

# Moroccan Decentralization: Step by Step

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For Arab Spring countries the motivation is essentially twofold: the urgent need to promote human development is accompanied by the necessity of meeting popular aspirations for greater empowerment and control over their lives.

Nations also face the situation – brought about by historic cultural and modern-day political conditions – of sub-regions desiring greater autonomy, such as that existing in Iraq, but also in Lebanon, Bahrain, Egypt, and arguably too in the Moroccan Sahara.

All of this has encouraged governments to develop strategies for decentralization intertwined with those enabling human development, the practical case of Morocco offering ideas as to how actually this could be achieved.

The underlying assumption in all of this is that the prime motivation is the promotion of human development, managed by the beneficiaries themselves, the sole necessity for which is the possibility of freedom of association. Other than this there are three main factors present.

There is, firstly, a precondition to decentralization, namely that the process occurs in a democratic fashion, in stages, so that pre-existing, undesirable local and provincial power relationships do not become further stratified.

It follows, then, that the promotion of human development by way of the participatory method is both a precursor to and a conduit for decentralization. In particular, the initial application of the participatory approach creates a context for local community members to become familiar with group planning of development and building partnerships with public and private groups. Decentralizing power in this new context thus enables that newly-gained local authority to be utilized in a way that ensures that the priority goals for social change identified by the people can be realized.

In 2005 the Kingdom of Morocco launched its National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD), whose aim is to promote sustainable development through the people's participation; only a full three-and-a-half years later did the country announce its intention to pursue a decentralized public administrative arrangement. Although much can be learned – and improved upon – from the NIHD experience, what is clear is that this program, preceding decentralization, helped give the latter its best opportunity for success.

Secondly (and this may not be unique to the process of decentralization) the optimal type of decentralization – that is most conducive to advancing sustainable human development – is likely to be a hybrid synthesis of multiple models. In other words, it entails more than merely dispersing power to communities to manage their own affairs; or requiring public and private groups at sub-national levels to cooperate toward human service delivery; or finally, simply transferring power from the top down within government structures.

Morocco's guiding model combines all three approaches to create a new model that aims to ensure these three directions are traversed simultaneously. It is intended that communities are empowered to achieve the development future they seek with ongoing government support – including from the national level – along with public and private partnership helping to contribute to the implementation of local priority projects.

Arguably, this rallies resources from the national level down in order to achieve empowering development. With this model in place, the development of new policies and procedures for the delivery of human services across the sectors (education, health, agriculture etc.) becomes both more clear and more cost-effective.

Thirdly, the process of communities analyzing their social conditions, identifying the most important projects for their development and actually implementing them, itself creates the decentralized system. The partnerships forged in the process, the building

of capacities in order to manage funds and projects, for example, are essential parts of the ongoing structure of decentralization.

It follows that if this new organizational arrangement is to be accomplished, it is essential that there are training programs in place at the local level. These enable citizens, including local teachers, government technicians, association members and students, to gain the skills in facilitating community dialogue towards the creation of action plans (in Morocco's case, communal development plans which are required by statute). It is this process, culminating in the implementation of projects in an environment that wants and requires it, that actually forms the decentralized arrangement itself.

For a range of reasons then, nations are being compelled to disperse power from the national level. For some, this is even a matter of political survival. National leaders and policy makers are engaged in a genuine search as to how this can be achieved in the best manner. The solution, in essence, appears to be the adoption of the Moroccan approach; the promotion of participatory development prior to the onset of new laws to decentralize and as the means, in itself, to decentralization. For this, experiential training in participatory democratic approaches and project implementation is a vital component.

***The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Morocco World News' editorial policy***