

Sustainable Consumption and Production

# HOW **TUNISIA** IS SWITCHING TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Building climate resilience and resource efficiency



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SwitchMed is an EU-funded initiative to support transformation towards Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Circular Economy in eight Mediterranean countries. SwitchMed directly supports the reinforcement of an enabling policy environment, practices by private sector, and experience-sharing among stakeholders to build a community of practice on SCP, circular and blue economy and reducing the environmental footprint of consumption and production activities.

SwitchMed is implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) and the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (MedWaves, former SCP/RAC). The initiative is carried out in close coordination with the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement (DG NEAR).

During SwitchMed's first phase (2013-2018) UNEP's collaboration with the countries focused on the development of National Actions Plans (NAPs) for the transition to SCP and demonstration projects. The Sustainable Consumption and Production National Action Plans (SCP-NAPs) feed into and are closely linked to related national strategies (Sustainable Development, Green Growth) and the regional SCP action plan developed by UNEP-MAP.

The second phase of the project (2019-2024) builds on the successes of the first phase by focusing on enhancing economic opportunities for businesses following green and circular economy models, enabling resource-efficient circular economies at national and regional levels. As a result, this action provides new employment opportunities, including for women. A special focus is encouraged to support their participation in trainings and capacity building activities and benefit from other supporting measures.

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## SCP: PLANNING FOR CHANGE – IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGE

The core aim of SwitchMed is to assist countries in making the transition to SCP and circular economy, one of the objectives the world set itself when it adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.



SwitchMed started back in 2013 – at a time when the SDGs were not yet adopted as the international Agenda for 2030. UNEP’s first activities at country level were to present and raise awareness of SCP and present the positive impact such a switch could have.

As a first step, UNEP provided technical assistance and capacity reinforcement for countries as they developed National Action Plans (NAPs) for making this switch. The plans focused on resource efficiency in tandem with other social and environmental challenges such as gender equality and climate change.

Tunisia’s NAP process began with a thorough assessment of the state of SCP in the country, and from that two 10-year plans were developed, one for the agri-food sector and the other for tourism. Development of the NAP, and the two 10-year plans, required widespread consultations, with government, business and industry, community organizations, media and academia, with the aim being to ensure the coherence, sustainability and implementation of the plans.

Significant work was done on determining the required regulatory framework, or updating the existing one, and on the behavioural changes that would be necessary for the country to make the switch to SCP. Tunisia hopes the transition in the specified sectors will enable it to see better use of resources, economic improvement, and a reduction in risks to the environment and human health from potentially harmful pesticides and chemicals in agriculture, or from water pollution and coastal erosion at tourist destinations.



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## TEN SUCCESS STORIES | TUNISIA

# 01

### SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Long a leader in the field of organic farming, the Tunisian Republic in 2015 set up a “National Strategy for Organic Agriculture to 2020”, which was based on the internationally recognized standards and regulations that country had set in place in 1999. The strategy is structured around the three pillars of sustainable development: it respects the environment by promoting soil conservation and preserving biodiversity, improves the economy by putting in place the tools to raise the income of organic farmers, and aids social development by limiting any harm done to human health from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the chemicals sometimes used in conventional agriculture. Tunisia now has about 320,000 hectares of land being farmed organically, and in 2019 was first in the world for olive growing by area (265,000 hectares). A significant proportion of the country's organic produce is exported, for example, olive oil makes up 80.4 per cent of total exports, and dates 17.5 per cent. Organic farming is increasingly positioning itself as an alternative and a solution that will help the country contribute to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 12 (sustainable consumption and production) and 15 (nurture life on land).



# 02

### SAVING WATER

Faced with growing water needs, Tunisia since the mid-1990s has developed twin policies on increasing water supplies and on managing demand. Some 82 per cent of available water in the country is used in agriculture. Consequently, since 1995, there has been a national programme that subsidizes up to 60 per cent of farmers' costs when they instal water-saving irrigation equipment in their fields. This programme has made it possible to increase the area equipped with water saving technology from 127,255 ha in 1995 to 435,000 ha in 2018. Localized irrigation, which is more efficient, now represents 49 per cent of the areas equipped (198,000 ha), against 8 per cent in 1995. From 1995 to the end of 2018, the total subsidy awarded for water saving exceeded DT 1 billion (about \$US 3.6 million), for more than 1,100 farmers across the country. A study conducted in 2016 to assess the impact of the water-saving programme showed an average decrease in water consumption per hectare of about 16 per cent, with an average consumption of 5,200 ha/m<sup>3</sup>/year. There was also an increase in water productivity: it has more than doubled in 20 years for fodder, market gardening and arboriculture, especially for green barley, chilli, vines and apple trees (GIZ/OSS 2017).



