

■ MOROCCO

Economic, social and cultural rights: reforms and the harsh reality



Although there have been a number of reforms in Morocco in the last few years, access to economic and social rights is still deficient. The State fails to invest adequately in human rights: every year, budgets assigned to the two ministries (Interior and Defense) are over eleven times greater than those assigned to the remaining ten ministries put together. The right to work, to gender equality, to health, to education and to a viable environment are far from being a reality for Moroccans.

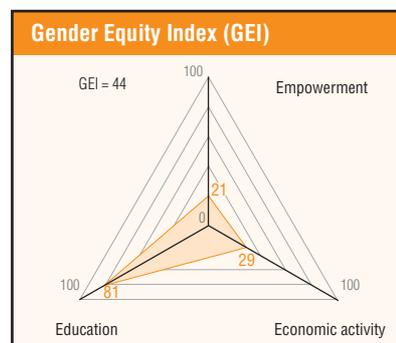
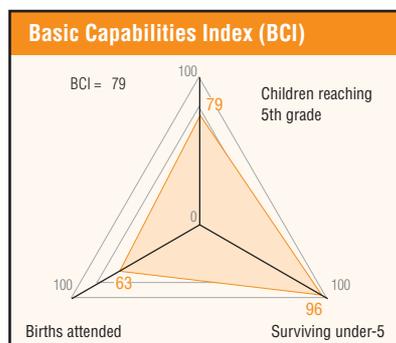
Espace Associatif¹

During the last few years, a number of reforms and initiatives have taken place in Morocco regarding human rights. However, the recommendations made by the Equity and Reconciliation Commission have not – at least for the most part – been put in practice. The present king, Mohammed VI, officially established this commission in 2004, in order to “shed light on the truth regarding the serious violations of human rights committed in the past”; that is, to investigate the repression and dirty war perpetrated during the reign of his predecessor, Hassan II.

Diverse Moroccan laws often refer to the foundational texts in their preambles or main content: from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the Millennium Declaration (2000), including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, although it is possible to register moderate legislative achievements with regard to gender equality – such as the reform of the family code – as well as with regard to socio-economic rights – such as the reform of the labour code (2005), the education code and the introduction of compulsory health insurance (2005) – these achievements are still not mirrored by reality.

There are deficiencies in the economic and social policy tools as regards the respect for human rights. This is seen unmistakably each year, as soon as preparations for the budget laws begin: budgets assigned to the two security ministries are over eleven times greater than those assigned to the ten other ministries put together.

Investment – both public and private – is still scant and focused mainly on exports. The agriculture and fishing sectors constitute a very eloquent case. As agriculture focuses on exports (citrus and fruit in



general) according to the needs of foreign markets, it has been necessary to import basic agricultural products (wheat and cereals) from industrialized countries in the European Union with agricultural subsidies. This partly explains the difficulties encountered in the face of the high cost of basic food products on the international market; the income per inhabitant cannot keep pace with the rise in prices. With regard to the fish industry, despite its 3,600 km (2,237 miles) long coastline, the country suffers from over-exploitation of its marine resources, without this entailing any noticeable economic profitability. This over-exploitation impoverishes resources (biological rest periods are not respected, illegal nets are used and so on). Furthermore, fish consumption per inhabitant is the lowest in the region; fish prices are very high on the domestic market in relation to the population's income levels.

The various free-trade agreements (with the United States and the European Union) as well as the duty-free zones are often accused of violating workers' economic and social rights.

Field observations and socio-economic indicators reflect significant backwardness in almost all sectors: from unemployment, particularly amongst young professionals of both sexes, to environmental degradation, through health coverage for the whole population and the quality of education. According to the UNDP's Human Development Index,² Morocco must make “a great effort” to improve the situation with regard to human, social and economic

rights. The same can be concluded from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)'s follow-up indicators, as well as from Social Watch's Gender Equity Index and Basic Capabilities Index which accompany this report.

