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2014-12-29

Morocco and South-South Unity

The reign of King Mohammed VI of Morocco is in the process of being framed by a number of progressive and productive pillars. Among these is one stand-out initiative focusing on building South-South cooperation between Morocco and its neighbors within Africa.

Certainly, the South-South movement has been gaining transformative momentum since the 1980s as developing nations began to respond to exploitative dependency relationships that had been forged previously with developed countries.

South-South regional blocs well managed and for the benefit of the many, can enable the people of nations to have the benefit of open markets without the severe social dislocation that often results. With its increased market size, economies of scale develop which, with increased efficiency, result in a reduction in prices. The new competition helps to break up monopolies, also putting downward pressure on prices. Further, the experience of South-South blocs - including the catalyzing of domestic regulatory reforms and standards - may also be considered a transitional phase to global competitiveness. **(Author: Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir)**

Global free traders who would see this form of regionalism both as diverting resources away from multilateralism and as protectionist should know that in fact South-South unity manifest itself as outward-looking. Regionalists are very often willing to eliminate trade barriers in a phased process that incorporates, for example, the lessons learned from the economic fallout in rural Mexico under NAFTA.

Mexico's harsh experience certainly informed Morocco's 2004 free trade agreement with the United States. As a result, Morocco is opening up agricultural products in later stages in order to give more time to promote human development with farming families.

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There is an unfortunate irony in that Morocco's king, who is intellectually and emotionally a backer of regionalism - and specifically of the Maghreb Union of North African nations which is the subject of his 1993 doctoral thesis - should have this aspiration rendered unrealizable because of the four-decade-long conflict surrounding the Sahara, the region which to Morocco is as sacred as the very concept of sovereignty.

Meanwhile existential matters are left by the wayside. Shared regional challenges involving migration, the environment and security remain unresolved and opportunities for green agricultural growth that could transform societies through reinvestment in communities and other major human development initiatives are not realized.

Morocco's proposal to the United Nations Security Council for a resolution, involving an autonomous Sahara within Moroccan sovereignty, offers a highly flexible framework, one which it is barely conceivable that Morocco can surpass.

The continuation of this conflict may be a classic example of the inability to separate positions from interests.

As a result of the proposal from the Moroccan side, the onus is placed on the Polisario to describe how they envisage an organizational arrangement for governance that promotes the prosperity of the people and assess whether such an arrangement could be accommodated by the 'autonomy within sovereignty' framework. They may conclude, after thorough analysis, that Morocco's proposal enables a governance system that could meet their and the people's economic, political, cultural and environmental interests.

In any case, Morocco's proposal for peace encapsulates three concepts, whose employment could help unify southern nations and enable them to realize their human needs.

Decentralization of decision-making and management from the central level to provincial, municipal and community levels is one of the most powerful forms of conflict resolution. For example, it is likely key to salvaging Iraq's future as a nation state; historically, it was the linchpin enabling the founding of the United States. The Ukraine is banking its future governance system on decentralization and arguably its use is on the rise in all hemispheres.

National governance that supports local people's decision-making on their development future plays a dual role as a preventative measure of conflict.

Finally, promoting community empowerment is a national unifying force as people are encouraged to pursue and achieve their self-determined interests.

Morocco, like all nations, struggles with the implementation of its ideals. What the Kingdom undeniably has achieved is the consistent adoption of a stance that promotes sustainable development driven by the participatory democratic method, decentralization and South-South partnerships (while embracing global relations).

The lesson gained from the Moroccan experience, then, is that enabling South-South unity requires three things: a head of state who is positively outspoken and action-oriented in this regard; the adoption of decentralization, both as an arrangement for conflict resolution and to promote development, and the ability of people to associate in freedom.

There are no further preconditions necessary to promote self-reliant regional blocs, nations and communities; with these in place, new, non-dependent relationships will be formed, the means of self-reliance helping to achieve its ends.

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