

# Morocco's Commitment to the Economic and Social Development of the Sahara

- The development of the South has been a priority for the Moroccan government for the past three decades. It is a common misconception that the conflict in the Western Sahara is a war over resources. On the contrary, not only are the territories not resource-rich, but the government has also allocated many more resources than it has gained. In financial terms, Morocco has invested a much greater sum of money developing the provinces than it has received from natural resource extraction.

<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Synoptique/15%20Synoptique%20Ang.pdf>

<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Articles/Dossier/ARTJAJA2533p088-092.xml2/-peche-Tourisme-phosphate-Le-Sud-des-provinces-pionnieres.html>

## Economic Development

- Since 1976, the Moroccan government has committed 20 billion dirhams (approximately \$2.5 billion) to infrastructure and capacity building in the South. Its goal from the beginning has been to develop the territory, particularly urban areas, by promoting economic development and establishing basic infrastructure, including roads, housing units, hospitals, and schools.

<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2551p078.xml0/-amenagement-du-territoire-infrastructure-Sahara-urbanisme-Sahara-l-amenagement-des-cites-du-Sud.html>

<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Problematique-generale/06%20Probl%20Gen%20Fr.pdf>

- Between 1976 and 1998, public authorities facilitated the construction/amelioration of 35,000 housing units throughout the southern provinces. In 1999, King Mohammed VI launched a project for an additional 20,000 housing units and land plots. This commitment to eliminating unsanitary housing/slums, improving urban living conditions, and providing free or low-cost housing to the population continues to this day and remains a key axe of the government's development initiatives in the south. The 2004-2008 development plan included a commitment to 7,000 new housing units, 18,700 new land plots, and renovations for 40,000 urban housings units.

<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Habitatinsalubre/08%20Hab%20Ins%20Fr.pdf>

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- Following his visit to the region in 2001, King Mohammed VI launched a number of substantial projects, notably in Laâyoune, where he initiated the construction of a power station, the construction of 1,550 low-cost housing units, and the expansion of the water purification station, the port, and the fish market. This new investment totaled 2.3 billion dirhams (approximately \$290 million).

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- On March 6, 2002, King Mohammed VI established a special agency, l'Agence pour la Promotion et le Développement Economique et Social des provinces du Sud du Royaume (The Agency for the Promotion and Social and Economic Development of the Southern Provinces of the Kingdom) for the development of the southern provinces, noting his firm willingness to

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“make our Southern provinces a model of integrated regional development and a hub for investment.”

<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Programme-de-developpement/12%20Prog%20dev%20Fr.pdf>

- The Southern Development Agency has promoted economic and social development by applying principles of good governance, ensuring that local, regional, and national actors establish partnerships and work together to address the needs of their communities.  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Programme-de-developpement/12%20Prog%20dev%20Fr.pdf>
- Through dialogue with local authorities, civil society representatives, diverse economic actors, and the mobilization of locals, the agency has been able to identify the needs of the citizens of the Southern provinces and tailored its development projects accordingly.  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Programme-de-developpement/12%20Prog%20dev%20Fr.pdf>
- For the 2004-2008 period, the Moroccan government, through the Southern Development Agency, committed 7.2 billion dirhams (approximately US \$900 million) for 226 development projects along 7 development axes: housing and urban development, fisherman villages and markets, water and environment, roads and infrastructure, tourism and craftsmanship, agriculture and breeding, surveys and feasibility studies. These axes highlight the government's commitment to improving infrastructure and overall quality of life for the population of the Southern provinces.  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Programme-de-developpement/12%20Prog%20dev%20Fr.pdf>
- Several urban and rural communities in the south have also been specifically targeted by the National Human Development Initiative (INDH). The INDH, which was established in 2005 by King Mohammed VI to combat poverty and promote the conditions for social development by alleviating social exclusion in urban areas and combating poverty in rural areas has an initial budget of 10 billion dirhams (approximately \$1.25 billion) and a mandate from 2005-2010.  
[http://www.ondh.ma/pdf/RapportFR\\_Chap1-2-3.pdf](http://www.ondh.ma/pdf/RapportFR_Chap1-2-3.pdf)
- The provinces in southern Morocco benefit significantly from the initiatives of the INDH, which aim to direct money to the most marginalized and vulnerable populations in order to eliminate social imbalances. In terms of funding, the southern provinces rank well above the national average. The majority of the country receives, on average, fewer than 300 dirhams (\$40)/person. The towns that receive a higher allotment per person are situated in the regions of Laâyoune-Boudjour and Oued Eddahab, where the disbursements per person are approximately 400 dirhams (\$50) /person and 600 dirhams (\$75)/person respectively. In Dakhla, the allocation is approximately 1500 dirhams (\$200)/person, highlighting the commitment of the Moroccan government and the INDH to promoting social and economic equality in the southern provinces.  
[http://www.ondh.ma/pdf/RapportFR\\_Chap1-2-3.pdf](http://www.ondh.ma/pdf/RapportFR_Chap1-2-3.pdf)

