Summary of the Mawjaat workshop in Algiers



Photo Credit: Tchebbek

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Preliminary note : Please note that our Lebanese and Moroccan partners could not join us in Algiers as their visas were not issued and our Egyptian partners were also unable to attend due to an ongoing transition period.

I. Presentation of Mon autre école and El Mahatta

1. Mon autre école

While the group gathered in Mon autre école venue, Rima and Rafik said some welcome words to the participants and then presented their organization.

Mon autre école was founded in July **2013** when we returned to Algeria after living in France for several years. Together with two other friends, Imène and Ahlem, we conceived this project, which came to life in October 2013 with a blackboard, three chairs, and two tables. “Mon autre école” thus began as a **second-chance school** and remained so for 10 years, driven by our desire to be the teachers we would have liked to have had and to offer an educational approach that takes each student’s personality into account. From the very beginning, art was a central part of our space, with art sessions even while we were operating as a school. In total, we supported 650 young people, all of whom earned their baccalauréat (many of them went abroad afterwards).

Watch the video about Mon autre école (produced in 2021): https://vimeo.com/920457175

Then, in **2021**, as art took on a greater role, we shifted our focus to become an **alternative space that provides access to art and supports young artist**s. Our dedicated program, **Déclic**, lasts 13 months and guides participants through the creative process from start to finish, whether in video art, sound art, and performance art. Déclic is divided into phases: the writing phase, where the participants "spit out" the entire theme of the project and the transition to action phase, where they learn how to transform the written material.

The cohorts range from 7 to 12 people. For the first edition (pilot edition), the participants were young people from Mon autre école. For the second edition, we issued a call for applications that received over 100 submissions (and resulted in a shortlist of 16 people). Today, we have 14 artists who have created a work with us. We’ve partnered with Wassyla Tamzali and her space, “Les Ateliers sauvages,” which provides us with a venue, hosts residencies, and offers us tremendous support.

The only requirement of the Déclic program is **to work on a theme rooted in Algerian society**, which is why we focus on rootedness and the body. Most of the students come from **traumatic backgrounds**, which compels us to address the issue of **self-preservation** when working on themes that often touch on personal experiences and intimacy.

For 2027, we have the "**Out of the Box**" project, which aims to guide more advanced artists to the next level—such as those who have already participated in Déclic.

An Innovative and Experimental Business Model

As for our business model, we initially refused to accept subsidies for seven years. When we were a second-chance school, we asked parents who could afford it to pay. It was a bit like Robin Hood—the students didn't know who was paying and who wasn't. We also worked side jobs to bring in money for the school. Now, **our guiding principle is to provide free support to all artists**, unconditionally.

Our alumni form a community centered around Mon autre école. Those who now work for us sometimes do so on a volunteer basis, but we try to pay everyone. We've established a horizontal structure with the students. For the past year and a half, we've been in an experimental phase and have developed external services that now account for 15 to 20 percent of our revenue. In practical terms, **we operate as a self-managed organization:** we provide a salary for the team, and each of us also has self-employed status. The services are billed to Mon autre école which then commissions the team members: they keep 80% of the fee, and we take a 20% margin to reinvest in the collective. This also allows us to **pool our expertise** in artist support and communications. We have recognized expertise in graphic design and clients such as the IF and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation… It took time, but it works.

Regarding our legal status: We are registered as a nonprofit organization under the 1901 French Law in order to be eligible for grants. Given the nature of our work, our funders are aware of the risks we face and do not require us to publicly acknowledge their support in our communications.

We recently established a foundation in Algeria.

2. El Mahatta

The group then moved to El Mahatta venue, still in downtown Algiers where Reda presented his space.

El Mahatta (the Station) is the continuation of El Moutanakil *(The Itinerant),* an independent cultural and musical platform founded in 2018 that explores the intersections between research, creation, experimentation, and archiving. After several years of grassroots work, we entered a new phase with El Mahatta, launched in 2024. The name reflects El Moutanakil (The Itinerant) finding a stable home after years of nomadism. The opening of this new space in 2024 is a

tangible response to our commitment with Moutanakil and addresses the lack of independent spaces dedicated to music in Algiers.

