The “Women Dialogue” Program

Final Evaluation Report

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Funded by the U.K Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 2014, Tunisia
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1. **Executive Summary**

Search for Common Ground (SFCG), an international non-governmental organization, has been working for a long time to transform the way local communities deal with conflicts promoting cooperative solutions against confrontational debates. SFCG relies on first-hand worldwide experience acquired on the ground as regards mediation/facilitation training, common ground journalism, radio/TV, drama, and music. SFCG has been operating in Tunisia since 2011 to “help members of Tunisian society approach conflicts and differences in a constructive manner, through cooperation and dialogue”. Although its activities cover a wide range of subjects in 14 governorates, SFCG Tunisia works mainly with youth, women and media to provide them with the needed skills to move towards peaceful coexistence by “understanding differences and acting on commonalities”.

In its post-revolutionary transition, Tunisia has faced tension and sporadic civil unrest fueled by political polarization, hatred speeches in the media and the emergence of radical Salafist movements which became increasingly visible and gained momentum in 2013, with the sparking of armed conflict in some remote areas of the country. Women’s rights have been a major source of impassioned debates between hardliners from opponent sides of conservatives and secularists, each of them being backed by prominent political figures. Furthermore, during this period, women’s ability to engage in the political sphere was weakened.

The Women Dialogue is designed to bridge the gap between main ideologically opponent groups such as leftist and Islamist women CSO groups and Islamist organizations. Through this project, SFCG’s ambition is to help empower these women’s groups “to make positive change and diminish political polarization by promoting a model of constructive dialogue.”

The program is expected to raise women’s awareness on the usefulness of dialogue, to enhance mutual acceptance, and to provide all women with skills in conflict management and constructive discourse. By leading the participants to discover common ground concerns the program aims at showing that differences can turn into sources of agreement instead of causes of conflicts.

The present evaluation report is intended to investigate the effectiveness of the program and assess to what extent the project objectives were achieved. The primary audience of this evaluation is Search for Common Ground. The result will be used to shape future projects with Women rights CSO’s in Tunisia. The evaluation is based on a qualitative approach that explores the relevance of factors that may enhance or hinder the achievement of the program’s objectives. An interview guide has been drafted in collaboration with the SFCG evaluation team and in accordance with the program’s objectives. The information collected has been summarized in order to provide assessment of the quantitative follow-up indicators of the program.

The Women Dialogue has mostly reflected historical disagreements between a faith-driven feminist movement and a secular women’s-rights based movement. Although the Women Dialogue took place in a period of political tension and civil unrest in the country, initial strong motivation of the participants throughout the program has been a key factor of success. The evaluation findings show that the program met the challenge of handling its activities in a safe way, managed to relieve tension and to achieve the following objectives:

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1 “Conflict Pool Project Form”, SFCG Project Proposal, p. 5
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- Build on the initial strong motivation and good will of the participants as key factors for the pursuit of the Dialogue. Thanks to the implication of the SFCG staff, the Dialogue succeeded in creating an environment conducive to positive exchange between the participants.
- Establish personal relationships among participants from different ideological stances which helped develop the cohesion of a highly heterogeneous group of participants despite the different internal or external phases of tensions the program went through.
- Enhance mutual knowledge as a key factor to better understand the differences in opinions. Building on improved mutual knowledge and shared life experiences, the program managed to bring forth change in attitudes and perceptions among participants.
- Raise awareness on biased and pre-conceived ideas likely to hinder the dialogue, reinforce intolerance and provoke conflicts.
- Lead the participants to acknowledge the existence of many unexpected “common grounds” far beyond apparent differences. This process resulted in drafting a publicized “Joint Statement” on common concerns between organizations represented in the Dialogue.

However, further efforts are needed to address the long-term effectiveness of the program especially by:

- Promoting the Dialogue at an institutional level, represented by the participants in the program. Although the “Joint Statement” has paved the way for future agreements, it does not include any specific actions to undertake that could imply institutional commitment from each organization participating in the Dialogue. The institutional commitment is necessary to reinforce the cohesion of the group beyond personal relationships and to avoid any apprehensions or hesitations such as those experienced by some participants at the closing ceremony of the Dialogue.
- Helping NGOs engage in concrete common actions on the ground and providing them with specific training on conflict resolution and trust-building issues. Despite an enthusiastic attitude towards the overall achievements of the program, the participants do not seem to be committed in proactive actions that may allow for long-term sustainability of the program’s effectiveness. They still consider SFCG as a key actor in taking initiatives to scale up the program. There is, therefore, a risk that without further SFCG involvement participants may revert to their former attitudes.

2. Project Overview

Search For Common Ground (SFCG) Tunisia works to establish a culture of constructive dialogue among Tunisian women’s civil society organizations in order to reduce tensions, build mutual understanding and find common ground between conflicting groups coming from all ends of the Tunisian political and cultural spectrum. The goal of the dialogue process is to “(i) improve personal relationships across deep political divides; (ii) increase mutual understanding of and (iii) respect for everyone’s positions and beliefs; (iv) lead to recognition of the existence of common ground between women; and (v) decrease tensions and stereotypes between leaders and groups.”

2 Ibid, p.11. In this context, SFCG notes that “CSOs that work on women’s rights/women-centered humanitarian/family issues, these CSOs rarely interact across the ideological divide” while they seek to find “new [original] ways to play prominent roles within Tunisian society and politics”.

The Women Dialogue program is based on participatory and voluntary dialogue techniques. The participatory process is supposed to enhance full participation, strengthen communication skills and break stereotypes. This process will eventually lead to a “coming together” which would build mutual understanding, respect and trust among participants and finally result in joint actions and policy goals.

The Dialogue kicked-off on 29-30 June 2013 with a session intended to introduce participants from 13 Tunisian organizations to each other. The Dialogue has gained support from the Tunisian Minister of Women as well as from prominent representatives of Civil Society, two "secular-leaning" and two "Islamist-leaning" influential leaders. Accordingly, SFCG mobilized an experienced team to support all sessions of the Dialogue.

The first session focused on “drawing the limits of the divide in a positive manner”. It relied mainly on trust building exercises and discussions between participants aiming to highlight each one’s views, fears and perceptions about the Dialogue. The participants agreed on some principles and topics they would have to discuss in the following sessions.

The next 6 sessions focused mainly on the following topics:

- Trust and team building activities to bring the participants together in an attempt to understand each other and to work together around common issues by highlighting differences, developing tolerance and learning from each other’s personal life experience.
- Developing, monitoring and evaluating an advocacy strategy: the participants agreed to search a common advocacy initiative (namely, informal employment of women) and learned how to plan for, monitor and evaluate it.
- Creating a safe environment conducive to mutual acceptance and to recognizing differences through socializing activities, capacity-building sessions and individual interviewing.

At the end of the program the participants were able to draft a “Joint Statement” – to be considered as the flagship of the program – stating principles that reflect the shared values and the “common grounds” the Dialogue has helped bring about.

3. Conflict Context

Not surprisingly, 2013 is regarded as the year of all dangers. Violence erupted in the first months of the year with far right-wing Salafist movement involved in many violent anti-secularist protests culminating in the assassinations of two political leaders in February and July. In the very first study on post-revolutionary non-State violence in Tunisia, the Tunisian

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3 16 Tunisian organizations were invited to join the Program but only 14 of them fully participated in the Dialogue series. One participant from a Salafist-lead NGO withdrew from the program since its first session while another participant from a secular organization left the program later on. Finally, throughout this report, by “participants” we only consider the women who fully attended the Program sessions and accepted to be interviewed for the purpose of this study.

