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Assessing Democracy Assistance:

Morocco¹

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This report is FRIDE's contribution to a project entitled 'Assessing Democracy Assistance' that is being carried out by the World Movement for Democracy. The project aims to gather views on how democracy support can be improved and its impact enhanced. Other case studies and a synthesis report can be found at www.fride.org.

Morocco is one of the most liberal states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. As such, it has been a main target of Western democracy promotion in recent years. The European Union (EU) is the largest provider of such assistance; other players include the US, individual EU countries such as Spain and Germany (through its political foundations, the *Stiftungen*) and, to a lesser extent, Canada, UN agencies, and Western NGOs.

Morocco is a monarchy where the king and the elite surrounding him – the so-called *makhzen* – enjoy vast power. The king effectively controls the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature. He is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. As one of the richer monarchs of the world, he has control of vast swaths of the Moroccan economy. Considered a direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, he is moreover Commander of the Faithful. Criticism of the king and the royal family is one of the *lignes rouges* that cannot be crossed in Moroccan politics.

The reason why Morocco is nevertheless often considered the most liberal country of the MENA is the series of reforms which has been enacted over the last decades. Some of these were introduced towards the end of the reign of the late King Hassan II: the constitutional reforms of 1996 creating a Chamber of Representatives directly elected by universal suffrage, the prohibition of torture and the beginnings of the *gouvernement d'alternance*, which meant that, for the first time, opposition parties formed part of the government. The new king,

¹ The project 'Assessing Democracy Assistance' is supported by the United Nations Democracy Fund, the UK Department for International Development, the Arab Democracy Foundation, the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Smith Richardson Foundation. The research methodology for this report is explained in the appendix at the end of the main text. Responsibility for this report and the views expressed are solely those of the author(s), and do not necessarily represent the positions of either FRIDE, the World Movement for Democracy, or the funders.

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Mohammad VI, ordered the so-called Equity and Reconciliation Commission to investigate repression during his father's reign. He pushed through the reform of the *Mudawana*, the personal status code, to strengthen the position of Moroccan women in matters of guardianship, marriage, divorce, etc. Other reforms have included easing controls on the written press, the integration of moderate Islamists into the official political arena, increased recognition of Amazigh (Berber) rights, and decentralisation.

Reforms have at times been tentative and backsliding is common. The parliament is toothless vis-à-vis the *makhzen* and the party system has been dysfunctional. As a consequence, elections – apart from not being fully free and fair – are held under conditions of relative apathy and cynicism is widespread.³ Constitutional reform, widely seen as necessary, has not so far materialised. Corruption is a serious problem.⁴ Human rights abuses, in particular against groups who find themselves in opposition to the state (such as Sahrawi nationalists and militant Islamists) still occur and impunity remains an issue, according to human rights groups. The recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in this respect have not been heeded for the most part. Freedom of expression and media freedom (especially in its electronic forms) also remain restricted and the written press is subject to serious and, some observers would argue, increasing harassment including politically motivated trials and exorbitant fines, leading to journal closures and even the exile of some journalists.⁵ *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* (Justice and Charity), a non-violent Islamist organisation, remains prohibited and its members harassed by the authorities.⁶ Since 2005, its spokesperson, Nadia Yassine, stands accused of defaming the monarchy for stating her preference for a republican form of rule (although the authorities continuously postpone the trial). Even the showpiece of Moroccan reforms, the new *Mudawana*, is not yet fully implemented on the ground: for instance, it has not yet had any effect with regard to the numbers of marriages involving minors.⁷

Most international governance assessments indicate that the situation in Morocco is stagnating.⁸ The European Commission, which regularly assesses the progress of EU–Moroccan relations, summarises the current mood: ‘reforms in the areas of democracy and human rights remain relatively un-ambitious’.⁹ At the same time, interviewees for this study (Moroccan journalists, academics, parliamentarians, representatives of NGOs, political parties and of the justice sector as well as international democracy promoting actors) do not believe that democracy assistance has had no impact at all. As noted above, there have been some notable changes in Morocco over the last ten years in certain key areas, and it is agreed that the international community has had a modest role in accompanying this reform process. International support for reforms of women's status, the development of civil society, and to a more limited extent, electoral procedures are examples of areas where international democracy promoters have had the most impact. In other areas, where the domestic impetus for reform has been weak such as, for example, judicial reform, anti-corruption, and the effectiveness of political parties, this is much less the case. In yet other areas, there have, for various reasons, been relatively few democracy promotion activities to date. For example, there are relatively few democracy promotion projects targeting economic actors such as the *Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc* (CGEM).¹⁰ Other neglected areas identified by interviewees for this study include labour rights, media/journalism, democracy and education, and the defence of socio-economic rights.

³ Mohamed Tozy (2008). “Islamists, Technocrats, and the Palace” *Journal of Democracy* January 14:1, pp.34-41

⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Transparency Maroc (2010). “La corruption au Maroc: Synthèse des résultats des enquêtes d'intégrité”.

⁵ For details, see annual World Press Freedom Review by the International Press Institute, annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, and reporting of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

⁶ Amnesty International Report. ‘Morocco/Western Sahara’ (2009).

⁷ “Moudawana: Les mentalités résistent encore” *L'Economiste* magazine 10 October 2009, “Moroccans assess Moudawana progress” by Siham Ali Magharebia 9 October 2009.

