



Rights & Democracy

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Democratic Development and Civil Society Movements in Morocco: Analysis and Strategic Actions

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Summary of the Study

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Introduction

Morocco has gone through a remarkable transition in the past few years — a transition that has affected its politics, economy and social realities. This "democratic opening" puts Morocco in a unique position: a country in the Middle East and North Africa and (MENA) region that has embarked on the path to democracy based primarily on its internal dynamics, including a reformist political leadership and an actively organised civil society. Why and how did this transition process begin in Morocco? Is it reversible? What are the problems it still faces? And, importantly, what are the lessons learnt for other countries in similar situations?

These are some of the questions addressed in *Développement démocratique et action associative au Maroc : Éléments d'analyse et axes d'intervention* (Democratic Development and Civil Society Movements in Morocco : Analysis and Strategic Actions), a substantive study undertaken by Rights and Democracy, in partnership with *Espace Associatif* — a major Moroccan civil society organization. The Study uses a grass-roots driven, participative methodology. The Study's three Moroccan authors — Rabia Naciri, Mohamed Sghir Janjar and Mohamed Mouaquit — have successfully identified the tendencies, obstacles, and opportunities that influence Morocco's transition. The result will aid policymakers and activists promote Morocco's democratic development, as well as those who are interested in democratic transition in the MENA region, or in general.

Goals and Objectives

The Kingdom of Morocco is experiencing an ongoing political opening. The goal of the Study is to assist Morocco's activists better define their objectives and strategies by analyzing certain key aspects of this democratic opening. The research was conducted *with* civil society actors *for* civil society actors. The research also aimed to strengthen the democratic process, using a broad ranging, participative methodology.

The specific objectives of the Study are:

- To improve communication, cooperation, and coordination within the Moroccan civil society movement, in order to develop a common strategy and vision linked to democratic development in Morocco;
- To identify cross-cutting issues that underlie democratic development in Morocco;
- To promote a democratic culture within Moroccan civil society organizations, as well as between organizations;
- To establish benchmarks and indicators of effective participation between civil society organizations and other participants in Morocco's development;
- To identify concrete strategies for Moroccan civil society and opportunities for cooperation with international, and in particular Canadian, partners.

Methodology

The process used to develop the Study took 6 months and was highly participative. One workshop for each theme — described below — brought together hundreds of civil society organizations and participants from the public and private sectors. The results of the workshops were compiled, before being presented at a larger workshop organized to discuss the preliminary outline of the Study. The final version of the Study was launched in Morocco at a National Forum from 19 to 21 November 2004 attended by over 100 people, including government officials and Canadian Embassy representatives.

Main Findings and Recommendations

Themes

The Study is conducted according to three cross-cutting themes that are important points of coordination and cooperation within Moroccan civil society, and between civil society and the State.

First, democratic development is examined in the context of women's rights and gender equality. Traditionally, civil society organizations that have advocated for women's rights in Morocco have been pioneers in Morocco's democratic transition.

Second, the rule of law, and in particular the independence, equality, accessibility and transparency of the judiciary, is an important component of Morocco's democratic development. To date, Morocco's political opening has largely not touched the functioning of its courts.

The final theme draws on the nature of promoting democratic culture in Morocco. Moroccan society is multicultural. It also faces the rise of politicized Islam. The principle vehicles of public culture — especially educational institutions and the media — still suffer the after-effects of repression and censorship used during *les années de plomb* (1970s & 1980s).

Chapters

These three overarching themes are the lens through which Morocco's democratic development was analyzed. They cut through the three substantive chapters on civil and political rights, economic and social rights, and spaces for dialogue. There is also a concluding chapter of recommendations.

Civil and Political Rights — The Current Situation and Perspectives for the Future

This chapter examines Morocco's political evolution over the last three decades. It defines Morocco's ongoing transition as a "political opening" that is characterized by notable advances in civil and political rights. Since the 1970s, several cycles of reform have resulted in an increased willingness to broach issues that were previously taboo. Particular attention is given to cultural and especially Amazigh (i.e. Berber) rights, women's rights, and the right to education. However, all these reforms were accompanied by the constant reaffirmation of the authority of the King, a political elite that remains chronically detached from the population, and the growth of the State's administrative structure. The terrorist attacks of 16 May 2003 have further reinforced the important democratizing role civil society must play in consolidating Morocco's political openness. The Chapter concludes by identifying how civil society can effectively

contribute to such consolidation — e.g. ensuring the proper implementation of the new family law, investing in civic education in public schools, and developing mechanisms of regular consultations with State bodies.

Economic and Social Rights — Placing Human Development at the Centre of Democratic Development

Morocco's increasingly liberalised economic sphere, coupled with improved political and civil rights, often finds itself at odds with economic and social rights. While macroeconomic indicators have improved, Morocco's economic and social development has proven discriminatory and divisive, benefiting few and polarizing many. Increased poverty, unemployment, and social inequalities threaten Morocco's improved political openness. However, this political openness contributes to a culture of social protest, whereby grievances can now be expressed through civil society that is not interpreted as a direct threat to the State. One consequence is that civil society itself has become divided, between groups that advocate for more political openness and groups that advocate primarily for economic and social rights. It is in this latter sphere that populist, often authoritarian, movements can gain momentum, undermining Morocco's democratization. This threat is compounded by the presence of radicalized Islamic elements in Moroccan society. Morocco's civil society organizations, including non-violent Islamic groups, need to improve how they link economic and social rights on the one hand, and civil and political rights on the other.

