

The Moroccan Advanced Regionalization and its Implementation Constraints

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Abstract: *This article examines the reality of regional development in Morocco under the new version of advanced regionalization. On several occasions, all the royal messages, letters and speeches aim at implementing an all - inclusive development model that takes into account the uniqueness of all provinces and that includes major projects designed to meet the expectations and aspirations of inhabitants in the regions. Still, this enormous project, which requires the involvement of a vast array of actors, is struggling to overcome a number of challenges related to the interference of political prerogatives among participant parties; the complications of participatory democracy as well as the crisis of renewing political elites.*

Keywords: regionalization, territorial management, constraints, advanced regionalization

1. Introduction

Morocco possesses an important historical repertoire in the territorial management. However, many constraints and challenges stand on the way of achieving a successful territorial development which is the main objective of regionalization. On top of these constraints is the stagnation of national democracy, the poor - coping of local actors with the nationally stated aspirations, the fragility of the regional legal arsenal, the limited regional financial resources, in addition to the marginalization of regions which lack the necessary natural and human resources.

So, can the current model of regionalization find solutions to the imbalances accumulated through history? Are the local authorities able to overcome the problems relating to development? It is clear that this new model of regionalization has achieved some tangible results, but it still faces a number of obstacles related to democracy and social justice.

1.1 The context of advanced regionalization in Morocco

The new version of the Moroccan regionalization is defined in the 2011 constitution as being "broad" in southern provinces, and "advanced" in all other regions. This Moroccan exclusive form of regionalization is an attempt to surmount political, socioeconomic and developmental constraints along with the issue of territorial unity. The project has also generated a lively debate on several issues such as democratic political practice, the integrity of local and regional elections, and the responsibilities of territorial authorities with regard to guardianship bodies.

The advanced regionalization workshop emerged in a time of great changes in Morocco especially after the king's January 06th, 2006 speech which was considered a guide for the second phase after independence (2006 - 2056). His speech summarized the objectives of the coming fifty years in paying special attention to the citizens' social side "in this way, we will pave the way, in the coming fifty years, to give more efforts to this important workshop to improve the economic, social and cultural rights of our citizens, mainly those who suffer from poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and marginalization" the king stated. Given that the confrontation of social dilemma necessitates a different

political and administrative structure, King Mohammed VI announced the creation of the Consultative Committee on Regionalization (CCR), entrusted with the task of preparing a new regionalization project that takes into account the Moroccan particular features and faces the constraints of development. According to the royal speech, the Consultative Committee on Regionalization should focus on four fundamental aspects:

- A process that goes beyond technical or administrative action, to the development and modernization of state structures and the promotion of integrated development;
- Diversity should be invested in a unified national identity, focusing on regional solidarity, working toward balance and consistency in terms of powers and capabilities and avoiding overlapping of competences as well as taking care of the wide decentralization.
- The creation of well - established and sustainable regions.
- Supporting the emergence of democratic councils with powers and resources to promote integrated regional development.

After long consultations and work for months, the assigned committee presented the project for advanced regionalization involving the reduction of the number of regions from 16 to 12 as the most important proposal. However, the initiatives related to the territorial issues were considered weak due to lack of harmony and coordination. The CCR's report presentation was preceded by another initiative related to the change and valuation of the communal charter according to the 17 - 00 law which was meant to be a practical response to the aspirations of the constitutional amendments.

Concerning the exceptional situation of the southern regions, the legislator adopted a second form of "broad" regionalization in terms of powers, roles and functions which gave them the right to form regional parliaments and government, to adopt a special territorial administration, and to take independent measures as to the sectoral, economic and social development of the region. This broad sense of regionalization also allows the southern regions' partnerships with territorial communities and other regions in addition to international partnerships with friendly organizations taking into consideration the possibility of

consolidating regional cultural identity in academic contents and other relevant sectors.

The Moroccan project for an expanded regionalization in the southern regions is considered an advanced proposal despite the interruption of negotiations with the Polisario front and the international community's pressure on the two parties to hold negotiations and in spite of the extension of the mission of the MINORSO by the representative of the UN Secretary - General. Morocco seriously wishes to settle this dispute through an objective and negotiated mechanism but the parties concerned do not want to solve the problem. Thus, the issue of regional development remains a persistently suspended workshop.

1.2 The constraints of advanced regionalization implementation:

Despite the progress achieved in the elected local councils, and the retreat of the central guardianship authorities' roles, the advanced regional project has not yet managed to achieve the developmental aspirations of the population because of several subjective and objective constraints.