⁸ Kaufmann D., A. Kraay, and M. Mastruzzi 2009: *Governance Matters 2009: Governance Indicators for 1998-2008*, section on Morocco http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/sc_chart.asp, Freedom House 2010: *Freedom in the World* Washington: Freedom House (comparisons made with 2002-2009 editions of the report), Bertelsmann Stiftung (2008). “Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2008 — Morocco Country Report” Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

⁹ European Commission *Rapport de suivi Maroc* SEC (2009) 520/2 23 April 2009, p. 1. a

¹⁰ It must be noted that the CGEM has not been entirely absent from democracy promotion efforts (contrary to perceptions of some interviewees): there have been some projects, for example by USAID, involving the organisation.

Overview of donor activities

Morocco receives democracy assistance from the European Union and, to a lesser extent, from individual European states. The United States and Canada also provide Morocco with democracy support as do Western NGOs. Democracy assistance covers a large number of issue areas, with a particular emphasis (in terms of funds committed) on judicial and administrative reform and decentralisation.¹¹ NGO development, the strengthening of political parties and parliament and electoral support are also important focus areas. In addition to democracy assistance, respect for democratic principles form part of the main agreements and initiatives between Morocco on the one hand and Western states on the other, such as those under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy. This section provides a brief overview of international democracy promotion in Morocco.

Morocco is the Mediterranean country that traditionally has had the closest ties to the **European Union**. Today, the EU promotes democracy in the country mainly through the bilateral European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) action plans and its concomitant financial instrument. The action plans include a form of weak positive conditionality: partner states, depending on progress (which is not strictly defined) of political, economic, and institutional reforms, are offered access to the EU's single market and closer ties with the EU. In addition, Moroccan NGOs receive some EU funding from the European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The EU has stressed democratisation in its other dealings with the Mediterranean as well, such as in the founding documents of the recent Union for the Mediterranean and its predecessor the Barcelona Process, European Commission Communications, the European Consensus on Development, and so on.

The EU/Morocco ENP action plan includes some elements on 'Democracy and the Rule of Law', mainly focused on administrative capacity, decentralisation, corruption and reform in the justice sector. Moreover, under 'Human rights and fundamental freedoms', action points regarding the implementation of the law on freedom of association and of assembly and the law liberalising the audiovisual sector are included.¹²

According to the National Indicative Programme, which translates the action plan into concrete programmes, 'Governance and Human Rights' receives EUR 28 million for 2007–2010, approximately 4 per cent of the total assistance package. 'Institutional support' receives another EUR 65 million. Human rights promotion programmes in Morocco include support for community reparation schemes in line with the recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, support for the development and implementation of a national action plan on democracy and human rights, the creation of a Moroccan Institute of Contemporary History which shelters, amongst other materials, the documents from the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, support to archives, and a history museum. However reform in two important poles of governance support, prison reform and the training of court staff in the new Mudawana legislation as well as legislation on minors, did not take place as planned. Institutional reforms primarily concern reform of the public administration (as regards budgeting, programming, introduction of internal audits, evaluation and performance control at ministry level, new systems of human-resource management, pay, recruitment and promotion) and improving regulatory capacity.¹³

Morocco was also one of the first ENP states to receive funding (EUR 28 million) through the ENP Governance Facility in 2007, as a reward for its commitment to political reform. The funds are used to reinforce ongoing reforms of the public administration. Recently, as part of Morocco's path towards an 'advanced status' in relation to the EU, the creation of a mixed Euro-Moroccan parliamentary committee and the reinforcement of exchanges between Moroccan and European political parties was announced.¹⁴

¹¹ Some of the latter has been purely technical in nature, however (see for example the French *Programme d'accompagnement du processus de décentralisation*, <http://www.padmaroc.org/>).

¹² European Union/Morocco, 'EU/Morocco Action Plan under European Neighbourhood Policy' (2005).

¹³ European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Morocco 2007–2010, National Indicative Programme, sections 3.2 and 3.3, Maroc Programme Indicatif National 2007-2010 Tableau révisé des engagements, octobre 2007, ; information obtained from Louis Dey, Programme Manager Justice, Migration and Human Rights, European Commission Delegation in Rabat.

¹⁴ EU/Morocco 2008. 'Document conjoint UE-Maroc sur le renforcement des relations bilatérales/ Statut Avancé' DG E V 13653/08.sections 3.2 and 3.3.

Under the separate European Instrument on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) which targets mainly civil society, allocations to Morocco have amounted to approximately EUR 1 million yearly over the last half-decade and are set to increase somewhat in the years to come.¹⁵ Support has gone to NGOs active in a number of areas: judicial reform; human rights (including political rights, labour law, women's rights and torture victims, awareness raising); election observation; anticorruption; journalists' training; women in local governance; reinforcing the Moroccan parliament, youth; etc.¹⁶

Morocco has traditionally been rather peripheral to **United States** interests, but after 9/11 this changed. Today, the US is the largest bilateral donor of democracy assistance in Morocco: democratic governance is one of four priority assistance goals of the US government in the country.¹⁷ Funding comes mainly through USAID, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (DRL), and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Important agencies responsible for programmes in Morocco with mainly USAID and NED funding include the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI, present in Morocco since 1998) and the International Republican Institute (IRI).¹⁸

USAID has recently worked on technical assistance and training for the Moroccan parliament, with the aim of strengthening the parliament's capacity to oversee public finances, review legislation and policy and engage in a dialogue with citizens. In view of the 2007 elections, USAID funded NDI and IRI to work with Moroccan political parties, including the moderate Islamist party PJD, to improve their capacity to develop political platforms and to effectively communicate them to voters. NDI also assisted Moroccan civil society to encourage voter participation in the elections, and has conducted a large number of focus groups (a particular type of polling technique) to gauge Moroccan public opinion.¹⁹ USAID has also been active on local governance, aiming to increase citizen participation at the local level and enhancing local governments' transparency, performance, and accountability.

