



## Opportunities for Decentralization in Morocco

by Yossef Ben-Meir / October 30th, 2009

King Mohammed VI of Morocco will deliver a highly anticipated speech this November 6th—the anniversary of the Green March of 1975 when 350,000 unarmed Moroccans crossed into the Western Sahara. On this same occasion last year, Morocco's King presented his "roadmap" to decentralize "all parts of the Kingdom, especially the Moroccan Sahara region" and "usher in a complete change from rigid centralized management." The roadmap expands upon the Kingdom's 2007 proposal to the United Nations Security Council for a final settlement of the Western Saharan conflict. Morocco proposes to build the political, economic, and social autonomy of the Western Sahara (and now the whole of the country) within overall Moroccan sovereignty.

How the monarch now follows through on decentralization will greatly determine to the extent he is able to achieve his most cherished goals: sustainable socio-economic development of the Kingdom achieved through participatory democracy; and a resolution of the Western Saharan conflict by way of meeting the self-determined needs of people in the region as part of the Kingdom.

There are four major paths to a nation's decentralization that have been applied around the world. Morocco's decentralization roadmap is highly innovative in that it combines three of the four approaches. The three arrangements incorporated in Morocco's plan are devolution, deconcentration, and delegation, or what the King often refers to as the participatory democratic method (Morocco's roadmap does not incorporate privatization, and instead intends to use public funds to implement the plan).

In the past, decentralization in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Canada, and China applied more heavily the devolution model, which emphasizes greater authority and capacities among local government. In Tanzania, under the still revered President Julius Nyerere, delegation occurred in which groups of people living as a community exercised self-government in all matters which concerned their own affairs. And India and Sri Lanka utilized deconcentration, whereby government and community groups collaborate to promote development.

Morocco's incorporation of the three approaches would create a progressive system whereby provincial and local government, and communities and their organizations, exercise decision-making authority, newly built skills, and other capacities, including financial, to carry out greater developmental responsibilities. Furthermore, His Majesty emphasizes that ultimate determination of specific kinds of projects should rest with local communities, or the beneficiary groups. Local beneficiaries are the "engine and objective" and are to "take charge" of programs, with government and civil support.

The King of Morocco should now use his upcoming November 6th speech to build on the existing roadmap by offering more specifics on the reforms and initiatives that will carry out decentralization. Here are some suggestions:

First, local civil and government technicians (across Moroccan ministries) require training in facilitating participatory methods that assist communities in analyzing their challenges and determining project solutions (in job creation, clean drinking water, school construction, etc.). This necessitates, for example, new development studies and training programs at universities (including here at Morocco's flagship Al Akhawayn University), well beyond the few recently created in the country. Morocco's goal to train 10,000 new social workers and the same number of engineers per year should include in their curriculum building skills in managing project development and participatory democracy. Since universities play an indispensable role toward decentralization, the King ought to announce his intention to establish the first university in Western Sahara.

Second, His Majesty should take this opportunity to highlight important lessons from Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development and suggest how they may guide the implementation of decentralization. Scores of Moroccans benefitted from the Initiative, and it raised the public's consciousness about sustainable development, creating fertile ground for decentralization. However, as the King himself suggested, the Initiative has been too centrally managed, which contradicts its original intention of promoting local self-reliance. Far more non-government facilitators of community planning of Initiative projects are needed. The Ministry of Interior, charged with internal national security, has been in too much control and results unfortunately show. Therefore, although the King's ongoing role in the decentralization process is essential, central government should not be the primary caretaker, but rather a new "third-party" agency inside the royal cabinet is probably necessary.

Finally, there are too many cases where local officials of the Ministry of Interior have stirred distrust and division, particularly in rural areas where most of Morocco's poverty exists, impeding collaborative development. Decentralization should reform their traditional functions, and subsume them to local Communes, which are governed by elected representatives directly involved in meeting human needs. Reforming the Ministry of Interior is inevitable if genuine decentralization is to occur, and the King now stating so will increase public awareness and confidence. After all, as he recognizes, it is the people, minimally encumbered, who are to grab hold of their own development.

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*Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir is a professor of sociology at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, and also president of the High Atlas Foundation, a non-government organization that promotes rural community development in Morocco. The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not reflect those of Al Akhawayn University and the High Atlas Foundation. Read other articles by Yossef.*

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*Rehmat* said on October 30th, 2009 at 10:26am #

It's just another propaganda stuff to fool the Moroccan and the world. A dynasty which was reestablished by the West to look after its interests in North Africa and Israel in the Muslim world – cannot be expected to change so peacefully.

Morocco: Ruled via "baraka"

<http://rehmat1.wordpress.com/2009/03/15/morocco-ruled-via-baraka/>

*Charles Liebling* said on October 30th, 2009 at 7:24pm #

It seems that every six month or so Yossef Ben Meir comes out with an article pushing his decentralization plan for the Western Sahara. For two very basic reasons his ideas on all this are not desirable or workable.

First, the Western Sahara is not Morocco's to decentralize. The Western Sahara is classified by the UN as a non-self-governing territory with the right to self-determination and not one country on earth officially recognizes Moroccan sovereignty over the territory.

Second, NGOs such as Freedom House and Human Rights Watch have amply documented Morocco's totalitarian police rule in the Western Sahara, and any Moroccan attempt at decentralizing would almost certainly result in a an insurrection by the Western Saharans.

The refusal of Morocco to allow a referendum on self-determination tells me that Rabat knows all too well that the Western Saharans would vote overwhelmingly for independence. As long the the local inhabitants prefer independence to decentralization, Mr. Ben Meir's plan would undoubtedly lead to war not development.

Forcing decentralization down a peoples' throats has as far as I can tell never worked.

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