1.2.1 Guardianship authorities' domination:

The Moroccan territorial management is run in two different unequal ways. It is governed by representatives elected by the people and other state officials appointed by a royal decree that manages the public authority and helps state officials to hold control over different territorial affairs. The reform attempts aimed at reviewing the authorities of governors and state representatives in all regions. According to the constitution, state representatives no longer represent the state individually as they cannot implement provincial and governmental decisions or manage central departments' interests in their territorial areas. The 2011 constitution, however, retained some important powers to state representatives to control and disrupt the implementation of the territorial communities' programs. Among these powers, the constitution stated that governors represent the central authority in all territorial communities which grant them the right to manipulate the regions' institutions and officials. Moreover, all their activities are carried out on behalf of the government to ensure the application of the law and the implementation of the government's decisions which makes them above regional decisions, especially in the absence of a coordination between the government and the local communities. The power to exercise administrative control remains one of the most exclusive prerogatives that constrain the authority of the chairmen of the provincial and territorial councils.

Despite all attempts to encourage the decentralization of administrative decisions, there are still many obstacles. The guardianship authorities' (regional state representatives) complete control over the regions and the reduction of the elected councils' responsibilities make the decentralization matter a real dilemma. Both sides' interests strive to dominate regional management and decision - making. Thus, elected councils always remain at the disposal of the central authorities unable to conduct a real regional development.

1.2.2 The weakness of the participatory democracy:

The 2011 constitution, and exactly in chapter 15, has made the participatory democracy a practical measure. It stipulates that all citizens have the right to submit petitions to public authorities. The conditions and modalities of this right shall be exercised by a defined regulatory law. The participatory democracy allows citizens to contribute in making decisions and in their implementation and evaluation not only through traditional mechanisms but also via new tools that authorize citizens' contribution and participation. The regulatory laws detailed how participatory democracy can be embodied:

- Nationally: submitting petitions to public authorities in the area of legislation.
- Locally: Participating in local bodies for consultation at the level of the local councils by submitting petitions that demand the inclusion of a particular issue on the agenda of these councils.

Referring to the three regulations defining the nature of interventions of the territorial communities, it is clear that submitting petitions by citizens and civil society associations is subject to a set of legal and formalistic restraints that are difficult for ordinary citizens to know, especially uneducated people. The legal procedures imposed make this right a real obstacle for people interested. For the petitions to be accepted, the number of citizens' signatures should not be less than 100 in territorial communities that have less than 35000 inhabitants and 200 citizens' signatures for other territories. But for districts the number of citizens' signatures in the petition cannot be less than 400, and 300 signatures for petitions presented to provinces and prefectures. As for regional petitions the number reaches 500 for regions with more than three million inhabitants.

Because of the various complexities of these procedures and the fact that they are not guaranteed by the Council, reports confirm that there is little interest in making petitions. Despite the progress in the number of petitions submitted, in 2019 (the first 9 months of the year) the total number reached 11.177 citizens who submitted only 46 petitions. In view of the evolution of the number of petitions since the publication of the regulations in 2016, the number of submissions has increased but remains very low compared to the number of inhabitants. The results are as shown in the table below:

Table 1: The number of petitions submitted by citizens to the Moroccan territorial councils as declared by the Ministry of Interior and the General Directorate of Local Councils:

The years	2016	2017	2018	2019
The number of petitions	03	12	16	15

According to reports of the General Directorate of Local authorities, the number of petitions submitted by citizen and civil society remains very weak with a total of 212 petitions in 2019, 78% of them were submitted by associations (166 of which 47% were rejected). The total number of petitions were submitted to 97 territorial authorities out of 1, 590 (06% of the total), 47% of which were rejected because of a legal or formalistic defect. This situation confirms the real difficulties of establishing a participatory democracy in line with the official discourse.

Table 2: The evolution of the number of petitions submitted by associations:

The Ministry of Interior and the General Directorate of Local Councils 2019

The years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
The number of petitions	01	07	28	37	93

An extrapolation of the article 121 of the regulatory Law No.111.14 indicates that associations taking part in territorial authorities' decisions should possess legal branches in all provinces, which the Constitutional Council considered non - conforming with the requirements of the constitution resolution No.966.15. There is also the legislator's disregard of the way the three advisory bodies and the body of equality, equal opportunities and gender issues will be formed in the territorial councils according to the regulatory laws.