The main US post-9/11 initiative in the MENA region is the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), offering support for political, economic and educational reforms. MEPI's presence is largest in Morocco,²⁰ where programming has included – apart from a range of region-wide activities notably on the media – parliamentary reforms, support to political parties, and strengthening of local government.²¹

The Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) funds some MENA-wide projects (on general democracy issues, media, women etc.) which have included Morocco. It has also funded judicial reform projects in Morocco.

Apart from funding a number of NDI and IRI programmes, NED has also funded Moroccan NGOs directly, focussing on issues such as judicial reform, local democracy, youth participation in politics, civil society strengthening, and human rights.

¹⁵ Programmes en cours dans le domaine de la démocratie et les droits humains financés par l'Union Européenne au Maroc – 2009', obtained from the EC Delegation in Rabat .

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ USAID. 'Morocco Country Assistance Strategy', 12 December 2008, p .4. Available at <http://www.usaid.gov/ma/policy/Morocco-CAS.pdf>

¹⁸ In 2007, Morocco was granted a five-year USD 697.5 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) economic aid package. In contrast to some other MENA countries, support from the MCC has not targeted governance, but rather economic components of development.

¹⁹ USAID Morocco Democracy and Governance Programme: Activities http://www.usaid.gov/ma/programs/dg_activities.html, NDI Worldwide Morocco <http://www.ndi.org/worldwide/mena/morocco/morocco.asp>, Amel Boubekeur and Samir Aghar (2006). 'Islamist Parties in the Maghreb and their Links with the EU: Mutual Influences and the Dynamics of Democratization', EuroMeSCo Paper No. 55, October.

²⁰ Haim Malka and Jon B. Alterman, 'Arab Reform and Foreign Aid: Lessons from Morocco', CSIS Significant Issues Series (Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2006), footnote 2, p. 40.

²¹ US Department of State, Middle East Partnership Initiative / Countries / Morocco, 2007.

In the context of the troubled US-sponsored Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA), the itinerant Forum for the Future was held in Morocco in 2004 and then again in November 2009. The BMENA Foundation for the Future, intended to provide assistance to civil society organisations that work to foster democracy and freedom, started its grant-giving activities in 2007. So far, however, it has only funded a handful of projects in Morocco.²²

Some American initiatives have been very high profile, including US work with the Moroccan parliament and political parties, opinion polls which IRI undertook prior to the 2007 elections (polling had not until then been part of the political landscape in Morocco and the polls predicted that PJD had a following of approximately half the electorate, upsetting the traditional Moroccan political landscape), and official support for Al Adl wal-Ihsan spokes-person Nadia Yassine when she was detained in 2005.

The old colonial power **France** is the largest of all donors (bilateral and multilateral) in Morocco, but does not have a strong tradition of democracy promotion abroad. However, in the Moroccan context, governance – if not democratisation – is nevertheless one of four ‘transversal intervention areas’ of the Service de Coopération et d’Action Culturelle (SCAC).²³ The governance dimension encompasses modernisation of the civil service, justice, decentralisation, and also includes a project on youth participation in public life.²⁴ France also supports NGOs, mainly those working in social areas, but also human rights NGOs.²⁵ EUR 25–30 million have been allocated for governance-related work for 2006–2010. The lion’s share (approximately EUR 22 million) is devoted to institutional support, and another EUR 3.7 million to civil protection and the police. The remaining funds go to NGOs working in the social sector, and to other governance-related projects.²⁶

Like France, **Spain** has traditionally put rather limited emphasis on democracy promotion in its development policies, in particular in the MENA region. Since the Socialists gained power in 2004, this has changed, however.²⁷ Morocco is one of 23 priority countries for Spanish development assistance, and in relation to Morocco, democratic governance is one of four priority sectors. In 2004–2006, an annual average of EUR 4.5 million was earmarked for ‘government and civil society’ programmes in the country.²⁸ Target areas in 2005–2008 were reinforcement of social dialogue, civil society empowerment, rule of law and decentralisation. A large part of assistance is decentralised to the Moroccan regions and channelled through NGOs.²⁹

Germany traditionally leaves the bulk of democracy promotion programming to its political foundations, which are linked to the German political parties and funded through the Bundestag. Four of Germany’s six political foundations are active in Morocco: the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS), and the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSS). All have a slightly different focus, reflecting their respective ideological backgrounds: FES centres its work on economic development and the promotion of women’s and human rights NGOs; FNS supports economic development and the training and education of journalists; HSS seeks to promote the rule of law and administrative reform and KAS finally, works on issues such as decentralisation, intercultural dialogue and civil society development.³⁰ The German foundations work primarily with Moroccan civil society actors.

²² Foundation for the Future Grants Program/Our grantees/Morocco <http://www.foundationforfuture.org/?q=en/node/337>

²³ Royaume du Maroc et République Française (2006). Document Cadre de Partenariat Maroc – France 2006–2010, <http://www.ambafrance-ma.org/cooperation/doc/DCP200306final.pdf>, section 4.2.

²⁴ Ibid. See also http://www.ambafrance-ma.org/cooperation/index_developpement.cfm?view=dev_adg

²⁵ http://www.ambafrance-ma.org/cooperation/index_developpement.cfm?view=dev_aa

²⁶ Royaume du Maroc et République Française (2006), Annex 3.

²⁷ Kimana Zulueta Fülcher, ‘Democracy promotion during Zapatero’s government 2004–2008’, FRIDE Democracy Backgrounder 13, February 2008, pp.2–3.

²⁸ Zulueta Fülcher *op cit*, pp.8–9; Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.) ‘Documentos Estrategia País Marruecos’, p. 9.