4 All participants declare having greatly appreciated the way the SFCG staff handled the different activities of the Dialogue. They noticed among other things, the impartiality of the staff and its dedication to see the Dialogue succeed.
National Council for Liberties called attention to the deep political polarization stemming from “the lack of consensus on transition’s priorities” as the main reason behind violence.\textsuperscript{5}

Passionate discourses on the implementation or not of the Sharia Law and concerns on women’s rights have also accompanied the Constitution drafting process. On the other hand, the media participated in exacerbating violence by diffusing offensive and hate speeches that resulted in “the polarization of the social field.” A survey conducted in 2013 by The Arab Working Group For Media Monitoring reveals the wide spreading of insults, affronts, calls for blasphemous purposes and incitements to murder in both print and electronic media.\textsuperscript{6}

Caught up in this self-sustaining polarization between what is seen as “secularist” movements and hardline Salafist ones, and not being used to such a tension, Tunisians got rapidly frustrated and the perception of insecurity and distrust among population increased. The lack of confidence in political parties and in the Islamist-led government – considered to have failed in controlling the spread of violence and reassuring secularist forces – resulted in an overwhelmingly polarized post-revolutionary context.\textsuperscript{7}

4. Methodology Framework

Generally speaking an impact evaluation study at a NGO level implies a comparison of a set of indicators related to the project’s outcome and collected from participants and non-participants before the program starts and after it ends. The impact evaluation purpose is to determine the “causal effect” or “the value added” of the program beyond any external interference by answering to the question “what would have happened to the participants should they not have been enrolled in the program?” Providing that the “selection bias” is undermined\textsuperscript{8}, such an approach is consistent with the use of sound statistical analysis and leads to directly assigning to the program any changes in participants’ outcome compared to non-participants’. This approach is commonly used, as long as the program indicators are easy to measure, specific to the program, affordable to collect and attributable, i.e., directly linked to the expected outcomes of the program. While this methodology is quite suitable for quantitative impact evaluation it can hardly be applied to assess qualitative phenomena such as those related to the “Women Dialogue” Program.

Indeed, the present study focuses on evaluation of phenomena that are not easily measurable through a closed-ended questionnaire neither attributable to the program only. Many important aspects of the Women Dialogue Program such as “mutual respect” or “constructive discourse” are closely related to human behavior and they involve personal attitudes and reveal personal perceptions which are context-driven, such as the group dynamics, the

\textsuperscript{5} “At the end of 2013 all the ingredients are combined for a civil war, which in the end didn’t happen; that actually might be what people mean by ’Tunisian miracle’!”, Non-state violence in the Tunisian public space: 2011-2013, Conseil National pour les Libertés en Tunisie, December 2013.

\textsuperscript{6} www.awgmm.org


\textsuperscript{8} “Selection bias occurs when the reasons for which an individual participates in a program are correlated with outcomes.” (Impact Evaluation in Practice, World Bank 2011). The classical figure of selection bias deals with motivation of (non) participants (not) to enroll in a program. For example, highly-motivated people who decide to enroll in a program are more likely to experience changes in outcomes whatever the impact of the program would be. As a consequence, it is not possible to determine whether changes observed at the end are to be considered as reflecting the program’s effects or as due to differences in motivations.
discussions which take place over time in/outside the group, etc. Far from being a final or exclusive outcome of the Program, these processes are continuously shaped as the program unfolds and the general context evolves (at a political, social, or national level). For these reasons, the Women Dialogue Program needs to be evaluated on a qualitative basis which puts more emphasis on the process/drive for change, if any, exploring the relevance of factors which may enhance or hinder the achievement of the Program’s objectives. In other words, such a qualitative approach aspires to identify and to contextualize the results while “uncovering” the hidden aspects that potentially could influence the behavior of the participants in the Dialogue with regard to the Program’s objectives; it does not claim any statistical significance and does not provide any sound quantitative measure.

The qualitative approach we adopt in this study presents however some limits on a methodological impact evaluation ground:

- A first limit relates to the “selection bias” of participants, i.e., the reasons why people decide to enroll (or not) in the program. Controlling the “selection bias” ensures that participants are as “neutral” as possible against the outcomes of the program so that any changes observed are attributable to the program and are not driven by the participants’ personal motivations. In general, failure to control the selection bias is a serious threat to the accuracy of the evaluation findings. For the purpose of the current evaluation, the selection bias related to motivation presents drawbacks when it comes to participants’ attitude towards the program. Indeed, participants in the Women Dialogue show themselves very keen to enter the Dialogue and to see the whole process succeed. Such a motivation makes participants more inclined to adopt a positive attitude towards the functioning of that program and they are likely to pay less attention to aspects that need to be addressed more effectively or even to be fixed.

- A second limit is the lack of comprehensive baseline data on participants in the program that allows us to establish the situation before the program started. Although some baseline questionnaires have been completed by the participants, the collected information still needs to be contextualized. For example, asking a participant whether she feels respected by the other participants is restrictive as long as we cannot ensure that all participants acknowledge the same “content” of the word “respect”. However, we draw on baseline questionnaires to address the situation of reference whenever the data collected are accurate and suitable for comparison purposes. On the other hand, depending on indicators, the baseline data are sometime augmented with information referring to past behavior of participants collected through ex post interviews in order to track changes over time.

- A final limit refers to the absence of a reasoned comparison group of non-participants to the program who are “statistically similar” to the group of participants. By comparing the outcomes of the program between these 2 groups the evaluation allows to directly attribute any observed change to the program. When such a comparison is not possible, as is the case here, the causal effect between participation in the program and changes observed among participants cannot be carefully ascertained. Notwithstanding, it is very difficult for such a program to identify a “statistically similar” control group which in general, implies a large number of individuals.

The qualitative methodology of this study consists of semi-structured interviews with 13 participants from the Women Dialogue and the SFCG staff in Tunis. A major benefit of this methodology is that it lets the interviewee elaborate on her thoughts and opinions, evoke

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9 In addition, an interview has been conducted with a prominent secular-leaning NGO leader who acted as a facilitator in the Program.
drawbacks and achievements, express unreported opinions apparently not connected with the program and consider the same issue from different standpoints. By doing so, the interview makes it possible to address to some extent the lack of baseline data context as long as it reports the dynamics of the participant’s perceptions. Last but not least, under this methodology, it is possible to take into account the “unspoken attributes” of the conversation such as the body language, the hesitations in answering and the willingness to develop one’s ideas. All of these factors help figure out “a profile” of participants in relation with the objectives of the program. However, this approach puts constraints on evaluators’ work in representing and analyzing the information collected. Usually, a lot of information comes out from interviews and needs to be processed consistently, avoiding subjectivity or judgment based on evaluators’ impressions and feelings. Although qualitative approach basically relies on “perceptions” the accuracy and the objectivity of the evaluation are ensured through two steps.

First, an interview guide was drafted and it identifies the main issues covered by the conversation to be held with all participants. Its primary purpose is not only to address the situation after the Dialogue ended but also to restore the dynamics of change, if any occurred, in the context of the Dialogue. The interview guide builds on current facts or perceptions and elaborates on how these perceptions may have changed over time. Furthermore, the interview is to be viewed as an informal query where the evaluator does his/her best to be neutral and make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible so that all external influence is reduced to the minimum.

Second, an “evaluation matrix/framework” has been constructed based on the Program’s objectives. It draws on the information already collected by the SFCG staff at a former baseline interview as well as on previous reports from the SFCG and recording sessions of the Dialogue. The evaluation framework ensures that the same evaluation criteria are applied to all participants. Upon completion of an interview, the evaluator fills in the evaluation matrix – including the evaluator’s observations – which helps contextualize the reported statements or perceptions of the interviewee. This tool is particularly useful in assessing the quantitative follow-up indicators. Moreover, it helps examine the underlying factors of change and prevailing attitudes among participants while providing the evaluator with an all-embracing perspective on topics of particular relevance for the effectiveness of the program.

Given this methodology and its limits, the evaluation should be considered as a dynamic processing of participants’ perceptions rather than a simple before-after comparison of a set of indicators. Although the evaluation findings are presented as a synthesis of the interviews in relation with the objectives of the Program, they go beyond a simple collection of assertions or testimonies from the interviewees and aim to bring out the major trends in participants’ attitudes, perceptions and behaviors and the way they have evolved over time. Quotes from participants are inserted throughout the report as an overall illustration of the evaluation findings.

Finally, the interviews took place from 17 to 30 March and were conducted by the evaluator in a face-to-face context\(^\text{10}\). Depending on participants, the discussions were held in Tunisian Arabic or in French and they all were recorded upon approval of the interviewees.

