

## **Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on the Agricultural Sector Investment Program**

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### **Relevance**

Situated in a semi-arid zone, Tunisia has fought a long "battle for water." Ancient aqueducts, Arab-Muslim cisterns, and the irrigation system in the oases of southern Tunisia all attest to this constant fight.

The PISA project is thus in line with the country's traditions in setting out to mobilize surface water in hill dams, to improve rural water supply, and drill exploratory wells, especially in rural regions. In keeping with the scope of development plans, the project will aim to improve the utilization of the country's modest water supply, to better manage the irrigation sector, to exploit subsurface water sources, and to safeguard and enrich the environment. Supported by JBIC, this policy is likewise backed by the World Bank.

### **Impact**

*Hill dams*, have altered the traditional landscape of some regions and have hence allowed a form of agriculture more suited to modern times. They have responded to the need to conserve water and soil, and have increased the area of irrigated land. Agricultural production has been expanded and diversified in most of the areas that benefited. Farmers now grow staple foods (potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, and watermelons) as well as tobacco. An equally strong effort has been made in terms of conservation and reforestation (i.e. at Moussa Cham, one the visited sites). Overall, productivity increased approximately 30%. Quality of life has been measurably improved, most notably by electrification, which accompanied the realization of the project; the reduced incidence of water-borne diseases is also evident. The public authorities (particularly the Ministry of Agriculture) have proven themselves vigilant in regularly monitoring silt and in protecting hillside basins from solid run-off to guarantee a long lifespan for the reservoirs.

*Rural water supply efforts* (the running costs of which have been reduced by nearly 50%) have improved service rates in relevant zones, creating change on a national scale. It will be interesting to quantify this improvement in view of the project.

*Finally, exploratory wells*, a large percentage of which are usable, have provided a better understanding of the sources of the country's subsurface water supply.

### **Conclusion**

This project, part of a larger plan to effect change by 2030, is one example of how Tunisia is modernizing its agricultural base. Japan has done very well to lend its support. The project's success assures a great deal of visibility for Japan among the Tunisian people who are enjoying the benefits. The process may seem slow, as much in its realization—and particularly in light of four consecutive years of drought—as in its current functioning, but this is completely normal considering the Mediterranean mentality and tempo. Only very recently finished, these public works will tap into numerous users. An effort is now being made to sensitize and train farmers. Essentially, however, this form of cooperation has been fruitful and has responded to the needs of the rural population.