²⁹ Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.) ‘Documento de Estrategia País 2005–2008 Cooperación Española Marruecos’.

³⁰ German Embassy, ‘Les acteurs du système allemand de la coopération au développement’ http://www.rabat.diplo.de/Vertretung/rabat/fr/05/Wirtschaftliche_Zusammenarbeit/akteure.html. For more details, see <http://www.fes.org.ma/accueil.html>, <http://www.hssma.org/index.htm>, http://www.kas.de/proj/home/home/25/3/about_us-1/index.html

Other European states such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland have provided support for individual initiatives and projects mostly as part of regional programmes or through their embassies in Rabat.

Morocco is the largest recipient of **Canadian** development assistance in the Maghreb region, and an important focus area of that assistance is governance.³¹ Thus, one of three priorities for intervention of CIDA, the Canadian development agency, is 'citizen participation' (equality between men and women, reinforcing dialogue between the state and civil society, decentralisation, and participatory development), and one of three target partners is civil society.³² Projects have included support in decentralising the education sector and improving local government in the north of Morocco. Many projects have a regional focus (encompassing the Francophonie or the entire Arab world).³³ Canadians have mostly worked through Moroccan associations, and targeted smaller, less high-profile NGOs.³⁴

The **UNDP's** work on governance in the MENA region through its Arab Human Development Reports has received great attention. Its Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR), focusing on capacity building, dialogue and policy advice in the areas of rule of law, participation, and transparency and accountability, follows on the analysis in those reports. In Morocco, POGAR is complemented by bilateral work, undertaken jointly with a number of other UN agencies. For the 2007–2011 period, one of the three main focus areas is 'reinforcing capacities for democratic governance', focusing on decentralisation. Moreover, the issue of human rights and gender should permeate all programming in the country (UNDP 2006, p. 4). The resources allocated for the entire five-year period amount to USD 5.9 million for gender mainstreaming and USD 14.5 million for decentralisation and public participation.³⁵

The line between Western state and **Western NGO**-financed democracy assistance is not easy to draw. As we have seen in the American case, for the most part government-funded but independently managed organisations are key to its democracy promotion policies. Similarly, the German foundations, while autonomous from government interference, are almost fully funded by the German state. In other cases, Western states are partial funders, or together provide the bulk of funds for Western NGOs.

NGOs with a sustained presence in Morocco include Oxfam-Novib (Netherlands), which works on a number of projects on what it calls 'the right to be heard'. Its Morocco programming is fully funded by the Dutch government and involves long-term partnerships with a handful of key Moroccan human rights NGOs.³⁶ One of its sister organisations, Oxfam Québec, is active in human and women's rights. The American Bar Association has been active in Morocco since 2003, focusing on the rule of law. It is funded mainly through INL and has worked on training and on the development of an ethics charter with the Moroccan judges association. Another US NGO present in Morocco is the Open Budget Initiative. Like the US government, some US civil society actors have also covered Moroccan religious parties in their programming. Thus for example, Nadia Yassine was invited by the University of California in Berkeley on a tour of the US, which included visits to Harvard and other leading universities.

In view of the 2007 elections, the Moroccan authorities invited an **international observation mission** headed by the NDI to the country. It consisted of a 50-strong delegation, preceded by a pre-election assessment team. The delegates visited polling stations in selected locations.³⁷ Domestic and international observers concurred

³¹ <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/morocco>

³² CIDA, 'Mise à jour—Stratégie de coopération 2003–2010' (Ottawa: CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency, 2002)), section 3.3.

³³ CIDA Project Browser Search result for Morocco.

³⁴ Khakee, Anna et al., 'Pragmatism Rather than Backlash: Moroccan Perceptions of Western Democracy Promotion', EuroMeSCo Paper 73, November 2008.

³⁵ United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] (2006). UNDP country programme document for the Kingdom of Morocco (2007–2011), Annexe 2.

³⁶ Information obtained from Tessa Kollen, Programme Officer for the Middle East and Maghreb, Oxfam-Novib, 28 August 2009.

³⁷ National Democratic Institute, 'Preliminary Statement of the International Observer Delegation to Morocco's 2007 Legislative Elections' (Rabat: September 2007).

that the 2007 elections were the most transparent and fair in the history of Morocco, as 'overall, the voting went smoothly and was characterised by a spirit of transparency and professionalism'. However the mission stressed that 'The low voter turnout [...] and significant number of protest votes suggest that Moroccan authorities will need to undertake further political reforms in order to encourage widespread engagement in the political process. Those reforms should aim to enhance the power of elected representatives while also increasing the transparency of the system and accountability to the electorate'.³⁸ During the 2009 municipal elections, only Moroccan observers, relying mainly on their own funds, were present.³⁹

Moroccan views on the impact of democracy promotion

What effect has international democracy promotion had in Morocco to date? On the macro level, there is general agreement that 'the institutional architecture that defines the power in Morocco has not evolved much in the last decade', as the most influential Moroccan blogger puts it. Power is still vested with the king, and constitutional amendments, although much debated, have not materialised. In that sense, no actor – national nor international – promoting democracy in Morocco has had any influence on the fundamentals of the system. According to a representative of one of the main international democracy promotion agencies in the country, during the last decade in Morocco, 'momentous moments' have time and again been turned into mere 'reconfigurations' through dilution and cooption (see also introduction to this study).⁴⁰

At the same time, most actors agree that the situation has evolved on the meso level, although whether the glass is half full or half empty is a question very much at the centre of political debate in the country. Hence, not surprisingly, there is no general agreement on the exact areas where change has been most significant, nor as regards the sustainability of reform, although some themes are recurrent: The expansion of women's rights is almost universally considered a major achievement, the increased freedom of the written press, the expansion of civil society, the IER, and Amazigh rights are other oft-cited areas of progress (albeit with the caveats discussed in the introductory section to this report).