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\(^{10}\) There’s only one interview conducted on a skype conference.
5. **Key Findings and Potential Implications**

Women’s participation in “Women Dialogue”, the intensity of the debates that have taken place as well as the final results that were achieved cannot be analyzed without taking into account the historical background that has shaped the Tunisian feminist movement. The latter is the historical confluence of several ideological currents which sometimes supported each other and at other times opposed each other. Since its inception, the feminist movement presents itself as “a succession or combination of organizations which instead of completing each other present themselves as a succession of mutual reactions.” The “Women Dialogue” will mostly reflect these original disagreements between a faith-driven feminist movement and a secular, women’s-rights based movement.

5.1. **The Roots of Dissensions: the Burden of the Past…**

The faith-driven feminist movement has started in the thirties with the creation of the Tunisian Muslim Women’s Union which is to be considered as the first main event in the cultural emancipation of Tunisian Women. Although it grew in the wake of a religious institution, the Zitouna, it claims to belong to both national movement and to a reformist religious trend that was favorable to women, particularly as regards education and participation to social life. This movement initiated a faith-based process of emancipation aiming to some extent to provide the Tunisian woman with “her own identity [which was either] not admitted or ignored”. Although evolving in a conservative environment, the Union raised general awareness of women’s social status. Moreover, it supported some revolutionary ideas that expressed an “unacknowledged egalitarianism” concern in order to further advance the cause of women. However, this movement still considered the emancipation of women solely as a “social factor” instead of relating to fully respected and “accomplished individuals”.

It is in opposition to this conception of emancipation that a feminist movement – qualified as “progressive” and organized under the banner of the Union of Tunisian Women (UTW) – emerged in the 1940s. It stands for emancipation of women based on the notion of feminism as individuality – recognition of values of freedom and equality for women – thus aligning itself with emancipation movements born in the West. Drawing on a strong left-wing ideological impetus of an “internationalist ideal”, the UTW claimed itself to be an “organization of social and political character” that seeks “to raise mothers’ awareness, not of their religious duties towards their family and homeland, but of their civic duties and also their social rights”. Despite efforts deployed over 20 years for the benefit of working-class women, the UTW’s action remained relatively marginal – mainly because of the way it is operated internally. Upon the Independence of the country, and considering the ideological affiliation it embodies, this movement’s activities were somewhat impeded and even prohibited by the new power in place, causing a strangle-effect on its advocates.

Indeed, early after Independence, the feminist movement could be tolerated only as a necessary instrument for the enhancement of the new State, for the promotion of an alternative society where “emancipation of women is part of the task of building a nation” with the aim of “getting as close as possible to more ‘emancipated’ societies”\(^{13}\). This vision was materialized in the 1950s by a number of legal and social reforms that were favorable to


\(^{12}\) Ibid, p. 142

\(^{13}\) Ibid, p. 169
women’s emancipation. Thus, the development of a feminist movement that is at the same time independent from the ruling power and that adopts pluralist ideas and actions was simply unrealistic.

While some see in this situation a *modus vivendi* that could not possibly be avoided in the absence of opposition to the old regime, others are much likely to express suspicions of connivance between the “progressive” feminist movement and that regime. Political developments that were in general unfavorable to Islamist movements have hampered the continuity of a feminist movement inspired by emancipatory religious values and have prevented its organization in any sustainable manner. Such a movement was soon assimilated to an Islamist “ideology” that was feared to represent a threat to the project of social development undertaken by the government and therefore repressed and totally prohibited from any visibility in public spaces. Due to the lack of any other option, the “progressive” movement – aligned to universal human rights and organized mainly around two associations nationwide – is singled out as the only force capable of promoting women’s cause.

5.2. ... the Conflicts of the Present

These “misunderstandings” and “unspoken positions” are by no means outdated. Today, being neither overcome nor dissipated, they still determine the positions taken by different parties. All participants in the Dialogue recognize that stereotypes weigh heavily on all negative perception of others’ ideological stance. The “Women Dialogue” has inherited the “burden of the past” and the perceptions that participants in the Dialogue have of their sister associations are strongly impregnated by these misunderstandings and unspoken positions, and this shows at two levels. The first level is related to the need to know and recognize the institutional history of the other camp. In its energetic mobilization to reoccupy the public space from which it has been absent for half a century, participants from the Islamic associative movement expresses a strong demand for transparency vis-à-vis the past on the part of “progressive” feminist associations. Participants from the Islamist trend do not hesitate to hold “progressive” women responsible for non-assistance to repressed Islamist women and they even accuse them to take openly detrimental positions to Muslim women. This perception is further fuelled by some reports, indeed underlined by the same "progressive" women, about their connections with the former regime. Highlighting their grievances and suffering, Islamist participants are not eager to recognize actions organized by progressive movement militants in favor of Tunisian women. This lack of confidence is not dissipated in the least as participants from the “progressive” movement abstained from committing themselves to any form of explanation as regards the “alleged facts” against them. Indeed, apart from a few individual positions, participants from the Democratic Women movement refused “to be in the dock” as they would have it, and did not accept to engage in any form of self-criticism. Generally speaking, while they accept as legitimate and positive the Islamist associations’ initiatives to “reoccupy” the public space from which they were absent, participants from the “progressive trend” believe that this cannot possibly be done via the “indictment” of their opponents or by accusing such opponents of complicity with the old
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regime. They recognize that the other camp members have the right to question their actions but this by no means authorizes them to play the role of accusers or lecturers to others, even much less on the basis of impugned motives. The recent past of the transitional period and the actions that accompanied it have further exacerbated radical pronouncements on the part of Democratic Women, who only see in the discourse of the other camp the will to disparage them and wage deceitful attacks on them based on confusing and untrue allegations. Therefore, they consider that the conditions for genuine self-criticism are not gathered as long as the other side abstains from doing the same thing, and this keeps them from taking any clear stance vis-à-vis their past.

The second level relates to perceptions of the factors causing the conflict where ideology and politics are confronted to each other. On the one hand, participants from the Islamic movement are critical of emancipation “the Western way” as advocated by “progressives” who, in their view, do not take into account the cultural, social and economic realities of Tunisian women. They consider that this “forced emancipation” cannot gain the support of the population as long as it fails to be assimilated to some specific Tunisian background. It is worth noting that these criticisms are reminiscent of those addressed in the 1930s by the Muslim Union of Tunisian Women, warning that “we must take what is best in the West and not blindly imitate the Western feminists.” However, participants in the Dialogue claiming to speak on behalf of Islamist movement would positively suggest political rather than ideological reasons. They seem to identify the struggle of emancipation in terms of actions to be taken (political) rather than in terms of emancipatory ideas (ideology). That perhaps explains why the Women Dialogue was the occasion for them to address different sensitive topics.

For their part, where Islamist representatives put forward a “political conflict”, “progressive” participants tend to speak rather of “ideological conflict”. They tend to justify this by their feeling that the positions of Islamist associations – and their activities – can be a threat to women’s rights because they convey a vision of society opposed to that adopted by Tunisia at least since Independence. The youngest among them find it difficult to understand how one can stand for women’s rights and at the same time express personal sympathies towards religious personalities whose opinions are, to say the least, confusing. For the

“[Because of their suffering] Islamists are overtaken by feelings of rancor. Their return to the political scene, boosted by victory in elections, has given rise among them to a sense of arrogance even towards Democratic Women.” (M)

“Just because you were imprisoned does not make you a better person than me. I have been a trade unionist, and I suffered for that. I was harassed, I saw my career cut short ....” (M)

From the beginning 12 out of 13 women expressly declare that dialogue is a necessity in the current political situation of the country. All of them agree on dialogue as a prerequisite to conflict resolution.

14 Although this issue deserves further investigation, it clearly reveals the prejudiced opinion that each trend has of the other. There again, the past is still very strongly present and the usual reference in discussions to this subject is “student life”. For most of the participants, this period traces back to the 1980s, a period when university was a hotbed for debates opposing the 2 camps.
15 Ibid, p. 82. These are the words used by Béchira Ben Mrad, the most emblematic representative of this movement.
16 Just to cite some highly conflict issues: abortion, the CEDAW convention, women’s inheritance rights...
majority of women on the progressive side, what is at stake is more a battle of ideas than of actions, hence the strong emotional involvement that characterizes such a position. Would that explain the radical behavior of some women from the “progressive” camp who refused to continue the dialogue or to stand in public alongside Islamist associations during the closing ceremony of the project?