Unemployment and social implosion

Article 13 of the Constitution establishes that all citizens have the right to work. Unemployment, however, increases without respite, particularly amongst university graduates, and every year the number of jobs created is lower than the number of people seeking work.

Unemployment is structural; over 70% of the unemployed have been looking for work for over a year and 80% of these have never worked at all. This situation has sunk many young people in despair, leading to clandestine immigration and even to suicide. Unemployment, experienced as a social drama by most Moroccan families, constitutes a real threat of social destabilization and is a factor of social implosion.

Labour insertion training programmes have been a failure because some companies made use of them in order to collect unjustified indemnity payments. Thus, many of the beneficiaries of these programmes are included in the ranks of the unemployed. With regard to the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Abilities, it is necessary to state that because of it, thousands of young people have been entrapped by fictitious enterprises. Also through the Agency, another group signed contracts with foreign firms which later refused to provide jobs for the young people, who had already settled in Spain. Several hundred graduates

¹ This document is part of the summary of a report developed within the framework of a collective and participatory project lasting five months. On 23 April 2008, *Espace Associatif* organized a round table that brought together a panel of experts, researchers and university graduates who had carried out studies and had contact with civil society actors, among them *associative groups* and journalists. This made it possible to perceive the status of economic, social and cultural rights and the role of associations, as well as contributing to the analysis of the obstacles that prevent the application of these rights beyond the recognition of their existence.

² In the Human Development Index, Morocco fell from the 117th position in 1995, to the 124th, in a total of 177 countries, in 2005 and again to the 126th in 2007 (UNDP).

have obtained employment in various public administration organizations, particularly within the field of education, after a selection process consisting of interviews and tests made available mainly to those who participate actively in unemployment collectives.

Child labour continues to be common in Morocco (according to official sources, 600,000 children work). This is due, mainly, to tolerance towards the employment of minors below the legally stipulated age in areas such as crafts and agriculture, as well as in domestic labour and exploitation in private undertakings. A serious aggravating factor is the situation regarding street children, together with the exploitation of children for sexual tourism. The lack of regulation regarding domestic labour and the adoption of specific legislation for work in the traditional trades, carried out in the most part by children, despite the current labour code, contribute to this situation very significantly.

Health: the failure of the reform

According to all of the political, trade union and associative actors, and also according to overwhelming reports from international institutions (WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank), health in Morocco suffers from the disease of its own model, its own political choice and its own form of management and governance.

Recurrent crises are related, essentially, to the absence of a health policy as well as of a strategic global vision – there is still no health chart for Morocco. Both this policy and this strategic vision must be based on dynamic, innovative actions and on a national charter rooted in the universal values of human rights and the right to health; that is, on the general principles of solidarity, equality, equity, freedom of charge and, finally, democracy and collective and State responsibility.

The disparities between the central (Casablanca and Rabat) and the peripheral regions are flagrant in every sense. Existing health structures perform very poorly. Over half (55%) of the doctors in the public sector are in Casablanca and Rabat, but only 19% of the country's population³ lives there. Professional risk and disease are common in hospitals and health centres: 30% of the health staff suffers from diseases contracted at work, and 3% have been diagnosed with hepatitis C.⁴ Several testimonies reveal that health staff even lacks soap in order to wash their hands and that it is not possible to follow the most basic procedures with regard to hygiene, asepsis and sterilization. Persons who undergo surgery are likely to contract diseases.

These results, which are alarming in more than one sense, are the direct consequence of budgetary restrictions (5% of GDP). In this context, the most worrying example for actors in this sector is the annual rate for maternal mortality (227 in every 100,000) and for children (50 in every 1,000). In rural areas, 52% of women still give birth at home, far

from a health centre. Close to 31% of the rural population still lives more than 10 km (just over 6 miles) away from a health centre and one in five children dies before the age of five⁵.

