

DHAHAR GEOPARK: A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LED BY TERRITORIES AND SUPPORTED BY UNDP

In the mountains of south-eastern Tunisia, between Matmata and Remada, an ancient territory is now becoming a beacon of the future.

Dhahar Geopark, recognized for the exceptional richness of its geological, cultural, and natural heritage, represents an innovative approach to territorial development. Through its support, UNDP contributes to transforming this heritage into concrete opportunities for local communities.

This initiative reflects a core conviction: sustainable development emerges where communities actively engage in the valorization of their own resources.

A living heritage serving local communities

Dhahar Geopark covers an area of more than 6,375 km² across three governorates: Tataouine, Medenine, and Gabès, forming a territory of exceptional geological and cultural richness.

Beyond its scientific value, this heritage represents a strategic resource for local development, capable of:

- Creating employment opportunities, particularly for youth and women;
- Promoting and preserving the region's distinct natural, geological, and cultural heritage;
- Supporting local activities such as handicrafts, tourism services, and local products;
- Enhancing the attractiveness of the territory and encouraging sustainable investment;

This approach enables the reconciliation of conservation, economic development, and social inclusion.

Structured UNDP support to strengthen territorial governance and sustainability

Through the "Governance as a Lever of Socio-Economic Development" portfolio, UNDP supports the Dhahar Geopark across several key dimensions, in collaboration with the National Office of Mines, Local Authorities, and Civil Society.

This support has strengthened the institutional capacities of the members of the steering committee, enabled the development of a 2026–2030 strategic action plan, and improved coordination among local stakeholders. UNDP has also enhanced the geopark's visibility and positioning at national and international levels, while supporting efforts to meet the standards required for future integration into the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network.

This work has now produced concrete results. In 2025, Dhahar Geopark reached a major milestone on its path toward international recognition.

Following a rigorous evaluation process, UNESCO experts confirmed the strong potential of the Dhahar Geopark, highlighting the richness of its heritage and the commitment of local stakeholders. The evaluation report notably recognized:

- The coherence and quality of the proposed territory, with regards to UNESCO criteria;
- The active involvement of local communities;
- The relevance of the project for regional sustainable development;
- The existence of a strong network of partners engaged in its management.

Experts also recommended the inclusion of Dhahar Geopark in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network, a recognition that opens new prospects for development and international cooperation.

This recognition represents a major opportunity for the territory, strengthening its visibility and attractiveness.

Tangible impacts for local communities

Beyond institutional frameworks, the impact of Dhahar Geopark is above all reflected in the lives of local populations by supporting:

- The development of sustainable tourism activities;
- The creation of new local economic opportunities;
- The promotion of traditional know-how and practices;
- The active involvement of youth and women in the management and promotion of the territory.

Local guides, artisans, producers, and entrepreneurs are now actively contributing to the geopark's dynamic, thus helping to diversify the local economy.

This gradual transformation strengthens territorial resilience and opens new perspectives for future generations.

Towards a territorially rooted model of sustainable development

Dhahar Geopark represents far more than a conservation project. It is a model of integrated territorial development, where the valorisation of cultural and historical heritage becomes a driver of economic inclusion, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

With the support of UNDP and its partners, the geopark continues its development through actions aimed at strengthening infrastructure and signage, improving visitor experience, expanding educational and scientific activities, and consolidating local and international partnerships.

Investing in territories means investing in the future...

The Dhahar Geopark experience demonstrates that sustainable and inclusive development is possible when local communities, public institutions, and technical partners work together around a shared vision.

Through this support, UNDP reaffirms its commitment to backing initiatives that transform territories, strengthen communities, and create new sustainable economic opportunities.

Dhahar Geopark fully illustrates this ambition: turning heritage into a driver of the future, led by and for local communities.