It seems therefore, that in view of the practical difficulty of addressing more directly issues that are sources of division, the Dialogue could be developed almost exclusively on a personal level between participants. The institutional dimension that involves taking official common positions between associative movements from various opposed camps could therefore emerge only marginally.

5.3. Mutual Understanding as a Prerequisite to Dialogue

a. Women motivation to dialogue

Initially, the idea of getting together around the same table has gained support from all participants.\(^\text{17}\) This reflects a view shared from the beginning by the entire group on the unavoidable necessity to talk, share, know each other and agree. This enthusiasm seems to have given crucial impetus to the success of the project. It served as a leitmotif throughout the Dialogue and helped move beyond some critical moments that could not possibly be avoided.

The tense political context that accompanied the progress of the Dialogue activities has also influenced this constructive willingness. All participants ascribe political violence to the inability of the ruling classes in the country to come to an agreement. Hence, there is a genuine willingness to give a concrete and constructive definition to the term “dialogue” that transcends partisan bickering. This willingness also reveals that all participants are sensitive to the cause of women in Tunisia. Although priorities as regards women’s rights may differ from one side to another, concerns about women’s socio-economic conditions are common and recurrent in all participants’ discourses.

It is noteworthy that this sense of ownership of women’s cause seems to have been more pronounced in the ranks of the representatives of Islam-inspired associations, probably due to their long absence from the associative and political scene. The representatives of “progressive” women’s associations seemed to be rather “curious” and they adopted – to varying degrees of course – a “wait-and-see” approach.

\(^\text{17}\) By “participants” we only consider the 13 women who have accomplished all the activities of the program. Besides, there’s only one participant who withdrew from the program since the first session as she did not accept “to dialogue” with her counterparts in the Dialogue.
Despite all this goodwill, the Dialogue could have stopped at the second session. Strong tensions that emerged right from the start, particularly in relation to the burden of the past and to stereotypes quickly diverted the attention of the participants.

b. Unveiling Differences, Dissipating Stereotypes

Frictions appearing at the beginning of the Dialogue have negatively influenced the participants’ perception of its potential success. All participants agree that accusations from both sides have seriously aggravated the situation. While recognizing the role of ideological or political factors, participants unanimously see these accusations as the consequence of negative and prejudiced perceptions that each side has developed on the other. According to them, prejudices may lead the opposite party to react negatively to facts or words that are not necessarily negative in themselves.

The majority of participants describe this experience as “disappointing”, considering their initial enthusiasm and hopes for mutual understanding. This feeling is even more widely shared among the youngest participants, for whom the culture of debate is still new and is not therefore associated with strong emotional content. Rolling the slope backward was quite challenging but easing tensions eventually played an important role in facilitating relations.

It turned out that these episodes of high pressure offered participants the opportunity to note – and later to avoid – points of view that were difficult to reconcile, and to identify their differences and thereby discover each other. It was, somehow, an unstated process of accountability, perhaps even a selective mechanism aimed at establishing the bases for a successful dialogue. Eventually, those difficult times have served to sensitize participants about their differences, on the one hand, and they helped establish the rules of the game for the rest of the Dialogue on the other hand. Participants of all stripes could thus take up the challenge of facing by themselves problems raised by diversity of opinions and nuances in disagreements.¹⁸

The relaxed mood that later accompanied the dialogue is, once again, to be put to the credit of the “human factor” and of personal relationships. Most of the time, the participants were keen on engaging in less formalized discussions outside the Dialogue activities. This was the opportunity for them to open up their hearts and confide which undeniably created a favorable climate for dialogue and exchange. In those exchanges, many among them came to discover that differences of opinion were more likely to express differences in form rather than in substance, and the positions eventually taken, all be it strong, were clearly more nuanced on both sides.

¹⁸ Some verbal aggressiveness has sometimes shown in the behavior of some participants.
The reconciliation process made possible by this Dialogue has benefited the participants and allowed the various parties to clarify their positions and correct misconceptions. This reconciliation – conducted in the personal sphere – failed however to make its way to an institutional level where what women were thinking and telling each other quietly could now be said out loud. In order to insure long-term progress for dialogue, it is necessary that what women perceived as “personal commonalities” be considered and referred to as “shared views” among the organizations they represent.

Even though a great step has been taken in this direction with the drafting of the “Joint Statement”, there still remains room for further thought and action. In that sense, 4 participants from all sides expressed reserves about the “Joint Statement” which stopped at the “level of principles” instead of discussing specific actions to undertake that could imply institutional commitment from each organization participating in the Dialogue. From these participants’ points of view, joint actions may have included for example, campaigning in rural areas to sustain women’s economic rights or possible lobbying in the National Constitutional Assembly in order to design specific laws to address violence against women.

c. Enhancing Mutual Respect

Baseline data show that since the very first sessions of the Dialogue all participants tended to identify respect with non-aggressive verbal exchange. Indeed, 9 out of 9 completed baseline questionnaires clearly refer to such an attitude which is confirmed by the ex post interviews with 13 out of 13 participants identifying the non-aggressive attitude as the only mark of respect when the Dialogue started. As such, and despite occasional episodes of strong tensions, this perception lead women to declare they considered themselves to have been respected by their colleagues throughout the Dialogue. However, as the program evolved all women, with one exception, tended to expand the content of “respect” to include participants’ ability to (i) avoid reductive/dismissive attitudes towards their opponents in debates, (ii) present their own views without fearing any reaction based on stereotypes and (iii) respond to others’ opinions with sincerity. If respect is defined in these terms then the program has helped enhancing mutual respect among participants.19

For most of the participants, the perception of respect by others is not clearly separated from the more general belief of mutual consideration. As a participant put it, “Aren’t we told that ‘Respect is earned!’?” In fact, “acceptance of the other” was relation-based rather than driven by acceptance of differences. Thus, the establishment of respect tends to be informed by the personality and profile of participants (their speaking skills, educational competences, ease

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19 There is only one woman who felt not respected by the rest of the group. She holds regional considerations may be lying behind the lack of respect she perceived. However, she recognizes some personal reasons which may have hampered her from getting actively involved in discussions.
and effectiveness in tackling some subjects, sociability etc...) rather than by any genuine consideration for what the other’s ideas and actions represent.

As a consequence, one should consider that throughout the Dialogue “good listening”, “understanding” and “respect” appear to be the fruit of friendly social interaction that emerged in the Dialogue rather than the result of exchanges that “inspire confidence”. Moreover, the question of “respect for others” as understood by the participants is tightly related to this continuous quest for self-positioning on their part. On the one hand, the representatives of Islamist associations seem more interested than others in expressing their points of view, making themselves known, showing that their ideas / beliefs, in addition to their character, are not “what others believe” they are, and that they represent no threat. Such associations are keen on showing that one can be “Islamist” and "progressive” at the same time. In doing so, they tend to invest more in being heard than in hearing what their sisters may say.

On the other hand, participants representing the “secular” movement prove more willing to adopt a “wait-and-see” position, with little initiative-taking and openness to the others. It is true that they do not fail to assert their opinions, but this usually occurs as a reaction to opinions expressed by the opposite side. Besides, they want to show in turn that being “progressive” does not exclude being a believer. However, this back-seat position, among other things, prevented them from showing in any convincing way the ideological diversity that drives them. In the rare occasions where some of the “secular camp” participants got involved, the expressed ideas did not rise above the personal level. “It is you that is different from other colleagues in your association!” it was argued.

In principle, “acceptance of differences” was required by all participants. However, the reservations they raised may show that they probably have difficulty in accepting such differences themselves. Therefore, more than an intrinsic condition to constructive dialogue, respect seems to have been perceived as a “rational” method to convey their own message.