First and foremost, we intend to use this space to meet our own needs, such as providing artist residencies, production services, and workshop hosting. Another observation is that in Algiers, we're losing all our record stores, and contemporary production is hard to find. So with this venue, we wanted both to promote our label and to invite independent labels too to let products here. For instance here is our latest vinyl, Sidi Omar, produced by our label **Open Hi Hat**. The project, which began in 2021, is built around Ahellil, the sacred musical tradition of the Gourara region in southern Algeria, and electronic music. Side A features an Ahellil group recorded in 2023, while Side B features Abdelkader's interpretation of the first three phases of Ahellil through electronic music. This vinyl represents significant archival work on this music, which had never before been professionally recorded. We have created digital and analog archives.

Current challenges :

- ➔ **The space** : right now, we have to find another venue because the landlord wants to sell this apartment. We want to stay in the city center for accessibility (this space is 4 minutes from the subway and 11 minutes from the tram). People can get here by train, bus, and taxi, especially from the airport. This makes it easier for artists to come.

- ➔ **The administrative and legal status:** El Mahatta is a sole proprietorship. In 2018, we were a collective of three people working on El Moutanakil. I met AFAC (The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture) in 2021, and she told me about structuring a business, so I chose this business model. We began to grow based on the principle of working with other people on a project-by-project basis. It can be difficult at times because I don't have a team. But since February 2026, I no longer feel alone thanks to my connection with Mon autre école and Tchebbek.

II. Visits of independent art & creative spaces in Algiers

1. La Maison Khadda: rhizome and Studio Chimbo

Rhizome has taken over the former home and studio of Algerian painter Mohamed Khadda in Algiers, transforming it into a space dedicated to artistic creation and residencies. Conceived as a living, open, and evolving space, it welcomes contemporary practices, ideas, and forms, fostering encounters and exchange between them. The space also houses Chimbo, a creative studio that extends this dynamic and contributes to creating connections between the artists, practices, and projects that develop there.

After a round of presentation of the participants, Khaled Bouzidi, director of rhizome, introduced la Maison Khadda space :

The house was designed in the 1950s by Jean de Maisonseul, who served as the first curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Algiers after independence. In 1968, he sold his house to the painter Mohamed Khadda. La Maison Khadda is a historic site that hosted events during the first Pan-African Festival in 1969. It stood vacant until 2013 and reopened in 2023. Today, we share it with Studio Chimbo. It welcomes artists for residencies but we're also working to build ties within the neighborhood through film screenings and partnerships with local photographers.

Rhizome has gone through several phases. The space initially served to support artists' careers by offering artist studios, a residency program, and a gallery, since there was no existing art market at the time. But we realized that this approach didn't suit us (such as attending art fairs, etc.). Now we sell primarily to public institutions. Furthermore, we prefer to focus on support rather than distribution, so we exhibit elsewhere (at Les Ateliers Sauvages, at the National Library) and retain only the residency program, as that is where the identified needs lie. From our perspective, this has a greater impact. We organize research residencies where artists are not required to produce new work. We can host up to two residents. Artists can contact us throughout the year; many come from the Algerian diaspora.

Louiz Dib, the cofounder of Studio Chimbo presented the scope of their work. Chimbo Studio has been in existence for 10 years. In addition to our graphic design work, we develop projects with other organizations at the national level. We also have relationships with international organizations such as Think Tanger, the Marseille Museum of Contemporary Art, and the online media 15/38 Méditerranée.

2. La Chambre claire

La Chambre Claire, initially conceived as a craft workshop dedicated to stationery and leather goods, has gradually evolved into a true hub for ideas and materials, where different practices now intersect, from publishing to film production. Youcef Krache is the cofounder of La Chambre Claire and a photographer. He is also the co-founder of Collectif 220 which promotes Algerian photography embedded in society. He presented his space to the group.

La Chambre Claire started out as a publishing house in 2018. Then, we decided to produce notebooks with our surplus paper to generate additional income. Our main materials are

images and paper. We are also a learning space, always in the field of photography, with programs designed to support photographers. Our main program, Crossroads, involves an independent jury selecting three photographers each year. These photographers explore the various paths a photographer can take, such as writing about a project, developing it, taking photos, exhibiting them, publishing them, and turning them into a book. At every step of the program we have a different mentor to support them. We also develop film production activities by producing Algerian films and initiating local collaborations.

We have international projects such as "Gusra", with the Egyptian organization Safina 7 (funded by AFAC). Gusra focused on the design and implementation of exchange residencies on photography and photo-based art practices into a critical dialogue with curation, book making, anthropology and history.

