



Ethiopian Observer


[Editorial](#)
[Mission](#)
[About](#)
[Home](#)
[DV 2006](#)
[Archives](#)


- ▶ [Africanidea](#)
- ▶ [Africa Review](#)
- ▶ [America Gov](#)
- ▶ [Afrol News](#)
- ▶ [Ayder](#)
- ▶ [Ethiopianamerican](#)
- ▶ [Irob](#)
- ▶ [Eyasu Solomon Blog](#)
- ▶ [Mekelle city](#)
- ▶ [Meqelle](#)
- ▶ [Reporter](#)
- ▶ [TDVA](#)
- ▶ [Tigrai Net](#)
- ▶ [Tigrai online Forum](#)
- ▶ [Tigrai_online](#)
- ▶ [Mekelletimes.com](#)
- ▶ [UTNA](#)
- ▶ [Awate](#)
- ▶ [EthioEritreaConflict](#)
- ▶ [Walta Information](#)
- ▶ [Ethiopian Culture](#)
- ▶ [Queen Sheba](#)
- ▶ [WorldFocus](#)

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- ▶ [Financial Times](#)
- ▶ [Globe and Mail](#)
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- ▶ [Independent](#)
- ▶ [Int'l Herald](#)
- ▶ [IRIN](#)
- ▶ [Los Angeles Times](#)
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- ▶ [New York Times](#)
- ▶ [Reuters](#)
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- ▶ [Toronto Star](#)
- ▶ [USA Today](#)
- ▶ [Washington Post](#)
- ▶ [Washington Times](#)
- ▶ [Wall Street Journal](#)
- ▶ [Mawi speaks](#)

Youth Entrepreneurship in Community by Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir Marrakech, Morocco

Moroccan youth today, whether urban or rural based, face enormous obstacles in achieving their self-development and in creating the improvements they seek for their families, communities, country, and even for the world.

As they know all too well, they are confronted with the statistical reality which confirms the more educational credits they have, the more their income expectation is proportionately diminished. The higher the level of education results in fewer employment options available for them to consider. The backdrop of having little faith in the social system, its sense of fair play, clouds the real freedom available to join cooperatives, to form businesses their aspirations mirror, and to envision more rewarding accomplishments.

In rural regions youth unemployment is more severe. Cash economies, dependent on established day-laborer experience, offer little chance of job openings. Urban migration is the only alternative for so many, even when their real desires would be to remain in their communities and to build on their local, heartfelt attachments. The poor and unacceptable levels of rural education compel young families to relocate in cities. Considering the strong incentives evident among youth to alter their realities, the success rate is low. The funding, secured for launching new projects, appears to be the exception.

This said, the bright light for change can be found rooted in the Moroccan condition. People's participation in their own development is the law of the land, pervading the social structure by way of policies, programs, and legal obligation. Portions of these national framework guidelines for human development specify youth as a primary and potential vehicle in facilitating local participatory development movements the nation seeks. This is to say the direct engagement of youth, in bringing their respective communities together, in planning and in managing the projects, offers the fulfilment their lives deserve while providing a key causeway to Morocco's best future. Simply put: Moroccan sustainable development, the reality of its outcome for all people will be determined by the role its youth plays.

But how do we move forward, and how does this embody true entrepreneurship? As in ways of learning, of forging new skills, we do best by the practice of doing. We coordinate inclusive, local dialogue by assisting in that dialogue. We help others in defining their heartfelt projects directed towards a better future by doing just that: asking the questions, collecting the responses, aggregating them in helping others work through them until a common consensus and direction becomes defined.

In addition, we put forth successful project proposals by writing and submitting them with responsible follow-up. We learn how to create budgets by creating them. We build capacities around the evaluation of past actions in order to build future courses by engaging in them. We learn from experience; so must our youth. Thankfully, there are no preconditions required to begin. There is no educational degree we must have. There is no innate status or background needed to qualify. We begin by beginning. Time and life are short, so we must begin now.

We are often taught to think that entrepreneurship comes from our own innovation. We are often encouraged to believe that to become the most creative, strategic, and successful is in doing that which arises from our own ingenuity, from our own personal business sense, and rests with our own ability to invent and to decide.

This outlook is categorically false, misleading, and even antithetical in effecting sustainable and progressive development towards a satisfactory society. Entrepreneurship rests on what we give towards drawing out and realizing the ideas of the people. Innovation is the embodiment of a thousand voices intersecting and resulting in one agreement for a collective, communal development. Our creativity is a reflection of how we assist others in understanding and pursuing their hopes for the future. Youth entrepreneurship is not an endeavor of separate individuals, but rather a concern of all youth, enriching themselves by building their communities' development course and driven by public participation.

There is a heavy burden Moroccan youth experience, with trepidation the future must hold in their hearts. To even fulfill the promise of the light of people's participation and development is truly painstaking and difficult, without certainty, and with non-linear progress. There is, however, reason for gratitude when national policies champion youth's role in creating sustainable change, and sees everyone's participation as vital to that change. The question before us is: will we give ourselves over to the cause of others; thereby to the vast multiplicity of entrepreneurship, with all the resources entailed, in order to walk this course?

Even though time brings us understanding, it is not presently our friend. There is urgency to this call in completing the Moroccan model in bringing, finally, mutual satisfaction; in the giving and the receiving our lives seriously need. Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir is a sociologist and president of the High Atlas Foundation in Morocco.



Photo by Elizabeth McClintock, November 2019, Region of Marrakech-Safi.

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