An Arena for Dialogue and Partnership: the State, Civil Society, the Private Sector, and International/Multinational Actors

The evolution of Morocco's civil society predates the current political opening. Since independence, civil society has existed in different forms but it is only since the 1990s that civil society has been instrumental in influencing political and social changes that have occurred in the Kingdom. The Study reaches some important conclusions about the nature and the role of Morocco's civil society. First, there is no universal definition of civil society association or organization in Morocco. This is indicative of the diversity and vibrancy of Morocco's civil society. Second, civil society has grown both qualitatively and quantitatively during Morocco's political opening. Civil society now plays an important role, particularly by implementing programs funded through international donors. Third, a new associational culture has emerged, which is determined less by political allegiances and more by common ideology and strategy. This new environment favours the collaborative engagement of citizens and groups, and marks a unique and positive rupture with past practices. Finally, the women's movement has contributed enormously to the improvement of the workings of civil society in Morocco. The principle challenge that Morocco's civil society associations now face is to better define their relationship with the State.

Recommendations

Based on their findings, the authors of the Study made the following recommendations to civil society organizations:

With respect to civil society organizations themselves:

- Better define their relationship with the State, political parties, and the Parliament.
- Establish avenues of constant dialogue, including partnerships, between themselves, the State, political parties, and the Parliament.
- Focus on the renewal of elites, including women, and on the improved democratic functioning *within* civil society organizations.
- Reflect on their relationship with non-violent Islamic parties and organizations.

With respect to the defense of rights and freedoms, the events of 16 May 2003 have reaffirmed the need to reinforce mechanisms that defend human rights in the face of security challenges. Thus civil society organizations should:

- Reflect upon and publicise lessons learnt regarding Morocco's repressive past and how it relates to the current situation.
- Insist that any security legislation in Morocco include clear provisions against torture, racism, and xenophobia.

- Insist on revision of media laws, in particular anti-terror legislation, to ensure freedom of speech.

With respect to public education and democratic culture:

- Identify a coherent strategy regarding the reform of public education and improve cooperation and coordination amongst civil society organizations working in this field.
- Evaluate past campaigns and initiate new campaigns to invest in civic education programmes in public schools, with the aim of deepening democratic culture in Morocco.
- Explore opportunities to defend the rights of students to education, possibly through the framework of Parent Teacher Associations.
- Seek support in developing their expertise in programming and curriculum design, in particular regarding faith-based (i.e. Islamic) education.

With respect to gender and women's rights:

- Reflect on ways to mainstream gender as a cross-cutting priority in their work. This would be a useful exercise in examining other cross-cutting issues, such as the rights of children, environmental issues, and cultural rights.
- Put in place mechanisms that evaluate how the new family law is implemented.
- Explore ways to ensure that judges, lawyers, and the public have a proper understanding of the requirements of the new law.
- Develop a partnership with universities and research institutes in order to study the short, medium, and long term impact of the new family law on gender equality, domestic violence, divorce, and division of labour inside and outside the home.
- Seize the occasion of the new family law to demand an in depth revision of the educational curriculum to eliminate any language or images that discriminate on the basis of gender.
- Pursue affirmative action measures to facilitate the participation and representation of women in leadership positions, in political parties and Parliament, as well as other State mechanisms.

With respect to cultural rights:

- Recognise that the promotion of Amazigh culture and language is crucial to Morocco's democratic development.
- Participate actively in the public discussion on the constitutional recognition of Amazigh language as a fundamental component of Moroccan identity.

- Support all efforts to institutionalise Amazigh language and culture in schools, the State administration, and the public media.
- Pursue initiatives that have as a goal the promotion of Amazigh language and culture.
- Reinforce the work of Islamic organizations that pursue non-violent, non-dogmatic, and non-authoritarian understandings of Islam in Moroccan identity.

And finally, with respect to pursuing economic and social rights, civil society organizations should:

- Improve co-ordination between those organizations that pursue an increased opening of the State, and those that advocate for economic and social rights.
- Continue building partnerships with the private sector, in particular to develop activities that contribute to the development of local communities.
- Defend the right to unionise, and promote a new union culture that sees itself as a social movement.

Acknowledgements and Biography of Authors

This study is the result of a joint collaboration between Rights & Democracy (Canada) and *Espace Associatif* (Morocco). *Espace associatif* aims to create a space to build a strong Moroccan associative movement; one based on the values of democracy, respect for rights, equality, and public engagement. Rights & Democracy and Espace Associatif wish to thank every person who has contributed to this study. Special thanks to the three authors of this study: Rabia Naciri, Mohamed Sghir Janjar and Mohamed Mouaquit.

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