

Overcoming Severe Water Scarcity: A Moroccan Vision

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The six consecutive years of [drought](#) in Morocco have been excruciating. The impact on the price of basic food items, such as meat and olive oil, has been striking. In recent years, the rainy season's onset has been unpredictable, making it difficult to know when to plant, whether rain will come at all, or whether we are in a new trend to which we must adjust.

At the same time, human ingenuity and Moroccan national frameworks for sustainability can reduce the heavy burden of the drought. Morocco is poised to see this struggle through, and how it does can illuminate a pathway to help other nations endure through their own severe water scarcity.

Every essential national framework is in place to encourage people at the local level to adapt and to show their resiliency. In fact, the severity of the drought requiring adaptation could further operationalize Morocco's already established charters, policies, and programs for people's participation in natural resource management. Indeed, local communities applying Morocco's pairing of sustainable development with participatory democratic procedures to address the water crisis could significantly fulfill its national goal of establishing decentralized administrations. After all, the more that sub-national (private-public) partners work together to implement community-identified initiatives, the more that decentralized management systems take practical form.

Morocco's national [investments](#) in desalinization and other large-scale projects that increase and strategically disperse its water supply for regional balance are, by established global standards, exceptional. These investments also epitomize the rational justification of Morocco's devolutionary path to decentralization, enabling the national level to assist its less advantaged regions. In this regard, [led](#) by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Morocco is well on its way to achieving its goals in an incredibly challenging situation by integrating these initiatives with renewable energy and the nationally recognized urgency.

However, community management of local opportunities and new and restored water infrastructure remain elusive, and the critical widespread rural mobilization is not catalyzed to the extent necessary for greater success.

A sustainable development process that results in locally identified and implemented water systems advancing conservation yet enabling higher production—which is in fact Morocco's approach—looks like this: in rural places where water scarcity is most seriously acute, women and men gather in different places (as is done traditionally) to examine as individuals and as a group their experienced difficulties in life related to social relationships, work and money outlooks, and health, education, and livelihood opportunities.

By first introspectively looking at their inner hurdles, strengths, and discovery processes determining their future and projects they want most of all, this experience in rural places commonly leads individuals to issues of water for drinking and irrigation combined with sustainable water delivery. A participatory planning approach resting upon the community's own determination of their development objectives and action plans and their commitment to their projects' maintenance and long-term durability is the primary factor of sustainability.

In Morocco, this process is not only found in the nation's municipal charter, which requires long- and short-term plans to be developed by its local council members alongside the jurisdiction's residents, but is also the central premise of the funding arm of the Moroccan government's National Initiative for Human Development ([NIHD](#)). Further, the feature of decentralized administration of development has a home in the nation's Constitution, and women being a driving force is codified in the country's progressively [evolving](#) family code (Moudouwana).

This relentless drought, that too shall pass, requires for us in Morocco to add the maximal possible level of investment into the already established Moroccan strategies to community sustainability. This means that we need to train thousands of agricultural extensionists and guardians of the nation's forests, thousands of university students and rural school teachers, thousands of members of municipal councils and civil society, and community and religious leaders in the methods for facilitating interactive participatory dialogue and activities for personal group empowerment and planning of local priority initiatives. This is especially true of those initiatives that involve water containment and maximization of utility including not just basins, towers, pipes, and drip systems, but also building the hundreds of thousands of terraces and planting hundreds of millions of endemic varieties of trees that will capture water, enable more gradual flow, without losing Morocco's precious water to runoff (yes, trees [conserve](#) water!).

Finance for local community associations and cooperatives for all matters concerning local management of water and its efficient utility should be directed not just from the Ministry of Agriculture, but prioritized by budgets across ministries whenever possible and most especially from the NIHD. Since water infrastructure is by far the costliest locally-prioritized project, NIHD should reduce its 25 percent finance matching requirement from community beneficiaries and co-create project proposals with local groups (since rural illiteracy rates are of national concern), making the NIHD funding accessible to those who seek it.

Essentially, the combination of Morocco's public frameworks to advance sustainable development, all integrating people's participation and management, requires facilitators to catalyze and assist the design and implementation of water infrastructure and projects. The procurements necessary for their completion would be enabled by the support and reform of Morocco's funding mechanisms.

In this way, Morocco through decentralized community-driven water projects in the face of a terrible drought, will powerfully entrench and scale its model, and in so doing inspire other countries on how people's participation can be the determinant feature that turns a devastating situation into one that is made transformationally better for time to come.

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Featured image: A new irrigation basin in the Al Haouz province of Morocco, as part of the rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of the 8 September 2023 earthquake (photo by the High Atlas Foundation, 2024).

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