In order to help participants “understand each other” and “develop tolerance” the Women Dialogue included many trust-building activities. However, trust and respect are linked concepts and as a participant stated, “respect does entail sincerity” Although the program helped participants from both sides dissolve many personal misunderstandings and enhance respect among them, the interviews reveal that building trust and accepting differences need yet to be developed. As two prominent leaders from secular and faith-based NGOs best put it: “the participants may have learnt to respect persons but they still need to learn to respect their ideas”.

d. Uncovering Common Grounds Concerns

The process followed by participants to reach “common ground” shows that they sought areas of consensus first through “elimination” and then through “discussion”. All women declare that over time the Dialogue has established a climate that is strongly in favor of exchange – which clearly promoted the quest for “common grounds”. This was the result of a long-sought approach even by the SFCG staff that gave good results, in as much as it helped reduce tensions and ensured the smooth conduct of the project.
All participants are unanimous in recognizing that the dignity of Tunisian women has now become a cause to defend. They even go further and provide a shared content to this “dignity” in terms of rights – such as women’s right to provide financial resources, women’s right to participate in political and social life, women’s right to non-discrimination, women’s right to be protected against violence.

This process did not fail to arouse feelings of surprise from all sides throughout the Dialogue. Islamist participants found out that “progressive” women's motivations can also be inspired by interpretations of the religious texts and that they do not necessarily come from an “international” approach to women's rights. For their part, “progressive” women “discovered” that the other side held much less “conservative” positions than they believed, and this led one of the “progressives” to declare: “We are all feminists ... but the other “camp” women do not confess it.” As a result, although participants were able to recognize from the beginning the existence of shared values, the Dialogue allowed them to develop their own ideas on these values, which resulted in greater agreement between participants.

Figure 1. Shared policy goals

Interviews with participants indicate that this “common ground” goes beyond the mere “statement of principles” and that there is a genuine good will to address these issues. In addition, on all matters of contention, including those accompanied by strong emotional ballasts – such as CEDAW or the issue of inheritance – differences are subtler and less dogmatic than what is commonly assumed. It is therefore not surprising that all participants see the consensus that has emerged - and which is marked by the “Joint Statement” - as a “natural” outcome of the discussions held and of the discovery of each other rather than the result of negotiations leading inevitably to concessions.

In addition, two prominent representatives from both sides did not hesitate to assert that they would have liked the “Joint Statement” to include more concrete aspects of the topics addressed and even commitments of their own associations to perform actions. Given this positive ground, the Dialogue could have had greater effect if certain aspects were more
12 out of 13 participants state that “Listening to” and “Being heard by” others was the most important lesson they learnt from the Dialogue

“Nothing prevents me from holding different views from other Islamist women and being closer to the ‘left’ or ‘progressive’ views” (I)

Over time, all participants declare they mostly understand and respect the beliefs of one perspective from the extreme group

thoroughly detailed for the joint actions to be undertaken. The agreements reached on various topics and the drafting of the Joint Statement have instilled in the consciousness of virtually all participants that dialogue, in addition to being desirable and necessary, is thought-provoking and it produces results. There remains the question of operationalization at the institutional level. While it needs to be developed, this necessary step may benefit from the solid basis of understanding that was triggered by the program and build on it.

5.4. The Way to Positive Dialogue

a. Promoting Constructive Discourse

We consider “constructive discourse” as the practice of (i) shared understanding of particular topics, (ii) elaborating participants’ own arguments on those topics, (iii) being receptive to others’ arguments and (iv) avoiding negative attitudes. The program clearly increased women’s capacities for constructive discourse as a whole even though it shows different effects on each of these aspects depending on the participants’ ideological background. Indeed, interviews with participants reveal that the perception of constructive discourse depends on the expectations each participant had from the Dialogue.

“I was persuaded that I would succeed in making them think differently about me as a person and about what they consider to be my ideology!” (I)

“I was eager to find out about their views!” (M)

Over time, all participants declare they mostly understand and respect the beliefs of one perspective from the extreme group

In the beginning, in their continuous attempts to seek recognition, participants representing Islamist faith-driven NGOs assumed themselves to be “at the front of the stage”. They argue people have a lot of wrong perceptions on Islamist NGOs and looked at the Dialogue as an opportunity for them to present their case with no bias. It is frequent to hear them say they "could surely" convince “secular” NGOs representatives of their sincerity, their good faith and dissipate any fear based on fallacious interpretation of Islam principles. By spending their energy on such “a mission”, they tended to take a leading position in discussions which drove them to pay less attention to others’ arguments. On the opposite side, participants from the “modernist” NGOs played a somewhat less active role on the ground that it was up to Islamists to clarify their positions. They felt sometimes under pressure due to Islamists’ claims of secularists’ allegiance to the former regime. What some considered as a need for a critical self-evaluation exercise was negatively perceived by others as an arrogant position.

Despite this early uncomfortable attitude on both sides, the program succeeded in developing women’s capacity to listen to opposite ideas as all women declared that over time, they have

20 There is no widely accepted definition of “constructive discourse”. However, following discussions with SFCG staff, we consider that these 3 aspects reflect the objectives and the activities of the Dialogue with regard to constructive discourse.
felt increasingly more receptive to others’ opposite opinions. It is worth noting that this aspect is also contingent upon personal experience. Women with confirmed communication skills such as teachers or lawyers show greater capacity and more readiness over time to reach agreement on subjects of dispute.

“Shared understanding” of the topics discussed during the Dialogue session has captured particular attention throughout the program. Indeed, all women agree that their understanding of other women’s positions improved over time. This issue has been, to a great extent, settled from the first two sessions of the Dialogue when discussions turned sometimes into heated debates that were difficult to handle. At these occasions, participants were able to gauge each other and “screen” the topics they should avoid. At this point, this “shared understanding” resulted more likely from personal relationship that most participants could forge than from any specific Dialogue’s training activities aiming to raise women’s awareness as regards constructive discourse. Whatever the influence of each of these components, it is worth noting that the Dialogue created an environment conducive to open-minded exchanges between participants.

Particular attention has to be paid to the issue of increasing participants’ ability to be receptive to others’ arguments. Most of the time women consider this issue as naturally originating in the “listening” process and tend to merge both of them into a much larger and vague attitude of “gaining respect”. Moreover, being receptive to others’ perspective requires participants to show eagerness – or gain awareness of the need – to challenge themselves and it seems that this has not been the case. Only two participants clearly mentioned that “questioning themselves” was one of the motivations for them to join the Dialogue. They recognized the Dialogue made them change their opinions on subjects where they apparently lacked any sound knowledge. In this sense, further efforts are needed in order to make women acquire skills in critical self-evaluation.

b. Improving Personal Relationships

Improving personal relationship has been one of the greatest achievements of the Program. It was all the more important that the execution of the Program depended on and largely benefited from the successful relations that were established or consolidated during the Program. Despite heterogeneity in group formation – the vast majority of participants did not know each other – a common language could be established between women, not without effort. This relationship that some will not hesitate to attach to “complicity” could be developed only at the personal sphere however – where affinities were discovered. The second level – relating to opportunities for collaboration that ought to be developed during and after the Dialogue – remains insufficiently developed.

Referring to their personal experience, all participants agree that coming close to each other is a process that takes time. Initially, some form of
distrust hampered initiatives to build relationships especially between two ideologically-opposed groups. This explains that some women’s integration in the group was conditioned by ideological affinities, while participants who do not claim to belong to any particular movement, especially the younger ones, could be more easily integrated in the group. On certain occasions, these young “unaffiliated” women served even as “unstated bridges” between “progressive” and “Islamist” sides, thus contributing to the participants’ discovery of each other.

In a more general way, the diversity of age-categories in the group seems to have been a catalyst for closer relations between participants. This is partly due to lesser emotional involvement in debates but most importantly, it allowed the entire group to see beyond prejudices and appearances. Over time, this led to the development of a peaceful climate favorable to exchange. For most participants in the Dialogue, these relationships were maintained even after the end of the program.

**Figure 2. Working together...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of participants who clearly advert at least one topic they would like to work at with women of a different political background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ex post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex ante *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* based on 9 completed baseline questionnaires

However, these personal relationships have failed to make it to the institutional level. Only two associations representing different parties in the group were able to establish a joint program of activities, while another association should join. This collaboration has also materialized in groups reputed to be more starkly opposed, with a representative of an association of Islamic inspiration being invited by AFTURD²¹, a secular association, to participate in a seminar on legacy, one of the most sensitive topics.

