

Prospects for Morocco to 2025

By Jason Ben-Meir*

Morocco's national report issued last month, "50 Years of Human Development: Perspectives to 2025," is a very instructive and important document for the country.

Inaugurated in 2003 by King Mohammed VI, the study, conducted by a group of 100 experts from universities, government, and civil society, assessed human development since the country's independence and prospects for the future. The final report states that Morocco is "in a period of profound questioning," at a "crossroads," and faces a choice between a "decentralized country where all elements in society contribute to human development," or a "regressive spiral" that leads to an "untenable situation." The path Morocco takes is of considerable consequence to its people, as well as the region and beyond. Morocco is a crossroads of Africa, the



Middle East, and Europe, and as such has important influences on them, in addition to being a vital ally of the United States with free trade status.

The report's descriptions of poverty in Morocco, especially in rural areas, is a strong reminder (certainly for those of us who lived and worked in Morocco's countryside) that such poverty need not exist because of the real potential for development. In my view, the report emphasizes the right areas (women and youth, decentralized development, and the Moroccan Diaspora) that can significantly help Morocco achieve its human potential. Here are some suggestions to advance in these areas:

First, development projects designed and managed by women and youth, and their training in the skills needed for communities to create self-reliant development, are vitally necessary. Participatory planning activities help communities in determining their development priorities and creating action plans to achieve their goals. These tools assist women and youth in implementing sustainable socio-economic development. The process will empower them and improve their decision-making abilities through information sharing. A lot is already happening in Morocco in regards to women and youth development, but the potential is enormous because of the desire by these groups to come together in order to make a difference for themselves, their

families, and their communities.

Second, Morocco has shown a commitment to a decentralized country (where people democratically manage their own affairs), and has made important gains in this regard. However, additional decentralization policies are necessary to more proactively bring members of communities together to create local projects that meet their needs. The National Initiative for Human Development is based on the fundamental premise of decentralized development, and will continue to make large inroads in promoting locally controlled projects. Here again, training is key because genuine decentralization takes place when local skills and capacities are able to catalyze and manage development. Training in facilitation of community planning activities equips people to manifest decentralized development and democracy into their lives and communities. The National Initiative recognizes this and recently announced a wide range of trainings that will take place under its auspices. The National Initiative is also dedicated to supporting centers that serve and build the capacities of the poor. Participatory planning centers, which provide training in facilitation and other skills, and where communities collectively plan development, will help attain a decentralized country. Their construction serves the complete objectives of the National Initiative in an effective and direct way and should be supported.

Finally, the Moroccan Diaspora can contribute more to the development of their homeland. Of course, most Moroccan expatriates, and so many others around the world who care about Morocco, are eager to play a helpful part. Networks, associations, and events need to be created to give them the opportunity to contribute to Morocco's future. This is increasingly being done, and a number of new international non-profit organizations that benefit Morocco have recently been established. Here again there is enormous potential. Morocco has an incredibly diverse range of constituent groups that would be willing to support decentralized development projects. A strategic global fundraising campaign would bring in tens of millions of dollars from private individuals and companies, and help create very productive international partnerships that benefit Morocco.

The potential exists for Morocco to achieve prosperity generated by human development. This will happen when communities and neighborhoods across the country come together and implement projects that free them from poverty and realize their dreams. Human potential is set free by building community projects based on the ideas for development of local people. The 50 year report contains a dire warning and at the same time suggests the viable alternative of decentralized democratic development. We will refer to this study for decades as we see Morocco's development progress and recognize its implications for the region and the world.



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