Projects for the reform of the health system launched by the sector's ministry (new strategy 2008-2012) are unworkable. On the one hand, there are no financial or human resources and on the other, the government's project does not present a global, comprehensive and coherent approach to the health question. Health cannot be separated from other areas, such as education, food, drinking water, housing, environment, living conditions and the protection and assistance of vulnerable populations.

Three years after the adoption of the compulsory medical insurance plan the new system, with its decrees of application, is an increasing burden on the budget of households, particularly on those of salaried workers of the public or private sectors. The aid plan for people without coverage, known as RAMEL, which should have been in place in early 2007, has been delayed. The emergence of a private medical insurance system, INAYA (an Arab term which means "look after"), seems to indicate the beginning of privatization in the sector, as has already happened in Egypt and Turkey.

The consumption of medication is very low; the average amount allocated is 20 dollars per year and per person, one of the lowest coverages in the region. Taxes on drugs are very high (49% of the price of prescription drugs is tax) and, despite a major tax cut for raw materials, from 25% to 2.5%, prices have not changed. Furthermore, reimbursement rates do not exceed 41% of what the insured person has spent, which means that, contrary to the strategy's promise, the amount households pay for health coverage will probably increase.⁶

Education: another failure

The right to education, like the right to work, is guaranteed by the Constitution. Although this decade, which is nearly at its end, was declared a decade of "education and training", and despite the Charter for Education and Training, and the establishment of a Higher Council for Education and Training, the sums invested in the sector and some quantitative progress during the last few years, results are far below target, and below the achievements of comparable countries.

Opinions are unanimous regarding the failure of the educational system; the Higher Council for Education's report, submitted to the Head of State on 16 April 2008, points this out, as well as the need for urgent intervention. Illiteracy is about 50% (in rural areas, less than 10% of the population is literate) and preschool education is limited (45% in 2004, and in rural areas only one girl in five has access to preschool education).

Official figures – 92% school enrolment; 87% in rural areas – are based on the statements of parents; there is no monitoring system. Close to one million

children between 6 and 15 do not attend school and, furthermore, almost one million and a half drop out of school every year. Students who finish the fourth year of primary education do not know how to read or to understand a written text.

Despite an increase of teaching staff, there has been no attempt to guide students in choosing the training which is most suited to each. With regard to higher education, with 280,000 students enrolled – one of the lowest rates (10%) among the countries in the region in a comparable situation – performance is only fair. If the necessary resources are not invested, the reform of the sector will not yield perceptible results.

Degradation of natural resources

In Morocco, matters concerning water – quantity per inhabitant, for example – are far from achieving the international threshold needed to guarantee development. The quality of the country's water is amongst the worst in the world. Air pollution is severe in industrial centers, despite recent adoption of solar and eolic energy plans, and has negative repercussions on the population's health. Management of biodiversity is one of the worst in the Mediterranean region. The loss of forests and soil degradation has given rise to increasing desertification.

The cost of environmental degradation is very high; it represents MAD 20 billion⁷ (USD 2,591 million) a year. There is no clear vision to guide farmers and encourage investors. National production covers food consumption less and less and the country's food security is in serious danger.

The management of natural resources, which entails the right of citizens to sufficient food and to live in a viable environment, does not receive the attention it deserves and does not interest the executive power, nor the political parties, nor Parliament.

Gender: very far from equity

Moderate legislative achievements do not hide the fact that women are far from enjoying the same opportunities as men as regards work, health and education. Furthermore, the implementation of the new family code is far from being a reality, particularly as regards polygamy, divorce (unilateral) and a mother's guardianship of her children, the marriage of minors, bicultural marriage and the establishment of a pension savings system. It is necessary to set up institutional mechanisms to monitor achievements in the matter of women's rights as well as the obstacles that come up. ■

³ *Social Watch Report, 2007.*

⁴ Report by the Democratic Work Organization, March 2008.

⁵ Morocco's Fiftieth Anniversary Report.

⁶ Information from the Regional Council of Pharmacists of the Northern Bureau, 2007.

⁷ National strategy for environmental protection and sustainable development, 1996.