La Chambre Claire is located in Belouizdad, a working-class neighborhood in the heart of Algiers. We are dedicated to becoming a part of this community and forging connections with its residents. We have organized several initiatives, such as open photo studios on Eid and theater workshops with children. This aspect is very important to us.



3. La Baignoire

La Baignoire is a self-managed and collaborative cultural space, hosted within the premises of a consulting company, conceived as an initiative supporting artists from a range of disciplines. His founder, Samir Toumi, who is also a writer, presented the space to the group.

La Baignoire has no connection to the governance firm that I run except that it provides the venue. In 2013, Facebook effectively acted as the Ministry of Culture, and Algiers sorely lacked venues to showcase artists with limited resources. Based on this observation, from 2014 to 2019, we opened our space to support these artists without expecting anything in return. The space was never a gallery, and no sales were made on site. I stopped when people started referring to "La Baignoire Gallery," especially since several other venues had opened around town to showcase artists. At that point, I felt my mission had been accomplished. Today, we welcome artists and visitors working on public-interest projects free of charge, including researchers, psychologists, artists, and student groups. We're open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

II. Workshops on the "Tree of Vision" & Funding opportunities

1. "Tree of vision" workshop

On Tuesday morning, September 29, participants gathered at the El Mahatta premises to work on the collective exercise of building a "Tree of Vision" for Mawjaat. The partners who could not travel to Algiers because of visa issues attended online: Ibrahim (Beirut Art Center) ; Christel and Simo from Tatmin, Ahmed (Marsa) ; Saleh and Marwa Abdelgawad -the new director- (B'sarya). Samir Toumi, the founder of La Baignoire and an expert in group facilitation within organizations, facilitated the workshop.

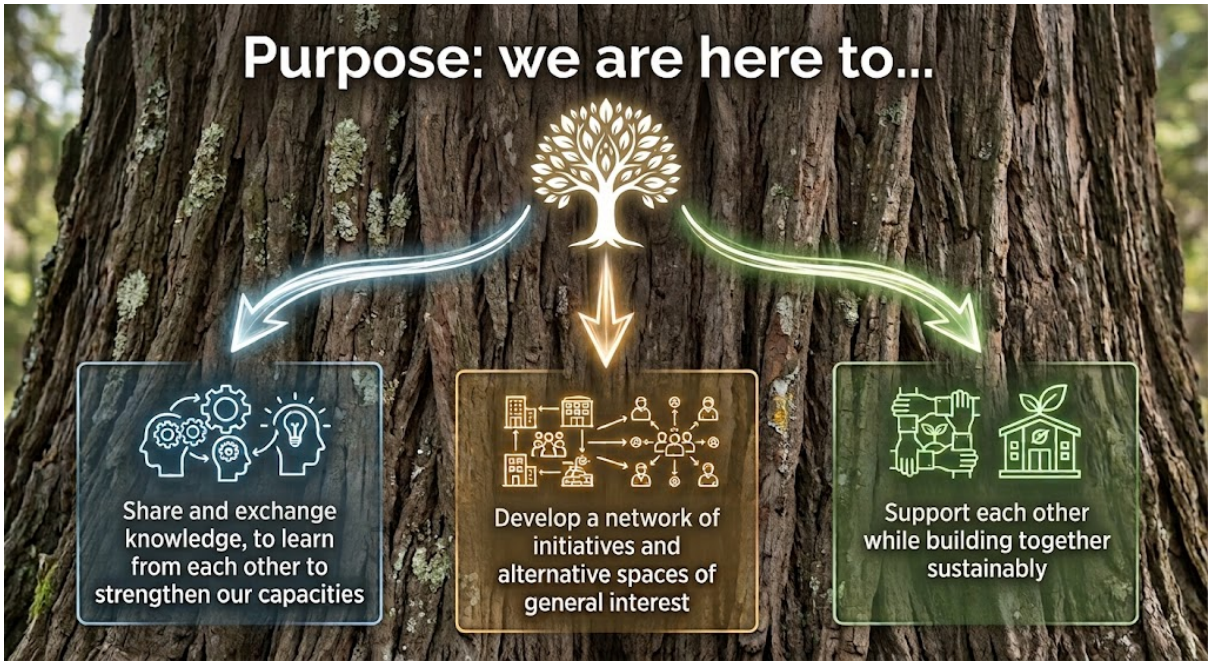
Context and objective: The workshop aimed to mark a new stage by bringing together the work carried out with partners during previous workshops. The expected outcome was to collectively develop a shared vision for Mawjaat.