- The population of the southern provinces also benefits from tax breaks, low-cost or free housing, and subsidies on basic commodities.<sup>1</sup>
- The commitment of the government has significantly transformed the three provinces of the Sahara. In 1975, the region had the lowest rating for human development in the country. Nearly 50% of the population of the Sahara ranked below the poverty line and illiteracy was prolific. Today, the provinces have been completely transformed. Its human development rating ranks among the highest, as do its rates for education, health, literacy, and access to infrastructure. In 20 years, poverty diminished 66%, two times faster than at the national level.  
<http://www.lavieeco.com/economie/15465-sahara-le-rapport-qui-na-jamais-ete-publie.html>
- As a result of this investment, the provinces now have two airports, four maritime ports, 10,000 km of roads, and a connectivity rate of 82% and 81% for water and electricity respectively. Significant projects have been completed, including the sea water desalination plant in Laâyoune, the Laâyoune power station, Dakhla harbor, and a new telecommunications station. This is in addition to the wide-array of government buildings, health care facilities, stadiums, mosques, schools, libraries, theaters, and cultural centers that the government has built in the region to improve the quality of life for the population.  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Problematiche-generale/06%20Probl%20Gen%20Fr.pdf>  
<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2551p078.xml0/-amenagement-du-territoire-infrastructure-Sahara-urbanisme-Sahara-l-amenagement-des-cites-du-Sud.html>  
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## Social Development

- The government has also made great strides in promoting the social development of the provinces. Starting in 1976, the government established a provincial department of education to enroll every child of 6 years and older in school and enlarge secondary and professional education. The significant investment yielded positive results; the percentage of children enrolled in school is 97%, the highest in the Kingdom. For youth, ages 6-22, the rate is %77.5, highlighting that in addition to primary education, the region is making great strides in secondary and university education. In addition, professional training initiatives have helped develop the human capacity of the region and have provided the region with well-trained professionals, particularly in the domains of construction, carpentry, electricity, and mechanics.<sup>2</sup>  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Problematiche-generale/06%20Probl%20Gen%20Fr.pdf>  
<http://www.lavieeco.com/economie/15465-sahara-le-rapport-qui-na-jamais-ete-publie.html>
- Also in 1976, the government began establishing health and medical services infrastructure by building hospitals, recruiting qualified personnel, promoting educational and vaccination campaigns, and distributing medicine. Currently, curative and preventative care is provided at

<sup>1</sup> Thobhani, Akbarali. *Western Sahara Since 1975 Under Moroccan Administration: Social, Economic, and Political Transformation*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Thobhani, p. 136-151.

minimal to no cost to the population and there is “little doubt that an effective health care infrastructure has been installed in the territory.”<sup>3</sup>

- Morocco’s economic initiatives and social protection programs in the South have placed the territories at the first ranks of the country in terms of human development. The area of Laâyoune-Boujdour Sakia El Hamra ranks 1 on the human development index for the country, followed by the region of Oued Eddahab-Lagouira at number 2.  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Synoptique/15%20Synoptique%20Ang.pdf>
- The impact of these development initiatives goes far beyond the creation of houses, roads, or ports. These programs are specifically designed to create steady jobs in construction, strengthen the economic capacity of the population, spur local investment and the creation of small business, and have a long-term multiplier effect. They have contributed significantly to the formation and training of local officials, professionals, and civil society groups, ensuring that the region will continue  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Programme-de-developpement/12%20Prog%20dev%20Fr.pdf>  
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<http://www.lavieeco.com/economie/15465-sahara-le-rapport-qui-na-jamais-ete-publie.html>
- According to a 2008 report written by a former UNDP expert, “the gains made in the southern provinces since their reintegration with the Kingdom will, in time, permit the region to cross the threshold of irreversibility in terms of human development.”  
<http://www.lavieeco.com/economie/15465-sahara-le-rapport-qui-na-jamais-ete-publie.html>

## Resource Realities

- The Moroccan government is working under serious environmental constraints to promote the development of the Sahara. Fertile land for agriculture is limited to just 1.2% of the total land, the regions of Sakia El Hamra and Oued Eddahab face severe climactic challenges, including drought and desertification, and there is increasing evidence that fishing resources are dwindling. Furthermore, the potential for significant mineral resource exploitation remains merely hypothetical and even the resources that are being extracted, primarily phosphates, require significant processing to be a high enough quality for the global market.  
<http://www.lagencedusud.gov.ma/download/Problematique-generale/06%20Probl%20Gen%20Fr.pdf>
- Under the terms of the 2007-2011 Moroccan-European Union Fisheries Agreement, Morocco received €36.1 million each year in exchange for granting EU fishing vessels the right to fish in Moroccan waters, including off the coast of Western Sahara. This investment totaled €144.4 million from 2007-20011, a far lesser sum than the millions Morocco has invested in the South to develop ports, fishing villages, and fisheries infrastructure. The EU and Morocco are currently negotiating a follow-up agreement designed to promote sustainable development in the Western Sahara.  
[http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/international/agreements/morocco/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/international/agreements/morocco/index_en.htm)

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<sup>3</sup> Thobhani, p. 161.

- The most common misperception regarding resources in the Sahara region is that it is “phosphate-rich”. Phosphates are mined by the OCP Group, and the Phos-Boucrâ subsidiary represents approximately 6% of total phosphate sales for the OCP Group and only 1% of its proven reserves. Furthermore, over the 30 year period that the Boucrâ mine has been in operation (first under Spanish control and in 2002 fully owned by OCP), revenues were only profitable in 2008 due to a spike in commodity prices. In addition, the phosphate that OCP processes in the Sahara is of a lower grade and therefore requires significant processing and investment to be transformed into market-grade phosphate.
- The OCP Group has invested more in local economic and social development than it has received from phosphate revenues. For example, since 2002, more than \$420 million has been spent on operating and capital expenditures and more than \$1.3 billion on personnel costs in the region. Over 60% of new hires are from the area and six of the top executives including the leader of Phos-Boucrâ are from the Sahara region.

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