Few, either among donors or among recipients, would attribute these changes solely or even primarily to international democracy promotion. Instead, they tend to speak of a concurrence of several factors. Donors tend to stress that changes are internal to Moroccan society, but that they hope to act as a 'catalyst'. As a European Commission representative puts it 'we support a national will to reform'. Or, as noted by another long-standing international actor in Morocco, 'Our success is the success of our partners. We chose credible partners that are able to change things'. This is well exemplified with the issue of women's rights: 'This is one of the most organised sectors of civil society in Morocco, which attracts donors. The strength of the movement led to the change in the Mudawana. It was a local creation, but supported internationally'. Moroccan actors often take a similar view: 'the international level will have an impact when there is a local process [of reform]', according to a leading journalist. However, Moroccan interlocutors tend to stress the home-grown nature of changes more: 'The movement of resistance didn't wait for the international agencies in order to fight for democracy. And we have never stopped calling on them to accompany these struggles, but they have been timid', a leading NGO representative stresses. A political party representative agrees: 'the international level is very secondary'.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Le Collectif Associatif pour l'Observation des Elections, 'Rapport préliminaire d'observation des Elections communales du 12 juin 2009', p. 2.

⁴⁰ The issue of cooption is far from new. See for example Naciri, Rabia, Mohamed Sghir Janjar and Mohamed Mouaquit (2004). Développement démocratique et action associative au Maroc Montreal: Rights & Democracy, 2004, <http://www.dd-rd.ca>, p.126ff.

The micro-level is, according to many interviewees, the weak side of international democracy promotion in Morocco to date. 'The 'top level' (ministries, parliamentarians, the walis (regional governors), etc.) works very well, but the work on the ground remains weak. International democracy promoters could do much more in terms of training for the rank and file members of the administration and local political representatives', according to one international NGO representative based in Morocco. A Moroccan MP agrees: 'training for political parties should be held in the provinces and the municipalities'. Some people active in the justice sector take a similar view, insisting that they 'would like to see a more grass-roots approach to justice reform in Morocco, working on issues of access to justice.'

For most actors, these rather modest conclusions as regards effects of democracy promotion to date are not necessarily problematic, as they stress that democracy promotion is by its very nature long-term, with time horizons of 25–30 years or more.

Hardly surprisingly given their emphasis on traditional and Islamic values, religious parties tend to be more critical of the model of democracy supported by Western donors. According to a leading PJD figure, 'The Europeans want Moroccans to adopt Western values; their aid reflects this [...] Western NGOs and governments are all in the same mode of rejecting Moroccan identity'. Another PJD MP agrees: 'With foreign financing, the goals of Moroccan NGOs can be, and often are, distorted'. Sensitive issues in this respect encompass homosexuality, freedom of religion and gender, as statements such as 'Homosexuality will never be accepted by Moroccans' and 'Moroccan women's NGOs repeat what is said elsewhere. It's Western' testify. Clashes do not entirely paralyse cooperation, however. With a bit of ingenuity, compromises can at times be found. A leading PJD member explains: 'the abolition of the death penalty is impossible because it goes against the Koran. However, the suspension of its application is possible. One has to find solutions such as this one'.

Criticism is not confined to the religious parties, however. One Moroccan observer distinguishes between political freedoms which are 'shared values that don't pose any problem' and 'the rights of homosexuals, the equality of inheritance, the abolition of the death penalty, which are rejected by the Moroccan society and perceived as a Western import'. Others, again, find it hard to judge: 'democracy promotion is too disparate to conclude whether they correspond to Moroccan values. They are a 'sum of actions' that don't amount to a coherent whole'. Yet others see this as in certain ways a faux debate: 'I don't know of a single donor pursuing the issue of homosexuality. Donors will eventually have to adapt to Moroccan values, otherwise, they will not find takers.'

Interviewees mostly agreed that democracy promotion is insufficiently linked to other types of development assistance. Some interviewees stressed the importance of supporting improved education in Morocco (Morocco has among the highest illiteracy rates in the Arab world). 'With the high levels of illiteracy we have, there cannot be any sharing of values. Reactionary forces will always be strong in such a society', according to an NGO representative. Also noting the link between education and democracy, a donor representative found that the area was 'neglected'. NGO representatives also stressed the importance of teaching democratic values to school children. 'The EU should put pressure on the government so that education becomes based on human rights and tolerance'. Others stressed that 'often, development aid masks the political dimension of the fight for economic and social rights, which reduces assistance to charitable or purely economic operations'. The structural, economic North-South issues were also mentioned by several Moroccan interlocutors as insufficiently linked to democracy promotion. Linked to this, the political economy aspect of democratic reform was identified by some Moroccan interlocutors as an area where democracy assistance is lacking. 'There is an oligarchy which prevents democratisation. It is necessary to convince these families that democracy does not threaten them'.

Box 1 - A largely positive experience: NGO development

Most interviewees, Moroccan and foreign, agree that international involvement has been largely positive for the development of civil society in Morocco. It has been so in several respects:

- capacity for mobilisation
- professionalism
- reinforcing internal structures
- openness vis-à-vis international values
- transfer of values and debates to the national level
- participation in the international debate
- making NGOs into government interlocutors (although their capacity to negotiate and change public policies is still low)

Even where democracy promotion has been the most successful, there is sometimes a downside, however: 'Assistance has played a very important role in the development of civil society. At the same time, assistance has both advantages and disadvantages. It helps an organisation but at the same time, the *esprit de bénévolat* decreases with foreign aid. There is sometimes an opposition between advocacy and financial opportunity', according to a civil society representative. Support for the National Human Development Initiative (INDH) was also seen as a danger, as INDH has led to the proliferation of new organisations, often created just to tap into INDH funds, which are considered to be insufficiently monitored. Finally, there is the thorny issue of how big an impact NGOs actually have on democratisation processes.