# 03

### CLIMATE-RESILIENT FARMING

Among the Mediterranean countries, Tunisia is among the most exposed to climate change. Most of the country is arid or semi-arid (nearly 96 per cent), and it experiences recurrent droughts and great variability in rainfall. The country faces an increase in extreme weather events (floods, droughts, desertification, storms at sea and strong winds, lightning and hailstorms, forest fires, etc.) which could have significant adverse impacts on ecosystems and natural resources, on health and economic activities. Agriculture is among the sectors most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (rainfall disturbances, extreme weather events, etc.) and farmers are now called upon to adapt to new techniques and technologies to improve the resilience of farms and to ensure sustainable food production. Aware of these challenges and the priorities of the sector, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries, together with GIZ Tunisia, led a project to identify best practices in agriculture to promote sustainability and rural development. A team of 26 trainers were trained in climate change adaptation, and they led 52 capacity-building sessions for 800 farmers around the country. The project has raised farmers' awareness of sustainable production methods to preserve natural capital (water, soil and biodiversity) and better adapt to climate change.



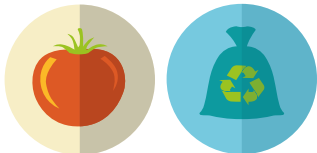
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## 04

**WASTE MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY**

Faced with increasing amounts of household waste being sent to landfills, and slow community acceptance of recycling, Tunisia has been developing an integrated strategy on waste reduction and management. The strategy will focus on the potential of waste as an economic resource, and aims to promote the principles of a circular economy. Five objectives have been selected in this new strategy: preventing and reducing waste production, introducing waste sorting for households and other big producers, improving the collection and transport of household and similar waste, promoting waste recycling and recovery, and limiting disposal in landfills to final waste. Consideration is given to actions that promote the generate of less waste, such as the development of eco-design, eco-labelling and extended producer responsibility, packaging standards, and incentives for waste reduction in production processes. As part of this process, and as an alternative to landfill, the National Agency for Waste Management, ANGED, envisages building a series of waste recovery and treatment plants that will adapt to regional contexts and needs.

## 05

**FIGHTING FOOD WASTE**

The fight against food waste is considered one of the pillars of SCP. According to a study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), waste amounts to about 200 kilograms of food per person per year in the countries of the MENA region. In 2019, in Bizerte in north-east Tunisia, the FAO organized, as part of a project implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries and funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, a training session on food waste reduction and food preservation for 17 trainers, in collaboration with the National Union of Tunisian Women and the Bizerte City Council. Tunisia has also adopted digitalization to reduce food waste. Start-ups have emerged offering innovative digital solutions, including artificial intelligence to raise citizens' awareness of the economic and environmental damage caused by food waste and to involve them in anti-waste processes. Mobile applications such as Foodealz were developed. Launched in 2020, with the single objective of fighting food waste, Foodealz connects individuals with restaurant owners or pastry partners to come to collect their unsold food at a reduced price. The application has been downloaded more than 14,000 times, and thousands of meals are collected annually from the restaurants that are members of this initiative.

## 06

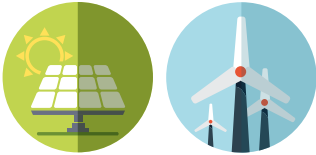
**SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

Public procurement in Tunisia represents on average around 13 per cent of GDP and more than 40 per cent of the state budget. Switching to sustainable procurement therefore has enormous potential to make savings, and to mainstream SCP through a range of sectors. Tunisia developed its first national plan for sustainable public procurement in 2012, known as the PNAPD, and a revision of the public procurement regulations was launched as part of Decree 2014-1039 of 13 March 2014. Work began on updating the PNAPD in 2019, with the construction and IT sectors identified as priorities. Issues being considered include integration of good governance procedures, appropriate standards and incentives, and the development of an appropriate training and support programme. The updated plan is expected to cover the period up to 2023. A pilot project has begun in the construction sector. It will be carried out jointly by the International Centre for Environmental Technologies, CITET, the Water and Environmental Support programme, WES, of the European Union and a local authority, the municipality of Mahdia.



