

Renewable Energy and Bottom-up Decentralization in Morocco

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The Kingdom of Morocco is a place of hope and promise of honest attempts to make strides commensurate with the humanistic journey. It recognizes in its Constitution, laws, policies, and programs that community participation is the essential ingredient for achieving optimal outcomes, including sustainability and ever-deeper satisfaction among the people.

The premise of the nation’s family code is rooted in not just centuries but millennia, calling for justice and equity in regard to women and men and our gender-based experiences. Morocco has also determined—based on its own historically informed outlook, but also from lessons around the world drawn over time—that concentrating the power of decision-making and control over the affairs that matter the most to people ought to rest among them and in the public administrative tier closest to them. This is also a matter of recognizing human dignity: distant determinations which are imposed are rarely as appropriate as those that people make for themselves and their families alongside their neighbors and community members.

The national commitment for renewable energy is also among the nation’s flagship efforts for a society that lives in balance, not just with each other as a diverse people but also in regards to the relationship with the natural environment. Morocco’s global noteworthy commitment to renewable energy, backed by financial and political will, is indeed inspiring. It is part and parcel of Morocco’s transformational intent in the other vital sectors of society and growth.

Nonetheless, as incredibly major as the country’s opportunities are, the difficulties and inadequacies of their implementation can, at times, be stark and real. Morocco deserves enormous credit for its honesty. One need not look any further than the Special Report for the New Development Model (spearheaded by H.M. the King of Morocco) for the truth in regard to both the promise and its painful lack of fulfillment, concluding with the urgency to chart a recalibrated course of action.

The national commitment to decentralization—or regionalization—that is captured in Article

1 of the Constitution is essential; it provides a system by which localities can identify and implement related projects in keeping with their own priorities. Such community movements occur, particularly in partnership with public and private sectors, the more these channels of cooperation in reaching decentralization can be effective.

Decentralization will remain stalled or will flourish to the extent that communities comprising the country's municipalities are vibrant and energized in their collaborative course, implementing the development they most seek. The unsatisfactory level of community actions in this regard is the primary reason that decentralization is not providing an empowering structure and necessary difference for the country.

Renewable energy projects, no matter their impressive prominence even with Morocco's sincere dedication, has not been integrative of community voices, evaluations, and, arguably, benefits—in a manner felt by the local people.

The High Atlas Foundation and its domestic and international multi-stakeholder partners all hold high hopes and expectations for Morocco's commitment to decentralized renewable energy. They are taking the course that we must first provide opportunities for harnessing empowerment among intended beneficiaries and also engage in participatory planning of initiatives that they most want. We will then see areas where integration of renewable energy can take place within the pathway to development determined by the communities.

As in all genuine, empowering local movements, it begins with an invitation by the community members expressing their desire to fully engage and give the time and energy needed to achieve successful outcomes. Many invitations in our program's experience are forthcoming, and we decided to focus in the Youssoufia province with a village community in the Jnane Bouih municipality because of circumstances that they face, including severe scarcity of water and evident vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

Women and men prioritized clean drinking water and a nursery of different endemic fruit-bearing trees and medicinal plants as part of the fulfilling future that they seek. As of today, with the initial phases of empowerment workshops implemented, the registration of their cooperative, and a source of sweet and nourishing water found at a depth of 200 meters, we remain steadfast in the completion of their individual and collective dream.

These local development experiences, viewed comparatively and in the aggregate, reveal the commonality of needs: the difficulty of accessing resources to create change, the gender-based differences in objectives, and the desire to remain in rural communities and not migrate to cities for the sake of bread alone. Experiences examined in these and in other informative ways can actually be helpful in reforming policy. The power of decentralization is not only in its concentration of capacity among the people who drive their own futures and possibilities but also in its ability to bring forward new approaches and policy frameworks that are more commensurate with what people actually want and pursue.

Our experiences in Youssoufia and elsewhere are, in fact, revelatory in that they spotlight the adjustments and programs that can more effectively release the endless energy that people have for improving their lives. The Youssoufia experience is about the immediate needs of its residents. But, it is also about understanding the needs that transcend the countryside and that, when sincerely listened to, can bring about laws backed by resources ushering in the Moroccan promise for all its people.

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Featured image: Imagine women's empowerment session in Youssoufia (High Atlas Foundation, 2021)

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