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Analysis

Morocco's Model: Uniting Democracy-Building And Sustainable Development

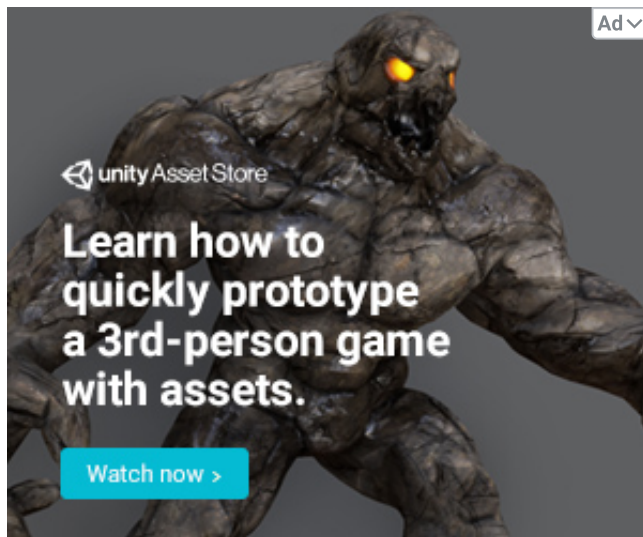
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By Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir

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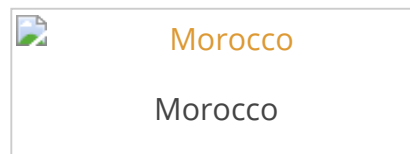
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With socio-revolutionary movements in North Africa and the Middle East and governments in the region seeking to identify and implement viable models for political reform and development, Morocco is fortunate to have been raising public awareness during the past two years about its decentralization plan. Morocco's approach to promoting both democracy and development – which King Mohammed VI often discusses and did right after the nation-wide protests of February 20th – is to wed the two together so that each is advanced by way of the other. In practice, this means that Moroccan people at the local level are to engage in participatory democratic

planning and managing of development initiatives that are intended to benefit them. Moroccan sustainable development is to occur through democratic exchanges and consensus-building, and democracy is to be built during the process of creating sustainable development. Decentralization, which transfers managerial authority, skills, and capacities to sub-national levels, is Morocco's chosen framework to synergistically advance democracy and development from the bottom-up.

Considering Morocco's stated goal of decentralization, it follows that its organizational arrangement emphasizes the "participatory method." This democratic approach is to be applied by local communities together assessing their development challenges and opportunities, and creating and implementing action plans that reflect their shared priorities, such as job creation, education, health, and the environment. Since 2010, the Charter of Communes in Morocco (Morocco is composed of approximately 1,500 Communes that make up the most local administrative tier) mandates that communities' own development plans be created and submitted to the ministries of Interior and Finance. Based on studies by the World Bank, USAID, UN development agencies, and numerous others, the participatory method is becoming understood to be the sine qua non of sustainable development because people's participation in the determination of projects intended to benefit them provides the needed incentives for local people to maintain them.



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By Germinal G. Van* It has been widely, vividly, but nonetheless wrongly believed that socialism is the appropriate system to



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Although exacting to effectively implement, as will be discussed, Morocco's model is potentially useful to other countries in the region since it responds to popular calls for people's direct engagement with democratic practices, while at the same time closely identifies with the Islamic concepts of: shura (participation and mutual consultation in governing based on dialogue regarding all matters involving the whole community and its leaders); ummah (a decentralized yet integrated and diverse worldwide Muslim community that brings about human rights and social justice in a peaceful evolutionary process that builds national solidarity and international cooperation); and ijma (consensus-building).

One major requirement of decentralizing through the participatory method is to train an ever growing supply of "facilitators" – or a position title sometimes called animator, catalyst, change agent, consultant, extension agent, field worker, information broker, intermediary, interventionist, mediator, or planner-researcher. Whatever their title, their essential functions are the same: to help coordinate community planning meetings, remove barriers to participation, encourage community dialogue, ensure all voices are heard (women, youth, the elderly, ethnic groups, the disadvantaged, the sick, and the disabled), consider and explain macro factors that affect local projects, understand the needs of the poor and power relations, manage competing interests, build confidence and self-reliance (to counteract people's sense of powerlessness), form diverse partnerships, inform beneficiaries of what government and other resources may be available for given activities, develop analytical skills, promote democratic practices, and serve as a bridge among people, government, NGOs, technicians, and academic institutions. Facilitators are nonauthoritarian with communities, specialists in the relationships between people, and absolutely vital at least during the initial stages of a community's development process until it is self-sustaining and the facilitation techniques have been transferred to project beneficiaries.