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## 07

**RENEWABLE ENERGY**

Tunisia's energy situation is marked by limited energy resources, a decline in energy production, and a sharp increase in demand. In addition, energy is responsible for most of the country's GHG emissions, some 57.9 per cent at a 2012 inventory (UNFCCC 2017). But Tunisia has significant renewable energy resources, particularly for solar and wind energy, so it has developed a strategy to promote development of renewables and energy efficiency. The Tunisian Solar Plan is a national programme that aims to increase the share of renewable energy in total electricity production to 30 per cent by 2030. A regulatory framework and financial incentives (30 per cent of the cost of the investment) have been put in place to help achieve this. The PROSOL programme, launched in 2005, promotes the use of photovoltaic energy for thermal heating of water in residential buildings, and is a key element of the national strategy. As a result, Tunisia had, in 2018, 980,000 square metres of solar collectors for water heating in the residential sector.

## 08

**PILOTING SUSTAINABLE CITIES**

Today's cities, where a large part of economic growth is concentrated, face many environmental, economic and social challenges. Aware of this, Tunisia has in recent years embarked on a national programme to promote sustainable cities. Part of this has involved assessing cities against multiple criteria, such as planning, landscapes, heritage, housing, transport, energy and socio-economic development, and determining what the country's vision for smart sustainable cities will be. After wide consultation the vision of a sustainable city was defined as: "Creating sustainable economic and social development opportunities and promoting investment plans that can foster wealth creation, improve people's living conditions and security, and share their expectations and concerns with them in a participatory and inclusive manner". This strategic vision was articulated around four strategic axes: environmental protection, social and cultural promotion, economic development and the institutional governance and organization of cities. It is in this context that the Tunisian Institute of Strategic Studies (ITES), on 1 October 2020, signed a partnership agreement with the Tunisian Smart Cities Association (TSC). The partnership aims to conduct a broad analysis to determine what the model of a smart and sustainable Tunisian city should be. A recent call for applications for cities willing to pilot that model exceeded all expectations, with more than 200 applications being received.



## 09

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



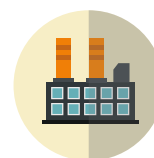
In Tunisia, the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is relatively new, but one that is gaining ground. According to a 2017 study published by the research institute Respeco, which specializes in research to promote environmentally responsible economic models, Tunisia jumped 26 places to be ranked 59th in the field of CSR from its 2013 ranking. An important step on this journey was the launch in 2015 of the CSR Label by the Confederation of Tunisian Enterprises in partnership with the International Centre for Environmental Technologies of Tunis, the Agency for the Promotion of Industry and Innovation, and the Association of Continuity of Generations. Four companies were awarded the label in 2019, including the Caisse de Consignes et de Dépôts, and two others are in the process of gaining the label, including the National Waste Management Agency. Another important step was the promulgation of Law No. 35 of 11 June 2018 on CSR. The law strengthens the regulatory framework for CSR, which aims to link companies with their social environment through participation in the process of sustainable development and good governance. Finally, 2019 was marked by the accession of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) to the UN Global Compact. UTICA is committed to contributing to the implementation of the principles of the Global Compact and the Sustainable Development Goals in its trade union activities and within affiliated economic enterprises.

## 10

## MANAGING TEXTILE WASTE

The clothing and textiles sector in Tunisia is a strategic one for the national economy being both a significant employer and exporter. But while the making of fabrics and garments is well developed, the re-use and recycling of textile waste is not. There is limited capacity for the recycling of high-quality fibres, and, according to the Agency for the Promotion of Industry and Innovation, Tunisia has six spinning companies but just two with more than 100 employees.

So, within the framework of the SwitchMed programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) set about making the clothing and textiles sector more circular and less polluting. In collaboration with global brands, as well as local and international experts, and the Tunisian Textile and Clothing Federation, the project, funded by the European Union, focused on the development of an infrastructure to recover textile waste and to build local capacity for the sustainable use of hazardous chemicals in textile production. A survey carried out as part of this project showed that a total 31,000 tons of textile waste was generated nationwide (UNIDO 2022), with 6,300 tons being reusable (overproduction or dead stock) and 24,800 tons being recyclable (cutting waste, spinning waste and tissue factory waste). The project includes setting up two fabric recycling pilot projects, sharing of best practices, developing a guide for finding profitable ways to use textile waste, and developing a national roadmap for the sustainable use of chemicals in the clothing and textiles sector.