Box 2 - 'Dos' of democracy promotion in Morocco

Some of the 'dos' and the 'don'ts' might seem trivial, and it is certainly not the first time that some of them are noted in analyses of democracy promotion worldwide. The fact that they are still very regularly mentioned – by Moroccan and international actors alike – indicate, however, that certain long-standing concerns are still not fully heeded by would-be international partners in the Moroccan process of democratisation. International NGOs and Western government agencies thus still have some way to go in this respect.

- 1.- Work with Moroccan actors in a participatory manner in the different stages of programming and let them be a guide on Moroccan realities. A majority of donors and recipients stress that this is not simply a question of procedure, but will lead to enhanced performance, especially in the medium-term.
- 2.- Be open about which Moroccan partners you are working with.
- 3.- Choose partners carefully, accompany them in their work and create dialogue and ways to strengthen NGOs. 'The international organisation must give something other than money: training, follow-up, exchange, partnership' and 'Civil society actors need not only financial support, but moral support as well' are typical statements
- 4.- Integrate technically credible evaluation and performance assessments into the collaboration. The importance of evaluation and impact assessments was stressed in particular by Moroccan partners.
- 5.- Work outside of the Rabat–Casablanca axis. Many NGOs operating only in 'Casa-Rabat' are not well implanted in the country as a whole.
- 6.- As an international NGO, make sure that you have sufficient distance vis-à-vis any state funder, as this is the basis for a relationship grounded on trust and credibility.

Factors limiting the impact of democracy assistance

A main factor limiting the impact of democracy assistance is to be found in the international political context, as discussed in the ‘Diplomacy and Coordination’ section below. In this section, more programme/project related factors are discussed. Many of the most important factors limiting the impact of democracy assistance are surprisingly self-evident: they are not discussed in the text below, but appear in Box 3 ‘Don’ts of democracy promotion in Morocco—programme level’ (see also Boxes 2 and 4). The text concentrates on the thorny issues which either have no simple solution or require further explanation and illustration.

Funding opportunities and procedures

Regarding the often-debated issue of funding opportunities and procedures for Moroccan NGOs, there is widespread agreement that information about funding possibilities does not reach far enough: ‘one has to know, those that don’t are marginalised’, ‘information is given to those organisations that have already received funds’, ‘one needs a network and time. Local associations etc. do not have the capacity to fundraise internationally’. ‘There is a problem of information and communication on donor programmes and how they work’, and ‘Western funding is opaque and personal relations play a role, one must be introduced’ are typical statements. One NGO representative said, laughingly, ‘they have a selective vision, dependent on relations and personalities. They will become corrupt like us’.

The fact that Islamists have been excluded from EU democracy assistance programming also poses a problem as far as impact is concerned.⁴¹ According to the spokesperson of the Al-Adl wal-Ihsan, ‘The EU misses the real vectors of society. The people do not benefit from this aid; it goes into the pockets of the elites’. A close observer of Western democracy assistance in Morocco elaborates: ‘The fact that the European Union excludes Islamists is not a problem in the short term. The process indicators will be fine; the non-religious associations are very competent at implementing projects. The problem is more one of the medium term, and it is a problem of interlocutors, of normalisation, of representation. The problem is political and ethical, not technical. It is also a question of real impact: process indicators will be perfect, result-based indicators will be much less so.’

A European Commission representative acknowledged that there is an ‘ongoing internal debate within the EU regarding the appropriate levels of dialogue with political Islam’ At the same time, however, he stressed that ‘there is no formal impediment to working with Islamists. Islamist civil society organisations don’t apply for EU funding. We would certainly consider them. It seems it is not highly regarded for certain organisations to be recipients of EU funds’. This is also a very sensitive issue internally in Morocco: ‘Moroccan human rights NGOs as we know them are mostly left wing and vehemently opposed to Islamists, so there is this local thing going on’, as one observer puts it.

The fact that funding is available only for projects, and that it is very difficult to get core funding for the organisation was also stressed as a limitation by some interlocutors: ‘These days, there is basically only project funding available, nothing for the organisation, the staff, the office [...]. It’s possible to get funds for a seminar in a five star hotel but not for three staff members of the organisation’.

Funding is also constrained by the long-standing issue of administrative demands and constraints. ‘Many western partners are very rigid and bureaucratic, the EU first and foremost [...].EU procedures are not adapted to developing countries’, according to one NGO representative. The administrative and other requirements are such that a number of NGOs, including very resourceful ones, hesitate over, or even entirely rule out,

⁴¹ In addition, the exclusion of political actors with their roots in political Islam poses a problem of legitimacy and credibility of democracy assistance (see Anna Khakee et al., op. cit.).

applying for EU money. Several NGO representatives note that associations need to make use of an (often European) paid consultant to prepare an application for EU funds. One NGO representative sighed that applying for money 'should not be an exam'. The lack of flexibility of funding in the case of a change of realities on the ground was also criticised. Another leading NGO representative, although not referring to EU procedures specifically, tempers complaints about procedures: 'with international funding, procedures are more difficult, but they also lead to the professionalisation of NGOs.'