This episode is particularly significant. Indeed, while it takes an institutional appearance, this exchange is the result of efforts deployed by one participant in the Dialogue, who had to face within her own association reluctance and prejudices from her own colleagues. This indicates

²¹ Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement (Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development).
that we can build on constructive personal relationships to broaden the spectrum of collaboration between associations of different ideological tendencies.22

5.5. Operationalizing the Women Dialogue

All participants recognize that over time, the Dialogue turned into a friendly space of exchange to which they attribute the success of the project. In their opinion, such a success could be viewed, among other things, in the “Joint Statement” drafted at the end of the Dialogue. That declaration is experienced by all women with a sense of “pride”, as the “crowning/culmination” of their efforts to show that dialogue is possible. However, it should be noted that at the end, this “unity in the speech” could not completely resist underlying prejudices.23

All participants had the opportunity to share this experience with members of their associations. To varying degrees, they found great ownership within their associations as regards the principles affirmed in the JS. Other participants had the opportunity to report this declaration to their partners in civil society in Tunisia and abroad. However, for most of them, it constitutes only one step and “initiatives” for the realization of the Statement should be considered.

At this level, two courses of action recur frequently namely, (i) awareness-raising of other actors in civil society of the success of the Dialogue and (ii) organization of joint activities between associations. It should be noted that with respect to “initiatives”, participants have shown some form of passivity. They indeed seemed to be more excited about the SFCG involvement than about their personal commitment to promoting the “Dialogue” as a shared space for advocacy. Moreover, only one initiative of collaboration between associations has arisen as a result of the Dialogue. While all participants remain enthusiastic about the opportunities for collaboration, no clear ideas as to what form this may take have yet emerged.

All women remain convinced that the Dialogue experience deserves greater outreach and needs to be widely publicized. They believe the Dialogue example could act as a catalyst to raise people’s awareness that mutual understanding and agreement between people with opposing ideas, although not an easy task, are within everyone’s reach. When asked about how they figure out future common actions to ensure the continuity of the Dialogue, all participants remain evasive. They mostly sustain that SFCG should continue its role as initiator in building initiatives such as for example, enlarging the Women Dialogue group towards other NGOs, or implementing actions on the ground which may involve the NGOs that participated in the Dialogue. In this regard, most

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22 A casual event the evaluator was faced with is worth noting here. The interview of one of the participants from a very influential leftist NGO took place the day the NGO organized a panel on the CEDAW convention. It came out that none of the Islamist-inspired NGOs was invited to the event.

23 In fact, in the closing ceremony of the Dialogue, there were some apprehensions concerning the participants to read out the “Joint Statement”. For instance, the suggestion of an Islamist-NGO representative was seen by women from the “progressive” camp as an attempt to regain the Dialogue for political ends.
participants, in particular those from the back country, view the need for conflict resolution capacity-building as of great relevance to promote dialogue. However, they still consider SFCG as a key actor in taking initiatives to scale up the Dialogue.

As a result, more than two months after the Dialogue ended, interviews reveal that despite an enthusiastic attitude towards the overall achievements of the program, the participants do not seem to be committed in proactive actions that may allow for long-term sustainability of the program’s effectiveness. As a participant warned at the beginning of the Dialogue: “the only threat I can see is that once the Dialogue is over people turn back to their former attitudes.” Indeed, participants are taking no personal initiatives/actions to scale up the Program.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The great motivation of virtually all participants has been a fundamental guarantee for the pursuit of activities and made the program reach many of its objectives. Motivation as basic component of the program is reflected through (i) participants’ awareness of the usefulness of the dialogue and (ii) their willingness to reach agreement beyond ideological divides. Despite personal ideology-driven motivations, the participants have felt responsible to take up the challenge of succeeding despite the overall conflict context of the country. This conflict acted as a stimulus for the participants to demonstrate the power the dialogue.

The burden of this “perceived” responsibility seems to have retained the overall attention of participants. From the participants’ standpoint, it was critical for the program not to fail and to make the case that a common space for dialogue could always be found. This concern represented a good incentive for participants to avoid problematic topics which used all their energy in building interpersonal relationships, easing mutual exchange in order to agree on common issues and achieve many of the program’s objectives. However, the way the Dialogue unfolded was somewhat driven by this constant concern of seeking consensus rather than building consensus through a sound, trust-based, mutual recognition and institutional-level process which may guarantee long-term effectiveness of the program. This is likely to be the reason behind the missing effects of some of the constructive discourse components such as positive attitude and self-analysis, mainly due to the participants’ focus on final results rather than on the process that should lead to them.

Notwithstanding the consensus that the Dialogue gave rise to, “institutional commitment” is missing. Such a commitment is fundamental to ensure the spreading of the culture of dialogue and decrease polarization between extremes beyond a limited personal dimension.

The Women Dialogue program’s achievements need to be fostered in order to guarantee the long-term effectiveness of the program through the actions SFCG may undertake including:

- Call greater public attention to the issues raised in the Dialogue through local media, involving prominent CSO leaders that have participated in the Dialogue. Participants in the Dialogue mostly recognize the interest people around them show to the Dialogue. In general, they remain extremely enthusiastic about this experience but they ignore how they can act to “spread the word” more effectively. None of the participants was able to

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24 It is worth noting here that as far as we know, this is the very first experience of such a kind to have succeeded. There have been some other initiatives like Women Dialogue carried out by other NGOs such as CREDIF which had many drawbacks and stopped.
suggest any concrete action to undertake in that direction without referring to the SFCG role as a “key player” in taking initiatives.

- Build on the commonalities that spurred out from the Dialogue and focus on less-consensual issues that mostly draw public attention. The Dialogue has revealed that even the most sensitive issues raising strong emotional or ideological reactions should be considered as brought about by lack of knowledge or by prevailing prejudices rather than reflecting any sound differences between the two opposite sides. In other words, by “uncovering common grounds” the Dialogue has created a suitable environment for further discussions on sensitive topics that have potentially broader impact.

- Need to address more effectively the balance between the institutional and the personal dimensions of the participants in such an activity. Indeed, in order to guarantee long-term effectiveness, the Dialogue has to reach the institutional level. However, the Women Dialogue suggests that participants were more willing to reach tempered agreement on an informal, relationship-driven basis but they tended to harden their positions when it came to representing their organizations.

- Address NGOs need for capacity-development in communication, trust-building and conflict resolution. 6 participants in the Dialogue clearly referred to their lack of training on these topics.
The “Women Dialogue” Program - Final Evaluation Report

7. Appendices

7.1. Mapping non-State Violence in Tunisia

### 7.2. Summary of Follow-up Evaluation Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator value (at the end of the program)</th>
<th>Observations on potential program effect *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Number of women CSO leaders who understand the positions and beliefs on one perspective from the extreme groups</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Virtually all participants declare that over time the dialogue helped them increase their awareness on these specific issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Number of women CSO leaders who respect the positions and beliefs on one perspective from the extreme groups</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Number of women CSO leaders who believe that dialogue is an important tool in the current Tunisian context</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Number of women CSO leaders who accept to work with women’s CSO of a different political/religious background</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Number of common issues among women’s groups raised at each dialogue session and at the end of the program</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Number of women CSO leaders who believe that the participants from a different background share similar values with them</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>All participants declare that over time the dialogue helped them increase their awareness on these specific issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Number of women CSO leaders who believe that they share similar policy goals with the participants from a different background</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>In the beginning, most of the participants could hardly perceive any common policy goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Number of joint statements describing shared values, analysis of problems and policy recommendations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participants agreed on a “Joint statement” at the end of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Number of women CSO leaders who acknowledge a degree of nuance and variation among different political/religious beliefs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>All participants declare that over time the dialogue helped them increase their awareness on these specific issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Number of women CSO leaders who can list one positive relationship that they have with a person from a different political/religious background</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>All participants recognize that over time the program facilitated personal relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Number of women CSO leaders who attended an event held by a different political/religious group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Events held during the program activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on interviews and/or comparison with any baseline information available*
7.3. **Interview Guide**