Methodology: Samir proposed using a tool inspired by the principle of the "Tree of vision", simplified and refocused on Mawjaat's current needs. The "Tree of vision" is a concept developed by Jean Gabriel Kern and Thibault Vignes. It assumes that the vision of an organization or collective can be articulated through an initial strategic and operational reflection represented by three components:

- **The roots**: a shared foundation of common values (what are the principles we share?)
- **The trunk**: a reason for being (the purpose)
- **The stems, leaves and fruits**: a collective mid-term ambition

For our workshop, the objective was to identify two or three priority actions capable of moving Mawjaat forward. Samir asked the participants to brainstorm in groups to find out what are the purpose, the values and the ambition of Mawjaat collective.

The purpose : We are here to ….



Group 1 (Beirut Art Center, Marsa, B'sarya, Lieve & Marianne)
"We are here to share and exchange knowledge, to learn from each other to strengthen our capacities"
Samir's feedback → here there is no territorial criteria, no field criteria, no status criteria but the purpose is clear and understandable.

Group 2 (IF Beirut, IF Algiers, Christel from Tatmin, El Blaça & Alice from La Friche)
"*We are here to develop a network of initiatives and alternative spaces of general interest*"
Samir's feedback → the purpose is missing here, we want to know what brings us together as Mawjaat ?

Group 3 (Tchebbek, Beyt Ali Gana, Simo from Tatmin & Louise from La Friche)
"*We are here to support each other while building together sustainably"*
Samir's feedback → here the purpose is clear and resonates with the sentence of the first group while adding the idea of sustainability.

Proposal of a shared purpose:

We are here to share and exchange knowledge, to learn from each other to strengthen our capacities in a sustainable way.

When Samir asked if we agreed to merge the two visions of Groups 1 and 3, a discussion about **sustainability** emerged. According to Reda, we must consider sustainability in order to envision the future after the Mawjaat-funded project ends. He emphasized that our common purpose is what brings us together and motivates us to fight for new funding. Rafik believes that sustainability does not necessarily mean funding. He argued that it is more about working together and supporting each other and that we will always find a way to include partners in activities.

Values: *What are the principles we share?*

The idea was to explore the core values of each structure, and then compare them to identify common ground. Each structure took the time to select three words that summarized their principles.



Tchebbek	Bsarya	Tatmin	IF / MEA	L'Blaça
Accessibility Independence Engagement	Engagement Art awareness Networking	Creating Exploring Sharing	Accessibility Engagement Freedom	Care Solidarity Cohesion

Bagnoire	Beyt	Friche	BAC	Marsa
Sharing Citizenship Independence	Research Sharing Support	Hospitality, Ecological and social responsibility Equity	Artistic freedom Collaboration Experimentation	Experimentation Collaboration, Independence

Looking at the various values mentioned by the participants, we can notice that they already have a lot in common. We could group them as follows:

1 Independence & Freedom

This is the dominant value within the network. It embodies the desire to build autonomous spaces that are free from external constraints and that guarantee freedom of creation and action.

2 Sharing & Collaboration (Sharing / Collaboration / Networking)

These values reflect the importance of the collective dimension in each organization's approach. This is seen in the sharing of knowledge (among peers, among artists across generations, with audiences…), through cooperation with other structures, and in forging connections to explore and build together.

3 Engagement & Responsibility (Engagement / Commitment / Responsibility)

The Mawjaat partners promote civic, social, and sometimes environmental stances within their spaces and toward their communities. One could add the concepts of hospitality, support, accessibility, care, and cohesion, which fall within the same framework of values.

Ambition : *What great things do we want to achieve?*

The idea was that once the common ambition had been identified, we would develop a roadmap and determine the necessary resources. However, the participants found this last exercise to be the most difficult because they could not agree on a common ambition. Several

types of questions revealed **the discrepancies among the partners' expectations.** For instance: *Do we have to expand the network? If so, to whom? Because we are not only artistic and cultural spaces. What about the territorial criteria? Do we need to create a legal entity? Are we a network or a community?*

They were confused and could not distinguish the difference between ambition and actions. Samir reminded them that the key question is, "*What do we want to accomplish?*" He added that **an ambition is an achievement or result**. He used La Baignoire as an example, explaining that when he founded it, his goal was to stop holding exhibitions after five years because there would be enough alternative spaces in Algiers to host them.