Democracy promotion methods

A number of interlocutors found that training efforts have been misguided, both in terms of the level at which such training is pitched and those doing the training. 'Moroccan politicians already know a lot, have passed a certain stage and don't need training of the type 'what is democracy'. Everyone is welcome as long as the programmes are adapted to our needs,' according to a top representative of a main Moroccan political party. A parliamentary representative of the PJD echoes this view: 'The programmes that international NGOs organise are not very useful. It is as if we had never had any training'. Sending people from Europe or the US to do the training is also criticised: 'A fundamental point for me is that the EU always sends foreign experts. It is as if they wanted to 'find jobs for the Europeans' instead of training and using Moroccans. The training tends to be far removed from Moroccan realities'. An actor in the justice sector agrees: 'It happens regularly that the donor insists on sending an international expert without any experience'. An NGO representative nuances the criticism: 'training works if it is large-scale and if there is a long term vision of continuous training'.

Dependency and intrusiveness

Whenever democracy assistance fails to be non-intrusive, it leads to the discrediting of Moroccan NGOs. 'In view of the World Social Forum in Nairobi, a French trade union financed the trip of some Moroccan NGOs and then made these associations adopt the union's position'. This of course saps Moroccan NGOs of any remaining authority. 'Certain organisations are funded almost up to 100 per cent by one foreign donor. In such cases, there is an obvious risk of losing in autonomy and of transmitting others' agenda [...] My advice is that one donor should not cover more than 40 percent of an NGO's budget, otherwise it is dangerous', explains one Moroccan NGO representative. A related problem is noted by a main observer of NGO life in Morocco: 'There are associations that do not specialise in order to 'cast the net wide'. For example, many organisations claim to be working on women although they do not have the competence to work on gender issues. Associations then lose their soul and tilt towards what is lucrative. The same problem can occur vis-à-vis the government'. However, such intrusiveness seems to be a relatively limited problem for advocacy NGOs, not least because major Moroccan NGOs jealously guard their independence, including their financial independence.

Most would still like to see a more mixed funding base: 'It is politically short-sighted of the state not to provide any assistance to NGOs. The best would be a mixed funding-base, with state and foreign money'. 'Ideal NGO sources would be from the government, mecenats, membership fees and contributions. International assistance creates '*un assistanat permanent*' and does not lead to the sustainability of organisations', civil society representatives believe.

Sometimes, perceived intrusiveness is arguably a consequence of more entrenched distrust or perhaps simply cultural misunderstanding (the NDI and the IRI put great emphasis on results reporting and on garnering feedback to enhance programs or better respond to partner needs and have developed extensive data-based indicators for this purpose). According to one interviewee from PAM, 'the IRI and the NDI collect lots of information for themselves. We don't know why'. An NGO representative agrees: 'The Americans, for example USAID, finance democracy assistance projects to extract information. The Peace Corps goes to villages and write reports. They are like the French missionaries.'

Box 3 - Don'ts of democracy promotion in Morocco: programme level

As a donor/democracy promoter:

- 1.- Do not come with the idea of 'giving lessons':⁴² this does not go down well in almost any country in the world, and Morocco is no exception. Show sensitivity and modesty. Treat partners as equals.⁴³
- 2.- Similarly, do not dictate what Moroccan NGOs should do, or which experts they should use. The associations should make the proposals themselves.
- 3.- Many national and international agencies as well as international NGOs are active in the area of democracy promotion in Morocco. Do not start activities without investigating into what is already being done and what has been done in the past (and how such projects have/have not worked).
- 4.- Don't 'throw money at an organisation' without checking their capacity and without accompanying them in their work.
- 5.- Don't lose sight of the core issues of democratic reform and get caught up in 'technical' and 'apolitical' work. Don't behave with the political cautiousness of a diplomatic envoy.
- 6.- In political party related activities, don't pick and choose among parties, as that is not well perceived in Morocco.
- 7.- Don't 'disconnect' from Moroccan realities. Keep in mind that existing democracies differ greatly as concerns political party structure, the role of the state, federalism vs. centralism etc., and don't think from your native perspective when working in Morocco.

Diplomacy and coordination

It is very unlikely that governments in the West will press hard for Morocco to democratise. There are many reasons for this: Morocco is a stable, politically moderate and friendly country in a volatile region. It is already a model of Arab reform, however tentative. European governments, which have the largest influence on Morocco given the many links between the two shores of the Mediterranean, are more interested in cooperation on other issues such as migration, security/anti-terrorism and trade and economic development. Business elites in certain European countries are closely linked to the makhzen. Many European governments are also weary of the PJD – although this could change given that Europe has, after initial misgivings, come to accept their Turkish counterpart, the AK Party. In sum, it seems clear that 'the real priorities are elsewhere' as a Moroccan NGO representative puts it.

The new king also presents a more modern face of authoritarian rule and the ugliest excesses of power have become less frequent. As a consequence, if anything, conditionality or overt criticism is now even less likely than a decade ago. As noted by a Moroccan NGO representative 'there is less and less [Western government criticism] in Morocco'. A blogger notes that 'reactions by Western states are very rare, even non-existent'. NGO representatives agree: 'We have the impression that today the internationals are more on the side of the government rather than the people. During the reign of Hassan II, it was the opposite'. Some Moroccan observers believe that the international doctrine is to 'promote individual freedoms and human rights, but not to do too much regarding the democratisation of the country, which remains synonymous with geo-political risk-taking'. In those few instances when official diplomatic moves have been made the reactions have been mixed. The support of the American ambassador (under George W. Bush) for the detained Nadia Yassine was perhaps one factor in the postponement of her trial. However, she herself was unhappy with the connection to the US government: 'it was a way of discrediting me vis-à-vis people and public opinion in the Arab world', she stressed in an interview. Moreover, according to a former minister, 'it was considered as an attack on our sovereignty'. The EU defends itself against the accusation that it leaves criticism to international NGOs only. 'We are perhaps not in the business of supporting this or that person or party. But on issues of principle, we can be critical', said an EU representative in Morocco.

