المرصد التونسي للاقتصاد
Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie

For the right to water and food sovereignty in Tunisia

The evaluation of the water footprint for a revision of agricultural and commercial policies

The Tunisian Observatory of Economy underlines the negative impact on the availability and quality of water resources, which can have the Tunisian policies of export of agricultural products.

“ The liberalisation of trade...“

In response to the crisis of the 1980s, the IMF and the WB imposed a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) on the government in 1986 as a solution to the crisis and a condition for the granting of a financial loan. This program implied the liberalization of foreign trade, which was to become even more pronounced with the accession of most North African countries to the GATT (Mauritania (1963), Egypt (1970), Morocco (1987) and Tunisia (1((1990 , and then to the WTO and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in 1995.

[1] OMC | Renseignements sur l'Organisation - gatt (wto.org)
[2] Chafik Ben Rouine, "Historique des relations commerciales Tunisie-UE : L'heure du désenchantement ?", Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie, avril 2017, p.1.

Post-SAP trade volume

The SAP has almost tripled the volume of trade of Tunisia between the early and late 90s.

“..That depletes water resources “

The liberalization of trade has encouraged the choice of a productivist agricultural policy focused on exports, which are synonymous with foreign currency, in parallel with the liberalization of water management in rural areas.
In return, basic necessities will be imported.
This is the principle of "Food Security".
Indeed, according to this liberal concept imposed by the World Bank in the 1980s, a country is not required to produce its food needs as long as the import market allows for its availability.
This concept does not take into account the impact of export crops on the sustainability of local natural resources.
Indeed, some export crops or products have a considerable impact on water resources in Tunisia, and in some regions in particular.

The case of citrus fruits in Cap Bon

26,000 tons of citrus fruit exported
=
14 560 m3 of virtual water (2017)

While the region of Cape Bon, where citrus fruits are produced, is in shortage and is supplied with water from the Northwest.

The case of olive oil production in Zaghouen

1 Kg of olive oil exported
=
2 331 L of virtual water

The main consequence of this production is the aggravation of water stress.

The case of dates in Kebili

166% of the available water resources in the region of Kebili are mainly used for date farming.

Keeping up with the pace of production means overexploitation of resources and salinization of groundwater.

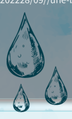
Climate and productivist model

In the context of a climate crisis, the depletion of resources generated by certain crops is worsening with the decrease in rainwater inputs, in fact Tunisia has been going through a period of acute drought since 2016 which further aggravates the problem of the availability of water resources.

[3] https://lapresse.tn/114983/lunique-menace-pour-la-securite-de-la-tunisie-la-secheresse-qui-sinstalle

-40%
decrease in citrus production expected for the 2022 campaign compared to 2021 (UTAP). [4]

[4] https://www.tunisie-tribune.com/202228/09//une-baisse-attendue-de-40-dans-la-production-des-agrumes/



-19.7%
decrease in date production between the 20192018/ and 20202019/ campaigns (INS).
If the recent harvests are slightly increased, they are marked by the decline in product quality and the spread of diseases.

-16%
drop in olive oil production estimated for the olive harvest between 2022 and 2023, and a 22% drop according to UTAP compared to the five-year average production estimated at 257,000 tons between 2014 and 2021.

[5] Tunisie : La récolte de l'huile d'olive ne dépassera pas les 200 mille tonnes, quid des prix ? - Gnet news

“ Import/Export : the risk of total dependence ”

The allocation of precious water resources for export products, in order to enshrine the principle of Food Security, is not only unable to generate the expected income, but is also done at the expense of the cultivation of other strategic products for the nation, including Wheat!
However, the Covid 19 crisis and the conflict in Ukraine have revealed its limits: when trade is halted or there is a sharp increase in world commodity prices, dependence on imports has put Tunisia at risk of severe shortages.

“Let's take the example of the grain sector ”

As a result, the choice to encourage water-intensive crops for export increases dependence on markets, exposes Tunisian consumption to international price shocks and prevents the country from achieving a form of food sovereignty and autonomy!
==> The trade policy has thus become a factor of depletion of vital resources in a country under water stress aggravated by climate change, as well as a vector of food dependence for the nation!

Dependency rate of imported products over the period 2008 - 2018 :

84.21%	40.69%	50.81%	57.35%	-60.925%
for soft wheat	for durum wheat	for barley	on average for all cereals combined	decrease in cereal production between 2022 and 2023 (Grain Board)

TOE Conclusion & Recommendations

Faced with this situation, which increases food vulnerability in Tunisia and threatens Tunisia's water potential, TOE recommends:
- To work towards a vision for agriculture based on food sovereignty rather than food security, primarily favoring local food needs and thus protecting the people who produce and consume.
- Encourage the use by Tunisian decision-makers of the water footprint as an evaluation grid for crop choices, and the promotion of sustainable farming methods in order to guarantee the sustainability of national resources and the right to water throughout Tunisia and for future generations.