## SCP IN TUNISIA: LOOKING AHEAD

Around the world, humanity is making ever-increasing demands on nature, taking from the planet natural resources at a rate far greater than that with which nature is able replenish them. Simply, we are living beyond our planetary means.

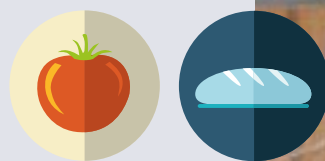
How we adapt to this challenge of rising demand for shrinking resources will be our legacy to future generations. We have a choice: we can leave them a diminished world, or a more resource-efficient low-carbon one. The true value of programmes such as SwitchMed is that they show a way forward to this new world, one where we still produce the goods and services that we need, but do so in a cleaner, greener way. Switching to SCP also contributes to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) which aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean. It can help to end poverty, combat climate change, and prevent a mass extinction.

The current Covid-19 pandemic has provided a tragic illustration of how closely linked human and environmental well-being are. Biodiversity loss, shrinking habitats, dwindling natural resources, pollution and climate change all adversely affect humans as well as flora and fauna.

But the pandemic has also created a rare opportunity to begin again, to adopt a systemic life-cycle approach that balances nature's needs with national priorities. Implementing sustainable consumption and production practices across all sectors would be a significant step towards achieving this equilibrium.

Sustainable consumption and production policies also provide important opportunities to trigger transformative changes in economic and social systems and promote the human rights of women and girls as well as men and boys. It is imperative to integrate a gender perspective into sustainable consumption and production work in general and national action plans, which are the key policy instruments at national level that create the enabling policy environment to achieve SDG 12.

Currently, for instance, about one-third of all food produced is wasted, or spoiled because of poor transportation. This equates to 1.3 billion tonnes of food worth about \$US 1 trillion. And if the world switched to energy-efficient light bulbs we would save \$US 120 billion a year. Additionally, in the decade between 2010 and 2019, electronic waste grew by 38 per cent but only 20 per cent of that waste was recycled (United Nations n.d.).



The National Action Plans developed by countries with the support of SwitchMed recognize the potential of making the transition to SCP and circular economy and set out the pathways they intend to follow.

In its National Action Plan, the Tunisian Republic focused on creating sustainability in the agri-food and tourism sectors, and has been building upon that work.

SCP and the circular economy have great potential to respond to national priorities, and to the three global crises (biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change) the world is facing. Switching to more sustainable patterns of consumption and production across these sectors and others will need behavioural change at both national and individual levels but could generate significant economic benefits. Research by the International Resource Panel shows that more efficient use of materials and energy could add an extra \$US 2 trillion to the global economy by 2050 (UNEP 2017), while a study by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) shows that transforming the energy system could boost cumulative global Gross Domestic Product gains above business-as-usual by \$US 98 trillion by 2050, nearly quadruple renewable energy jobs to 42 million, and expand employment in energy efficiency to 21 million.



The opportunities for countries from sustainable consumption and production are rich and varied. Some ideas for building on successes and moving forward, subject, of course, to alignment with national priorities, include:



**+ TOURISM.** TOURISM around the world has been hard hit by Covid 19, so, as the sector turns its mind to recovery, now may prove an opportune moment to support and encourage doing things differently. Embedding resource and energy efficiency, waste reduction, and protecting flora and fauna could build resilience in a sector that, traditionally, is jobs intensive. Working to reduce food waste from restaurants in the hospitality sector, as well as promoting locally grown in-season food, could help Tunisia achieve some of its goals on GHG emissions, waste management, and circular economy. Additionally, for some marine or coastal destinations, a focus on sustainable actions could support the country's efforts to expand its "blue" economy, a strategy for which is currently being developed. Sustainable tourism is already a national priority, and a thriving blue economy could help deliver on that objective while improving lives and livelihoods, and promoting clean seas and environmental well-being.