1. What motivated you the most to participate in the “Women Dialogue” Program?
2. In your position (as executive director of an organization), did you ever have the opportunity to participate in a debate/discussion with people who do not share your views on a given subject and/or are totally opposed to yours? What were those topics?
   a. How important was the scope of your divergences in the debates? Was it a public debate or a private discussion?
   b. To what extent were you accepted? How did you feel/react to others’ ways of expressing themselves? (Elaborate on trust, understanding differences, respect to others’ views etc…)
   c. How important was the gap between diverging opinions in the debate? During these discussions, did you find any shared points of view? (Elaborate on values, perception of differences and nuances, etc…)

**Evaluator’s note: Hereafter, questions have to be asked with clear reference to changes regarding the pre-program perceptions**

3. To what extent are your personal or professional relationships affected by discussions with persons whose opinions differ from yours? (Tolerance and acceptance of differences)
4. Suppose that you are having a discussion with someone who does not share your opinions (or strongly disagrees with you). What aspects of the discussion interest you the most?
5. During the “Women Dialogue” program you made the acquaintance of participants from different backgrounds, with various professional, social or political status.
   a. To what extent did the proximity of your shared opinions facilitate integration into this group? How did this evolve during the program?
   b. On what topics did you hold different opinions from theirs or find that your opinions were not compatible? What was the level of disagreement? Did you have the opportunity to broach your opinions on a one-to-one basis? Did your/their opinion change somewhat? (Perception of difference of opinions; respect of others’ opinions; perception of levels of agreement depending on personal/informal vs formal/institutional discussion).
   c. How would you define a “conflict debate/situation” (personal/verbal attacks, rejection…)? Do you think that there was a conflict between you and other participants? What are the reasons? (Because of the difference of opinions? of prevailing stereotyped image of the other? etc.)
   d. What are the values you seemed to share with the other participants in the group? Did you discuss about them? Do the other participants share your opinions on those values? Did you feel they accepted the concept as much as you did? Did you understand their points of view? Do you believe that the other participants understood yours? Do you believe it was just a question of kindness, of good social behavior, of education rather than the willingness to understand others’ opinions?
6. What were the subjects on which the dialogue helped you the most? (Which ones to a lesser degree?)
7. In the present situation, do you believe that entering into dialogue with people whose interests/opinions are different/opposite is necessary? Unavoidable? Open to all topics?
8. How do you react when faced with arguments that seem to be totally opposite to yours? (Find some examples of divergent speeches to which the person reacted or had to make up her own mind even during television/radio debates).
9. Do you think that opinions opposed to yours (including those expressed during the “Women Dialogue” program) are all identical or do differences appear? Are there any concordant ideas?

10. Upon completion of “Women Dialogue” activities, you and your colleagues have written a “Joint Statement” on shared values.
   a. Do you think that your opinions have been clearly reflected? Do you think that the other participants have been as (dis)satisfied as you have been? To what extent do you perceive this common declaration as the result of concessions made from all participants?
   b. Have you shared this declaration with others? (Your NGO’s staff, other organizations, political parties, events…) What means did you use? (Mailing list, social networks, talked to media, posted in the offices…) If not, why?

11. Since you have participated in this dialogue, have you been invited to an event organized by the other participants’ organizations or by other organizations whose opinions differ from yours?

12. Have you kept in touch with participants in “Women Dialogue” that had opinions/convictions different from yours?

13. Should you be invited, are you ready/willing to work with organizations/individuals having political/religious convictions different from yours?

14. What is your reaction to speeches that appear to be incompatible with yours?

15. How do you conceive the possibility of the “Women Dialogue” follow-up and/or other similar programs? What do you think you mostly need in order to enhance your capacities to enter into dialogue?
### Evaluation Framework/Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation criteria</th>
<th>Evaluation topic</th>
<th>Mutual understanding/respect</th>
<th>Mutual Relationship</th>
<th>Constructive discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>$I_1$ $I_2$ $I_3$ $I_6$ $I_7$ $I_9$ $I_4$ $I_{10}$ $I_{11}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The topic emerged clearly/spontaneously during the interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular need for the evaluator to reframe/summarize</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participant is able to provide examples/direct references to support her opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participant is able to elaborate on her opinion (why? how?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participant avoids contradictory/confusing/hesitating purposes on the topic throughout the interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participant’s opinion applies to “most of the participants” (or “most of the time”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participant clearly refers to/elaborate on perceived personal change in relation with the topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The evaluator holds any baseline information on the participant’s views related to the topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### General observations
### 7.5. List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Participant (interviewee)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Association Tounissiet</td>
<td>Monia Bouali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Association Nissa Tounissiet</td>
<td>Ibtihel Abedeltif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Association Femme et Citoyennet</td>
<td>Ghofran Béchawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Association Amal pour la Famille et l’Enfant</td>
<td>Monia Garci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche</td>
<td>Samia Lteif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail</td>
<td>Akri Balti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Association Voix d’Eve</td>
<td>Jannette Kaddachi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tunisian Association of Management and Social Stability</td>
<td>Fethia Jwabria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Forum Tunisien des Droits Economiques et Sociaux</td>
<td>Mounira Balghouthi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Association Mères des Martyres</td>
<td>Meriem Tabbabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Association La Femme Libre</td>
<td>Mouna Hadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Chambre Nationale des Femmes Chefs d’Entreprises</td>
<td>Faiza Chabchoub Chaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Association Nisaa El feth</td>
<td>Naziha Messadi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD)</td>
<td>Bochra Bel Haj Hamida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Dialogue facilitator, Member of the Steering Committee, Former Chair of the ATFD)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
7.6. Baseline Questionnaire

Entretiens individuelles

2ème session de dialogue El Hambra 06 et 07 septembre

1-Les sentiments/Compréhension

Question 1: Quelles sont les croyances de l’autre groupe? D’après vous pourquoi il pense ainsi?

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Question 2: Vous vous sentez respectée par les autres participantes?

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Avez-vous appris de nouvelles choses des autres femmes ou sur elles?

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Question 3: Quelles sont les valeurs que vous avez identifiées chez les autres femmes? Sont-elles différentes des vôtres?

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Y a-t-il des valeurs communes que vous partagez? si oui lesquelles?

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Si non pourquoi?
Question 4 : Y a-t-il quelque chose qui vous a surpris dans l’échange avec les femmes ?

Avez-vous appris de nouvelles choses des autres ?

Pouvez-vous nous en parler ?

Question 5 : Avez-vous réussi à construire une relation positive avec une des participantes ?

Avez-vous réussi à construire une relation positive avec une participante très différente de vous ? Parlez-moi de cette relation
2-Comportement

**Question 6 :** Combien d'événements avez-vous assisté au cours des deux derniers mois, organisé par une association différente de la vôtre ?

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**Question 7 :** Avez-vous mis en place des événements où vous avez invité des femmes d’autres associations différentes (participantes dans ce dialogue) ?

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**Question 8 :** Vous trouvez que c’est intéressant de rencontrer différentes femmes de différents backgrounds et de différents horizons ?

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Si Non pourquoi ?

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D’après vous aura-il une collaboration entre différentes associations présentes hors le projet de dialogue ? Comment ?

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**Question 9 :** Partagez-vous des objectifs stratégiques avec des femmes ?

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Lesquels ?

Si non pourquoi ?

Question 9 : Si vous étiez program manager, qu’est ce que vous faites d’une façon différente ?

Question 10 : Avez-vous exprimé votre point de vue avec liberté et franchise ?

Question 11 : D’après vous quels sont les risques sur le dialogue ?
7.7. Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Final Evaluation
“Women Dialogue” by
Search for Common Ground-Tunisia

Search for Common Ground-Tunisia seeks an experienced evaluator to carry out a mid-term evaluation of its project “Women Dialogue.”

Context and Background

Organizational Background
Since 1982, Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organization, has been working to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial confrontation, toward cooperative solutions. SFCG is engaged in a long-term process of incremental transformation, so we make long-term commitments. We work with partners on the ground to strengthen local capacity to deal with conflict. SFCG currently has offices in 30 countries. Our “toolbox” includes mediation/facilitation training, common ground journalism, radio/TV, drama, and music.