In sum, there are practically real challenges that make these laws somewhat inapplicable. At the national level, there are countless difficulties in submitting legal petitions to public authorities. At the level of the territorial collectives, there are many questions regarding the implementation of the legal procedures mentioned since advisory bodies are unaware of the ways to express their opinions concerning public policies in the absence of a clear relationship with the regional councils' chairmen along with the rare meetings and the disharmony of regional councils. It is also incredible to make peoples' registration in electoral lists mandatory in order to submit petitions to local councils since they are incapable of participating, discussing or voting in meetings.

1.2.3 The local elites' inaction and the project of development:

Morocco has stepped into a real territorial development experience based on cooperation, partnership and harmony. It adopts a human development paradigm that tries to expand the options of inhabitants and multiply opportunities. Morocco has also followed a general measure based on strategic planning and vision. Yet, these aspirations require qualified local actors that are genuinely aware of the responsibilities and actions to be done. Morocco can never reach a good implementation of its strategic vision of development depending on locally - elected councils with very weak qualifications and high level of illiteracy among territorial councils. Good governance necessitates proper political process, democratic, fair, and transparent electoral conditions, and harmonious elected councils resulting from honest electoral campaigns.

No one can deny the real violations of the internationally recognized rules that take place in the Moroccan elections. Political parties themselves, during the electoral process evaluation, acknowledge the various forms of these violations including the use of money and the central authority's favoritism of certain parties or political figures over others. All these forms of corruption results in an electoral outcome that does not reflect the real will of the electorate which leads to the emergence of illiterate local councils and a great aversion of educated people from participating in elections. Consequently, the small numbers

of voters consist mostly of uneducated people and the declining members of political parties.

Municipal elections often result in members of territorial councils with inadequate levels of education if not at all. This has a negative effect on the territorial management concerning designing plans, setting priorities or implementing regional developmental projects. But to solve this problem, the state has emphasized the need to work on participatory and agreed upon projects by all members of the territorial councils. However, the elected councils still give special priority to projects that serve their personal interests both in terms of the nature of projects chosen or in terms of the geographical location of projects targeting inhabitants of great loyalty to the ruling majority in local councils.

Thus, the Moroccan political landscape endures a problem of political turmoil and a corruption of the majority of parties which is a constantly recurring issue in many royal speeches. In the throne speech of July 30th 2004, the king clearly expressed his resentment of political parties' performance and their obsolete local elites. "We call on the political class to shoulder their responsibilities in managing public affairs through appropriately responsive elites that make of the political practice an absolute noble political endeavor" The king declared. The 2018 throne speech also calls on "the political parties to work for the emergence of new elites and the mobilization of young people to engage in political work in addition to the renovation of their methods and engagement mechanisms". "The political bodies are expected to respond to the citizens' requirements and interact with, or even anticipate, the changing events of the society at the right time rather than allowing things to exacerbate, as if they are not concerned with what is happening". The throne speech of 2018 addressed seriously the political elites stating "What can the Moroccan public say if the king himself is not convinced of the way politics is practiced, and does not trust a number of politicians. For all those I say: It is enough, be mindful of your duty to Allah and to your homeland, it is either you perfectly complete your mission or you are asked to leave".

The problem of political elites in Morocco is a structural one linked to the entire political system, which is strongly unsatisfactory for many considerations:

- The absence of a good example at the central level, as it is not acceptable to have political elites that exploited their political positions most of Morocco's independent periods asking local elites to renew themselves which is evidently impossible.
- The growing phenomenon of political aversion and the declining confidence of citizens in politics.
- The decline of the roles of some institutions in the training and graduation of highly qualified graduates (universities and higher institutions) due to the state choices and priorities.
- The sovereignty of the authority's view and the weak civil society institutions as well as the lack of diversity.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been shown that advanced regionalization has contributed to a new era of decentralized governance since the constitutional amendments have eased

the central decisions and sought to share authority between the center and the other territorial regions. The regulatory laws have also tried to rearrange the general authorities which are all good initiatives to set an appropriate example for the territorial issue in Morocco.

But there is a central question that should be asked: Is the advanced regionalization, in its current form, considered an ideal model for achieving an owed territorial development and democracy? If the answer is positive, then what is the problem? Is it the continuous desire to monopolize power by the center and by some state representatives in the territorial communities? Is it just the attempt to empower the concept of control over the concept of governance? Or there are other constraints that should be put under question.

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