The conversation helped the participants realize that they were not yet ready to develop an ambition with a clear, detailed action plan. They agreed that a minimum ambition could be **"Mawjaat as a network must exist in 2030,"** acknowledging that continuing to exist beyond the end of the funded project period would be a great achievement in itself.

2. Funding opportunities workshop

Initially, the afternoon was planned as a workshop on funding opportunities, with two sessions: one on creating a shared list of funding opportunities, and another on a practical exercise on an Erasmus funding opportunity. However, the participants used this time to discuss the vision tree workshop and outlined several key points before considering how to move forward with a new phase of Mawjaat.

The discussion can be summarized around the following key themes:

- **Contributions and Impacts of the Mawjaat Project**

When asked to reflect on the impact of the Mawjaat project, participants mentioned several notable points.

For **L'Blaça,** the main outcome was the **structuring and clarification of their collective**, as Mawjaat helped them structure spaces, formalize practices, and articulate their organization. However, this structuring has led to **new management challenges**, such as managing physical spaces (common headquarters and legal status), and more complex operational issues.

Tchebbek emphasized how Mawjaat helped them **transition from the informal to the formal**. The opportunity to create Tchebbek within Mawjaat formalized long-standing informal collaborations and addressed shared challenges, such as relations with the authorities and the Ministry of Culture, in order to establish recognized independent artistic spaces.

- **Current situation: Impression of stagnation and doubts**

Aligning all members around a unified vision is proving difficult. Several participants (Charlotte, Dhafer, Aida) expressed the feeling of **going in circles** and returning to the same questions as during the kick-off meeting in Alexandria. Lieve argued that, although the discussions seem repetitive, they help the group narrow its vision and lead to more realistic actions.

According to Nouss (Mon autre école), one reason for not agreeing on a common ambition is the **diversity of specific local contexts.** Reda (El Mahatta) said that the Tree of Vision exercise showed that **there is still a long way to go**. He explained that he chose the Tree of Vision over the Tree of Life to help create a roadmap for the collective's trajectory. However, he believes the ambition of still existing in 2030 is a good objective. He shared his previous experiences with failed collective attempts and discussed the need for a reassuring framework. That's why with Tchebbek they wanted to start by working on creating an open and evolving charter, which is the first step towards a functional collective.

- **Need for action and grounding in daily practice**

There was a strong call to **move beyond theoretical concepts and prioritize action** (Rafiq and Dhafer). Dhafer (L'Blaça) said the challenge lies in perceiving the collective's daily, direct added value once everyone returns to their respective organizations.

Rafiq (Mon Autre École) discussed examples of joint actions that have already been carried out, such as the musical event during the Declic program and Tchebbek's initiatives, which prove that **collaboration works on the ground**.

Rima pointed out the **articulation of local vs. regional scope** within Mawjaat as Tchebbek is engaged in a dual effort: taking action in its local community in Algiers while connecting at the regional levels and added that the cross-border connection still needs to be strengthened.

- **Dynamics thanks to knowledge sharing and mutual inspiration**

The participants acknowledged that field visits and discovering diverse models (economic, knowledge production, and third places/tiers-lieux) are a **genuine source of inspiration**. Dhafer (L'Blaça) emphasized the importance of formalizing knowledge sharing, or **knowledge brokerin**g, to make knowledge accessible to all.

Alice (La Friche) expressed a desire to **better value expertise** within La Friche's economic model. She said that visiting the different partners in their countries has inspired her to reflect on how to achieve this goal.

To maintain momentum ("*keep the flame alive*"), a major area of collaborative work has emerged for Tchebbek: a j**oint advocacy effort** for the recognition of venues and disciplines

in Algeria (Rima). A targeted work on mobility at a regional level would be also interesting and relevant (Reda).

- **Strategy, Timeline, and Financial Framework**

The ambition to sustain the collective through 2030 was welcomed, r**aising the question of securing new funding to continue existing** (and growing ?). Alice reminded the participants that Mawjaat will benefit from the project's human and financial framework until May 2027. She added that there is an Erasmus+ opportunity, but the program has strict deadlines and conditions regarding partnerships and eligible themes. She added that the Mawjaat project was initially designed without partners and that the next steps must be developed collectively.

