift to a more professional scheme, by having a technical director hired with larger responsibilities and a wider role of private sector (introducing PPP contracts for maintenance, metering, billing...etc). They would like to transfer the most complex water systems to the drinking water utility as well.

Finally, we argued that for SDG 6 to be implemented in an integrated fashion, the performance indicators of local water user associations need to incorporate the full range of SDG 6 indicators. Indeed, the GDA format has increasingly been used in Tunisia for the delivery of domestic water services in rural areas (SDG 6.1). Performance criteria include financial questions and questions on system losses. However, the criteria used to judge the performance of GDAs in Tunisia do on the whole not correspond to the substantive targets of SDG 6. This leaves open the question how SDG 6 will be implemented and monitored if it is not integrated into the day to day functioning of local Water User Associations.

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GIWEH: SDG 6 POLICY NOTE SERIES NO. 1 / OCT 2018