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# Mobilizing Decentralized, Participatory Energy Transition In Morocco – OpEd

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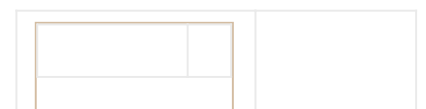
By IDN

By Kerstin Opfer, Yossef Ben-Meir, Imane Akhezzane and Marine Pouget\*

Humankind faces the unprecedented challenge of existing on the warmest earth we have known. A lack of political will and societal awareness has inhibited the necessary, vigorous change to meet this challenge.

North Africa is one of the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change, experiencing severe environmental degradation. Morocco is no exception.

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Creeping desertification, compromised forests, diminishing water resources, damaged ecosystems, and natural disasters threaten not only Morocco's rich biodiversity but also the livelihoods, well-being, and health of its people.

Morocco is the energy pioneer on the African continent, one of the first to champion renewable energy (RE) and to align economic development with environmental protection and sustainability. Several large-scale projects have been initiated, but small-scale projects remain insufficient to enable a successful transition to 100 per cent RE. Morocco's promotion of decentralization acknowledges the peoples' will to participate in decision-making and manage their own affairs, but these have not been significantly applied throughout the country.

The mission of the [High Atlas Foundation \(HAF\)](#) as a facilitator is to gather experts from academia, civil society, public and private sectors, and legislators willing to move forward and bring meaningful policy reform through proactive and decisive participation. Discussions and multi-participant workshops with local and international experts have been essential to our current work in this area. We have assessed the current state of energy sector development and decentralization and offer here a way forward.

**Morocco's energy sector** is highly carbon-intensive and heavily dependent on energy imports, affected by fluctuations in price and supply. Electricity demand has increased dramatically from population growth, economic development, and near-universal access – necessitating foreign imports to meet demand. Morocco has set ambitious targets, with institutional and legal frameworks for RE attracting national and international investment, research and innovation. It has set in place a considerable number of green energy initiatives, including two ambitious programs for solar and wind power. Knowledge and expertise within Morocco are thus among the most profound within the continent, and the attractive investment climate has lowered costs for alternative energy.

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**Decentralization** is an integral part of Morocco's policy agendas, with frameworks for doing so productively, inclusively, and equitably. Some frameworks include the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), which provides sub-nationally managed funding for local development projects; the Municipal Charter, which requires locally-elected

representatives to create participatory development plans for local projects; the Decentralization Roadmap, which integrates the three pillars of devolution, deconcentration, and delegation; the Decentralization Charter, submitted by the

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government at the request of King Mohammed VI, ideally intended to bind national and regional government agencies to specific functions in administering human services; and the newly-ratified Constitution in 2011, which further enshrined the right of citizens' participation in decision-making processes with decentralization, transparency, and good governance.

Our assessment has shown that the decentralization of energy transition requires the following measures:

1. Enhance cooperation across sectors. Economic, private, civil, scientific, and other sectors must coordinate expectations and share information for the level of transformation that no one could accomplish alone. HAF and [Germanwatch e.V.](#) launched an initiative in 2019 to create such a cross-sectoral partnership for decentralized energy transition in Morocco. Enhanced integration of administrative tiers and ministries following this model could enable the exchange of best practices.
2. Strengthen regional agreements to cooperatively address challenges. Morocco promotes South-South cooperation and has already established economic partnerships and significantly strengthened political ties with other African countries. Many national agencies are already operating in several African countries. Morocco's exports to these countries have quintupled over a decade, making it a hub for RE-based electricity, trade, capacity-building, and innovation. Strengthening this regional cooperation will increase investment interest and opportunities for companies seeking entry into the African market, lowering interest rates and inflation while maximizing production.
3. Improve management of people-centred initiatives. The decentralization charter establishes clear parameters for how the national and regional levels work together but is less clear about the role of provinces and municipalities. Since regional public administrative centres remain distant from dispersed communities, clarity about their functions and responsibilities within the decentralization context will help action-planning and decision-making for all sectors and tiers.
4. Accelerate the implementation of RE projects. Integration of development agendas into energy planning and policy has been limited, and the financial support and incentives for smaller projects are less developed. Governments, policymakers, and regulators need to speed up strategies for bringing RE projects to fruition.
5. Raise awareness about readily available financial support. A credit line specific to RE or an appropriate framework for successful financing is lacking. Information about decentralized, small-scale, and people-centered approaches and their associated benefits is necessary to help mobilize support and make funding easily accessible for local communities. Investment promotion measures are also needed to encourage public-private partnerships to share investment costs, risks, and benefits and to attract both domestic and foreign investors in climate finance.

In conclusion, Morocco has an enormous opportunity to address the climate crisis. Large-scale implementation of renewables is indispensable to meet Morocco's energy needs, but they should be accompanied by small-scale RE solutions to help reduce poverty. Becoming a world climate leader with a



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different model for energy and electricity issues requires policy and regulatory frameworks as well as new forms of cooperation and investments opportunities. Setting clear political goals is essential to secure investments, stakeholders' mobilization, and resources allocation. A strong political will is indispensable for driving the decentralization of renewable energy.

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