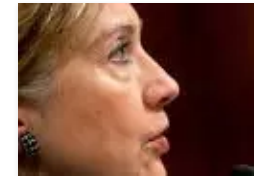
In Morocco, based on my own study and observation, a productive ratio of number of facilitators per general population is 1:500. The cost to experientially train (in the field with an actual community) one facilitator with post-training professional guidance is \$2,000, or \$140 million to train 70,000 facilitators – enough to engage every Moroccan rural village and urban neighborhood (including 35 million people) in the participatory method for planning projects. Groups of people to target for participatory training can include: elected members of Communal councils and parliament (which would inform how they govern and their political campaigns), workers of village and neighborhood associations, local representatives of public service and nongovernment agencies, forestry guards, university students, school teachers (in rural areas, they are typically young), religious leaders, retirees, and interested citizens.



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In addition, the cost to implement priority projects (for example, clean drinking water, fruit tree agriculture, women's cooperatives, and youth centers) that will generate critical socio-economic and environmental improvements for a rural population of 10,000 Moroccan people, is \$1 million, or on average \$100 per person. The very low cost of participatory projects relative to the number of beneficiaries is the combined result of utilizing local resources and know-how, and the method generating a range of important in-kind contributions and local commitment to projects. Four billion dollars could developmentally transform Morocco utilizing the participatory approach to decentralization. The approach does require granting fiscal powers to sub-national elected governments – arguably the Communal level in Morocco's case. Where taxes previously set and levied by the central government were not transferred to local authorities (such as occurred in Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana during the 1980s), local governments were starved for resources and unable to support development, and questions were raised as to the central governments' real intentions to decentralize, like cutting national deficits.

Nominal progress toward participatory training and projects was achieved by the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD), Morocco's ambitious and ongoing project that was launched by the king in 2005 and is based conceptually on the participatory approach directed toward the most marginalized rural and urban people. NIHD measurably raised national awareness of matters related to sustainable development, at least in part due to the king constantly touring the country in support of its projects. In fact, mainstreaming and drawing attention to the ideals of participation in development have helped NIHD prepare the nation for decentralization to some degree, and perhaps has helped decentralization avoid simply being a vehicle for transferring power from national elites to local ones.

However, as the king and the National Human Development Observatory acknowledged, the levels of community participation in planning and managing NIHD projects are less than ideal or even inadequate. This outcome is likely in large part attributable to the fact that the NIHD is implemented by host ministries (mostly the Ministry of Interior) whose modus operandi is top-down management. The NIHD naturally took on the character of the highly centralized government which implements it.

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Morocco's participatory decentralization will require reforming the Ministry of Interior, whose purpose is the internal security of the nation – just as it is in most countries in the region. This Ministry that has traditionally created feelings of fear and suspicion among the public being the primary charge of human development is counterproductive. The Ministry of Interior's responsibilities related to development should be handed to social service ministries, including, among others, the Ministry of Agriculture who carries the mission of integrated development in rural areas, and the new decentralization agency that will likely be created, that should act primarily as a coordinating body among the different ministries, sectors, and administrative tiers to create integrated initiatives, similar in principle to how Morocco's Ministry of Environment is charged to function. Protocols requiring notification of the Ministry of Interior of community planning meetings and project implementation activities should be phased out. Genuine decentralization involves a level of local activity that will increasingly make this kind of reporting an administrative burden for local communities and the Ministry, and it seems quite unnecessary in any case. However, the Ministry of Interior could play an important role in building institutional partnerships by making available to the public, via the Internet, information related to the mission, region, and how to contact the tens of thousands of nonprofit Moroccan associations.

While offering an innovative model that unites democracy-building with sustainable development, Morocco's implementation must be absolutely bold to be successful. Clearly, based on the Moroccan model, the monarchy is open to transformative change of the whole of society, but through a bottom-up process driven by developmentally empowered and self-reliant local communities that are integrated in a decentralized national system and whose elected leaders are chosen based on their ability to help forge and respond to the consensus decisions of their constituents.

Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir is a sociologist and president of the High Atlas Foundation (www.hihatlasfoundation.org), a nongovernment organization dedicated to community development in Morocco. The views expressed in the article are his own. He can be reached at ben-meir@mailcity.com

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