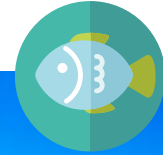
**+ PROMOTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY.** A circular economy is a strong first step on the path to more sustainable consumption and production in that it encourages us to reduce, reuse, and recycle, but a truly circular economy closes the loop by encouraging the repair and remanufacture of goods produced. Tunisia is already taking steps along this path with the introduction of regulations that promote waste recovery and treatment through such methods as eco-design, eco-labelling extended producer responsibility, and cleaner, leaner production processes. Projects that support the creation of a market for repaired and remanufactured items (where goods at the end of their useful life are made into something else) could be valuable. Examples here could be creating standards for second-hand or remanufactured goods, making room for them within public procurement regulations, putting in place incentives for their purchase, and supporting factories and start-ups in the production of remanufactured goods. Targeting particular sectors, such as housing and construction, for instance, where much of the waste produced could be reused, may prove useful, and could aid in mainstreaming the principles of SCP and circular economy more broadly through society.



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## + SUPPORTING CHANGE IN THE BLUE ECONOMY.

Tunisia's coastal and marine resources and ecosystems are important economically, socially and culturally. There is significant potential for SCP within the "blue" sector, from establishing more environmentally friendly port operations, to embedding resource efficiency in coastal and marine areas management plans, to innovative cleantech solutions, and standards for marine sports and eco-tourism. Protecting the biodiversity of marine environments could have significant flow-on economic effects, particularly in eco-tourism, but also by improving the livelihoods of coastal communities with the development of small-scale projects that highlight the cultural traditions and crafts of the populations along the coast. Additionally, greening operations in busy ports could be useful in reducing waste, cutting GHG emissions, and creating jobs.



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**+ SUSTAINABLE FINANCING.** Globally, a switch to green financing is under way. A database maintained by UNEP and the Green Growth Knowledge Partnership (GGKP) shows that there are now at least 391 national and sub-national policy and regulatory measures on green finance in place around the world, with 79 new measures were implemented or announced in 2019 (UNEP 2019). These measures range from transparency in climate-related risks in investment portfolios, to providing incentives for investing in green assets, and strengthening environmental risk management practices within institutions. Projects that support green investment, or a shift towards considering environmental impacts as a fundamental pillar of investing and lending practices, could be a significant contribution to building a better, greener, post-Covid economy.



**+ DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION** Delivering on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals the world set itself in 2015 will require commitment and innovation. Projects that examine, develop and assess the digital tools necessary to scale up ambitions in existing projects, to measure and record their achievements against SDG indicators, to understand the digital needs of industrial sectors to transform to cleaner more sustainable production, or that support technological start-ups working on creative solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution or that collect and disseminate data, statistics and knowledge will be important steps in the transformation to a more sustainable society. Tunisia is already working to promote entrepreneurship and digital innovation, particularly in the areas of clean energy and waste management. Expanding the digital transition to other sectors could aid in the efficient management of resources, as well as improving economic resilience in the post-Covid world by providing new green jobs.

Whatever path Tunisia decides to follow in the years ahead, it is important that environmental, economic, and social concerns especially on gender equality, remain at its core. The country's commitment to sustainable consumption and production provides a solid foundation, but behavioral change at all levels of society will be essential to achieve the transformation to a resource-efficient low-carbon world. An agile, resilient, innovative approach could see us all doing more and better with less as we work together to face any challenges that arise.

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## SWITCHMED: INSPIRING CHANGE

SCP is about doing more and better with less. It is about meeting humanity's needs but remaining within planetary boundaries, about using the natural resources that the Earth provides without degrading the environment. Now in its second phase, the SwitchMed projects works to support the development of policies and practices that support a switch to sustainable consumption and production (SCP) in the Southern Mediterranean region and to make the circular economy the mainstream business model there.

Tunisia has already developed integrated plans and a regulatory framework that have SCP at their core. For some time now, it has been building on these, expanding its waste reduction plan, establishing a circular economy, and further developing its work on sustainable water managements and energy solutions. It is clear that SCP is no longer just something discussed in meeting rooms. Now it is happening on the ground, across business and industry, in cities and regions, reducing pollution, improving the air we breathe, and promoting better use of nature's gifts through resource-efficient and low-carbon consumption and production practices.

In this document you will see 10 success stories inspired by the work of SwitchMed in the Tunisian Republic. They show how what began in workshops developed into plans that created a ripple that flowed out around the country. This short publication shows that opportunities for countries from sustainable consumption and production are rich and varied.

The Switch to SCP is off and running. SwitchMed is proud to have supported Tunisia in its work to build a society where people and planet thrive and prosper together.