Hadia wondered how to achieve this goal and how to collaborate to make it happen, considering that everyone has their own ideas. Aida said that we have not yet had the time to reflect on past progress, and that projecting too far ahead seems premature. For Tchebbek, we can accomplish things without funding; it's all a matter of will. Reda mentioned that he worked on a mobility advocacy campaign before with other organizations. They believe that trying to fit within the framework of the call for projects and adapt to its constraints could interfere with our purpose as a community.

Finally Louise emphasized that despite all these questions about the future, **the desire to remain connected and maintain the collective momentum is widely shared**. She emphasized the importance of including all the absent partners (Tatmin, BAC, Marsa, and B'sarya) in future discussions, mentioning that this conversation is just the beginning and must continue by involving group members who were absent from this workshop.

The role of Lieve and the research in the Mawjaat project

During the conversation, the role of the action-research component in relation to IMERA and Lieve's work was discussed. Some members wondered if she could address their needs, particularly those that emerged during visits to different countries (e.g., mapping various legal and economic models). It was therefore asked whether it would be possible to reorient her research project in this direction, as some did not identify with the theoretical framework she proposed—a framework that also raised concerns given the threats towards civil society in their socio-political contexts.

In fact, it turned out that the relationship between the research component and Mawjaat's activities was unclear to some, particularly the Algerian partners who were not present at the project's kickoff meeting in Alexandria. The issue was clarified by reiterating Lieve's freedom to conduct research emphasizing that La Friche did not commission her beyond the deliverables she had agreed to provide. Finally, Lieve explained her research ethics and "do no harm" approach to the partners.

3. Presentation of Erasmus + program

Instead of the planned experimental exercise, Alice and Louise from La Friche presented the Erasmus+ program and its funding opportunities to the participants, covering its key points:

- Sector
- Priorities
- Eligibility
- Budget
- Project duration
- Areas of action and activities covered by the program

Note: All feedback from participants was incorporated into the previous paragraph for clarity. Additionally, they are gathered and analyzed in the SWOT analysis here below.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
- **Engagement and Collective Will:** A clear, shared desire to stay connected and continue building together. - **Proven Field Success and Impact:** Demonstrated capacity to carry out high-impact concrete actions at local levels by accelarating organizational clarity and the formalization of long-standing informal bonds. - **Cross learning and Mutual Inspiration:** Field visits, discovering diversified economic models, and cross-learning bring genuine value to members.	- **Difficulty Stabilizing a Shared Vision:** Heterogeneity of local contexts makes the transition from individual ideas to a unified collective ambition complex. - **Sense of Stagnation:** A shared feeling among some members of spinning their wheels and getting stuck on the same issues as during the Alexandria meeting. - **Theory vs. Practice Gap:** A perceived disconnect between concepts sometimes deemed too theoretical and concrete application in daily operations.
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
- **Complementary Funding:** The opportunity to leverage funding mechanisms like *Erasmus+* to consolidate and sustain the momentum (but a process of ownership and integration is still required for a next phase). - **Knowledge Sharing and Capitalization (*Knowledge Brokerage*):** An opportunity to structure expertise-sharing on third places (*tiers-lieux*) and integrate it into the network's economic model. - **Long-Term Vision (2030):** There are a lot of shared values that represent a strong basis to elaborate a common vision to sustain the collective through 2030.	- **Calendar Constraints and Administrative Burdens:** Strict deadlines and conditions imposed by funding bodies (*Erasmus+*) that risk rushing the project's maturation. - **Pressure of Local Daily Life ("Head in the Handlebars"):** The risk that operational emergencies in each member's home structure will stifle engagement in the collective. - **Risk of Demobilization:** Without a clear roadmap and the security framework provided by Mawjaat project funds, partners may lose the connection and momentum necessary for planning future activities and fundraising.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Noussaiba Merah	Tchebbek/ Mon autre école	Algeria
Rima Djahnine	Tchebbek/ Mon autre école	Algeria
Rafik Ouadi	Tchebbek/ Mon autre école	Algeria
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Dhafer Ben Khalifa	Collectif L'Blaça/ Collectif créatif	Tunisia
Aida Ben Ammar	Collectif L'Blaça/ Ftartchi	Tunisia
Hadia Gana	Bayt Ali Gana	Libya
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