Arab Reform Initiative

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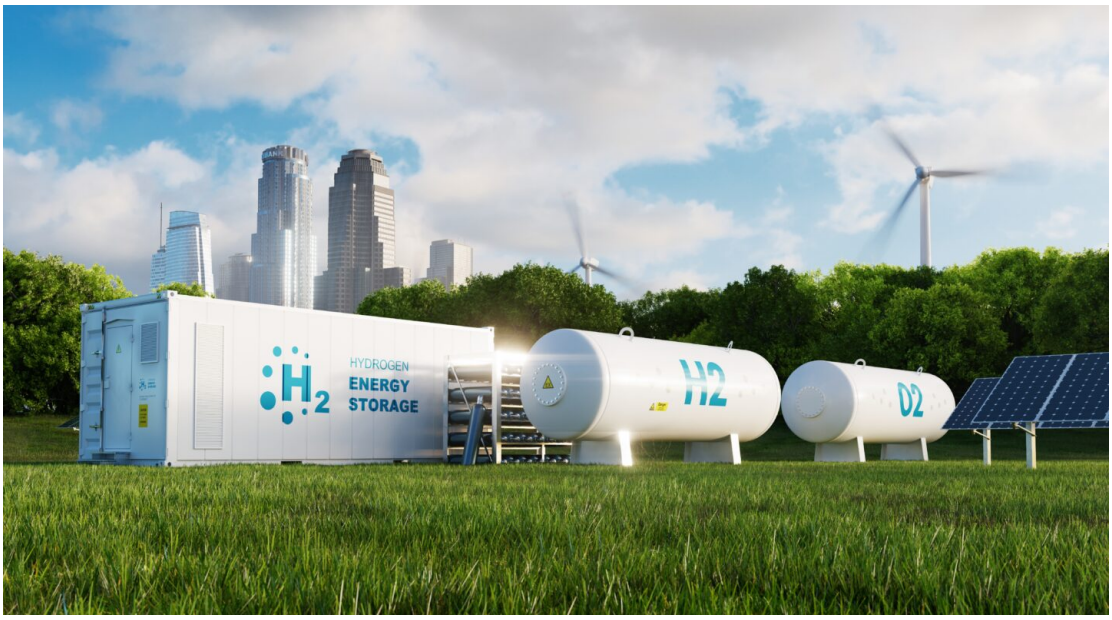
Who Benefits from Tunisia's Green Hydrogen Strategy?

→ Arab Reform Initiative



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(Tunis, 20 December 2022) – The Arab Reform Initiative and Heinrich Böll Foundation released a new report examining Tunisia's national green hydrogen strategy as the country is preparing to develop and scale the production of this "green fuel" with the help of foreign partners.

In the research paper, entitled *Who Benefits from Tunisia's Green Hydrogen Strategy?* author Aïda Delpuech argues that in the run to develop this green alternative, both Tunisia and its partner, Germany, have failed to sufficiently assess the environmental and social impact of such a strategy on Tunisia or consult with civil society actors and potentially affected local communities.

"For green hydrogen to be true to its potential as a clean energy, there needs to be a clear discussion around its potential social and environmental costs for Tunisia and such a discussion should involve a much wider segment of stakeholders than what we have seen so far," said Zied Boussen, Tunisia research fellow at the Arab Reform Initiative.

Tunisia launched in early 2022 the development of its national strategy for green hydrogen which it aims to finalize by 2024. The country has already announced that it will prioritize the export of this green fuel over local use. Germany is a key partner of Tunisia in developing this resource and in December 2020, Tunisia and Germany signed a 31-million-euro deal cooperation agreement to develop this new sector.

As the global energy sector sought to revamp itself over recent years, several countries around the world have joined a race toward green hydrogen. Unlike grey hydrogen, made by fossil fuels (natural gas) and a significant source of greenhouse gases, green hydrogen is generated by electrolysis whereby water is split using electricity from renewable energy sources. The large-scale production – powered by solar and wind energy megaprojects – requires vast mobilization of several types of resources along the entire production chain of this fuel.

Hailed as the "energy of the future", green hydrogen in Tunisia is being promoted as seeking to de-carbonize key industries as well as transportation. However, the report criticizes Tunisia's focus on the export of this green energy to Europe without prioritizing local needs, given that Tunisia depends as much as 97% on

Algerian gas to produce electricity. Such a move would entrench an already slow energy transition in Tunisia.

Climate commitments and geopolitical tensions tied to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine have prompted European countries to turn to different providers, including North African countries, for their energy needs. Publicly announced on 18 May 2022, the "RepowerEU" plan, envisions to double green hydrogen imports by 2030, boosting the estimates to an expected 10 million tons per year.

"The development strategy of green hydrogen – as well as a broader transition towards more renewables - could be a significant opportunity to meet local needs in North Africa and to decarbonize some industrial sectors in Europe but only if the plans are well thought through and based on multi-stakeholder consultations," said Sarine Karajerjian, director of the Environmental Politics program at the Arab Reform Initiative. "If green energy is just thought of as a "product for export" then we risk seeing a repeat of old exploitative economic relations that tend to ignore the needs of locals as well as their social and environmental well-being."

To ensure that the development strategy of green hydrogen in Tunisia serves local needs as well as contributes to decarbonizing key industries in Europe, the report puts forwards some key recommendations for decision-makers as well as development partners. These include:

General recommendations for decision-makers:

- Green hydrogen production has to follow strict social and sustainability standards and respect human rights.
- Green hydrogen production should be oriented towards the prioritization of local value creation and access of local users to energy supply.
- Green hydrogen production should not compromise the national renewable energy transition strategy or national de-carbonization goals in general.

Recommendations for Tunisian decision-makers:

- Developing standardized national and regional stakeholder consultation

processes to include local land users and other affected people as part of the development of a Tunisian green hydrogen strategy.

- Guaranteeing the right of local communities to say no to renewable energy projects on their lands, while investing early stage into transparency and information sharing and to plan a win-win scenario and benefit sharing with the locals to win their support and avoid conflict.
- Establishing a national framework that defines the parameters of local community participation and benefits (monetary or other) from renewable energy facilities.
- Ensuring that communities using the land have legal support to negotiate with investors, energy companies or relevant stakeholders and access to independent mediation in case of conflict.
- Ensuring better coordination between the Ministries and relevant bodies already in the strategy-building process to harmonize efforts and enforce cohesion of relevant actors and their particular goals.

Recommendations for international development partners:

- Assessing ecological risks by conducting environmental impact studies that inform the development of the national green hydrogen strategy.
- Countries that import hydrogen should be required to certify that the green hydrogen procured comes from projects that meet international human rights standards.

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About the author

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The Arab Reform Initiative is the leading independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality and social justice.

- We produce original research informed by local experiences and partner with institutions to achieve impact across the Arab world and globally
- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

Founded in 2005, the Arab Reform Initiative is governed by a Plenary of its members and an Executive Committee.

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