Search for Common Ground-Tunisia is working in the post-revolutionary context to help members of Tunisian society approach conflicts and differences in a constructive manner, through cooperation and dialogue. SFCG- Tunisia is working through multiple channels, primarily with youth and women in 14 governorates CSO representatives, the Tunisian media sector, and local public officials, to build the capacity of individuals and institutions to approach challenges by understanding differences and acting on commonalities.

Project Summary
Women’s issues civil society organizations: Women’s rights are a major source of political conflict, drawing impassioned responses from religious conservatives, hardliners, and secularists alike, as evidenced by the recent acrimonious national debate over the language about women’s status in the constitution. Due to the tensions between Islamist, Salafist, and secularist (or (ultra) conservative and progressive) CSOs that work on women’s rights/women-centered humanitarian/family issues, these CSOs rarely interact across the ideological divide despite broad areas of probable agreement. Where there is interaction, fears of the other’s vision for Tunisia, stereotypes and defensiveness impede cooperation and understanding.

Considering that women CSO’s are all in key positions to influence national politics, since previously their ability to engage in the political sphere was undermined or their voices censored.
Now, during this time of change, they are seeking new ways to play prominent roles within Tunisian society and politics, but they have few models of civil discourse available to them. The dialogue approach aimed to address several of the major factors contributing to conflict between groups such as the leftist and the Islamist women CSO groups, Islamist organizations, and secularist parties and CSOs. Through this project, SFCG has helped empower these women groups to make positive change and diminish political polarization by promoting a model of constructive dialogue.

The proposed project has built upon SFCG’s established presence on the ground in 14 governorates.

**Evaluation criteria**

**Evaluation Objectives**

The intended study is a final evaluation to explore how the project was implemented, and to what extent the project objectives were achieved. Specifically, the evaluation seeks to evaluate whether and how the training increased skills in inclusive dialogue, mutual acceptance and conflict management and how this training, and dialogue sessions facilitated constructive engagement of women CSO’s across the ideological divides:

1. Evaluating the **effectiveness** of the project
   a. To what degree has the project equipped women with skills in inclusive, common ground dialogue?
   b. To what degree have the project activities contributed to improved relationships between targeted women CSO’s leaders relationships and mutual understanding?

2. Evaluating the **relevance** of the project activities to the overall conflict context
   a. To what degree do the women participants see the Women Dialogue as a useful way to achieve their advocacy objectives on women’s issues?

3. Evaluating the **sustainability** of the project over the long term.
   a. Are women CSO’s representatives utilizing the skills they have acquired and in what capacity?
   b. To what degree have the women CSO’s representatives taken steps toward long term sustainability? What is their vision beyond the end of the project?
   c. What kind of support is most needed to empower the women CSO representatives to constructively collaborate moving forward?

The evaluation will also provide a clear measure of each of the following indicators:

- Number of women's issues CSOs from across a diverse spectrum, including extremes on the left and right (e.g. hard line secularists and Salafists represented in the series of dialogue sessions (on average per session)
• Percentage change of participants’ understanding and respect for other participants’ positions and beliefs
• Percentage change in participants responding “all” or “most” to the question “how many of my fellow participants share many important values with me?”
• Number of major points of common ground identified through dialogue process (in areas such as advocacy goals, shared values, etc.)
• Percentage change in participants responding “all” or “most” to the question “how many of my fellow participants share many important policy goals with me?”
• Participants produce document of joint statements of shared values, an analysis of the problems and concrete policy recommendations on issues discussed during dialogue (yes/no)
• Number of public officials and other key decision-makers who read the joint statement
• Number of Youtube, in-person, or other views of the short film about the dialogue process
• Percent of outreach event attendees who believe that dialogue between people/groups of different ideologies is a useful or worthwhile tool
• Percentage change of women’s issues CSO’s understanding and respect for other stakeholders’ positions and beliefs, including for at least one perspective from the extremes (e.g. Salafists or leftists)
• Percentage change in stakeholders who believe that constructive dialogue is an important tool in the current Tunisian context

Audience

The primary audience of this evaluation is Search for Common Ground. The result will be used to shape future projects with Women rights CSO’s in Tunisia.

3 Evaluation Methodology

Approach: The SFCG approach to evaluation is grounded in the guiding principles of our work: participatory; culturally sensitive; committed to building capacity; affirming and positive while honest and productively critical and valuing knowledge and approaches from within the context. SFCG and the hired evaluator will agree upon a joint set of evaluation standards when negotiating the final contract of agreement.

SFCG will engage an external consultant to evaluate the effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of the implementation of the Women Dialogue project. The evaluator should take a collaborative approach with the SFCG team in order to develop and refine the evaluation methodology.

Scope: The evaluation will be based in Tunis, Tunisia and will focus on data collection from women CSO project participants and SFCG staff.
Methodology: The evaluation will be entirely qualitative. SFCG will not concentrate on statistical significance for this evaluation.

The evaluation will draw on the following sources:

1. Data from the baseline questionnaire
2. All of the documentation collected during the project activities
3. Project proposal and quarterly reports
4. Targeted interviews with all women’s CSO participants
5. Interviews of SFCG programme staff to assess the implementation of the program, further contextualize the responses of women CSO’s representatives.

This information will be collected from the evaluator directly. The Search for Common Ground project team will provide regular assistance, including logistical support.

At the beginning of the evaluation period, a detailed plan will be constructed and finalized with the consultation of the SFCG Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation staff. The plan should take the following principles into account:

- **Inclusiveness**—the methodology should include a wide range of viewpoints.
- **Testing the theory of change**—specific data needs to be generated by the methodology which addresses the theory of change.
- **Rigor of evidence**—gathered information needs to be reliable and transparent
- **Unexpected impacts**—the methodology needs to include techniques which assess planned and unplanned impacts.
- **Ethics**—the methodology needs to consider ethics in order to insure that the evaluation is fully objective.

The evaluation must not only follow SFCG’s guiding principles, but also comply with the OECD DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.

Scope of Work

Location

This evaluation will take place in Tunis. The finalized analysis and report writing will take place in Tunisia.
Deliverables

- An evaluation plan detailing a proposed methodology and written evaluation tools
- A draft evaluation report for review by SFCG staff and other stakeholders
- A Final Report of maximum 20 pages in length (excluding appendices) that consists of:
  - Executive summary of key findings and recommendations
  - Table of contents
  - Conflict context
  - Methodology
  - Research findings, analysis, and conclusions with associated data presented, where appropriate in clear graphs or charts
  - Recommendations for future action
  - Appendices, which include collected data, detailed description of the methodology with research instruments, list of interviewees, bibliography, and evaluator(s) brief biography
- The full report should be in English.

SFCG will exercise no editorial control over the final evaluation report.

Duration & Deadlines
The contact will cover the period from March 29 - April 30 through (REPORT DEADLINE)

Logistical Support

SFCG will provide preparatory and logistical assistance to the evaluator, which include:
1. Background materials (project proposal, meeting notes, reports, et cetera)
2. Meeting, phone, email communication
3. Qualitative documentation of project activities
4. Interviewees (and their contact information)
5. Technical assistance
6. Field visit logistics (e.g., travel cost)
7. Meeting arrangements with stakeholders and beneficiaries
8. Assistance in logistics by SFCG Team Members
The Evaluation Team

Evaluator’s Role

The evaluation will be conducted by an individual managed by the Program Manager, Ikram Said, and the regional DME Specialist, Kelsi Stine. The evaluator will be expected to design the data collection tools, and to conduct interviews as described in the methodology. They will also analyze all collected data and write a final report be submitted to the SFCG-Tunisia office.

Evaluator Competencies

SFCG seeks an experienced evaluator with the following qualifications:

- Proficiency in Arabic, French and English.
- More than 5 years of experience in project evaluation or the equivalent in DM&E expertise, including collecting data in interviews, surveys and focus groups
- Experience working with international organizations
- Strong communication and writing skills
- Understanding of and experience working with women and engagement in dialogue
- Understanding of and experience working in the post-revolutionary context of Tunisia.
- Evaluation methods and data collection skills
- Ability to be flexible with time and work schedule
- Available for future evaluation contracts with SFCG
- Conflict resolution/peacebuilding experience