⁴² According to one donor representative, still today 'surprisingly many internationals do that'.

⁴³ According to a Moroccan observer 'This national sensitivity and pride is, it seems to me, too often underestimated by Western NGOs that are often misled by their regular interlocutors: journalists, the francophone elite, and human rights defenders, who make the difference between the support of foreign NGOs and intrusion. The ordinary Moroccan does not necessarily make such a distinction'.

For a number of Moroccan actors, the rarity of international reactions and the prevalence of other interests pose the classical problems of double standards, inconsistency and hypocrisy. 'Today, few Western states are credible when it comes to human rights', deploras one NGO representative. A colleague adds: 'The EU is ambivalent, caught in its own traps [of multiple agendas]'. 'One can always give funding to NGOs, but that is not the heart of the matter. With a power structure like the Moroccan, decision-making is simple. For European economic interests, it is easier as there is no need to convince several interlocutors', according to the representatives of a human rights NGO. Others agree, using another example: 'The enforcement of European migration policies is anti-democratic', and 'all sorts of repressive practices have been made possible' in this context. Many Moroccan actors believe that Europeans on the individual level support democratic ideas, but often stress that 'people that who share our values should support us more openly'.

They also note that when it is in their own interest, Western governments are much quicker to push for reform. For example, the American government pushed for the criminalisation of insider trading in free trade negotiations with Morocco, although 'this was not even a claim by Moroccan civil society'. The same is true, according to Moroccan actors, when it comes to European priorities for judicial reform. Similarly, when self-interest and values clash – such as for example as regards free trade and balanced economic relations – the former regularly wins out.

There is wide disagreement as to whether the new 'advanced status' that Morocco enjoys vis-à-vis the EU will bring any benefits as regards democratisation. Disagreement does not necessarily follow the classical political fault-lines in Moroccan politics, and is probably also a result of the still very hazy contours of this new step in the EU-Moroccan relationship: 'this seems to be something symbolic', as one observer put it. According to two NGO representatives, 'We got the advanced status because of the migration issue, it had nothing to do with democracy'. Even an important journalist close to the government stressed that 'the democracy mechanism [within the advanced status] is hardly visible'. Another journalist close to the PJD stressed that the status is 'important for Morocco and the EU. It will emphasise the need for democratic reform in Morocco'.

This does not mean that international engagement is absent. The role of international NGOs is widely perceived as positive and effective, given that Mohammed VI is keen on promoting a modern image of the country internationally. Reports by organisations such as Amnesty International, Transparency International (TI), and Human Rights Watch (HR) receive widespread publicity in Morocco and lead to official reactions. 'International solidarity is a good thing; all reactions from NGOs are very welcome,' stressed the head of the Moroccan national press union. Others echo his point of view: 'When you listen to the political prisoners [during the so-called years of lead under Hassan II] they systematically render homage to international human rights organisations which were the only ones that defended them [...] Many Moroccan associations have taken the example of their foreign counterparts, sometimes adopting the same methodology [...] this mechanism works and there are numerous examples'.⁴⁴ An NGO representative elaborates on this, stressing that the impact is two-fold: 'international reporting gives additional arguments to those forces [within Morocco] that want change; it also fills in analytical and diagnostic gaps that we have in Morocco'.

However, some stress that such criticism cannot lead to fundamental structural change: 'This is not what will bring democracy. International NGOs should put more pressure on the EU instead.' NGO representatives also underline that the government 'has elaborated a counter-discourse to criticise such reports, claiming that they are anti-Moroccan. That has worked to a certain extent'. The editor in chief of *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*, a main daily newspaper, said that while TI and HRW were credible, they were not always balanced. Moreover, some international NGOs such as Reporters without Borders 'spoke like twenty years ago and do not acknowledge the progress which exists'. Another influential journalist, while recognising that international NGO criticism has an impact, stresses that it becomes more problematic concerning controversial issues such as homosexuality or the right to publicly breach Ramadan. 'In such cases, a part of society, the regime and the PJD will see this as an intervention, and that is counter-productive. They should focus on issues and values which we have in common'.

⁴⁴ See also 'Sonnette d'alarme. Salutaires ONG internationales', TelQuel http://www.telquel-online.com/138/couverture3_138_1.shtml

Box 4 - Don'ts of democracy promotion in Morocco—political level

As a donor/democracy promoter:

- 1.- Beware of – and carefully ponder – the pros and cons when moving into sensitive issues such as homosexuality or religious freedoms.
- 2.- Be transparent regarding financial support, its sources and main recipients. Don't confuse state and non-state funders, as this could lead to a loss of confidence in the whole process. Moroccan actors have a good understanding of the sometimes complex institutional inter-linkages between international democracy promotion agencies.⁴⁵
- 3.- Be cautious when evaluating and comparing progress of reforms in Morocco as this is significant in internal debates. For example, Moroccan actors that are ambitious regarding political reform will often prefer comparisons to neighbouring countries such as Spain or Portugal (undemocratic and developing a few decades ago), while those who want to proceed more slowly tend to prefer being juxtaposed to Libya or Tunisia.
- 4.- Strive for increased policy coherence in policies towards Morocco.

Donor coordination

On the level of most major donors, a donor group initiative was launched in 2002, which now in principle includes the World Bank, the International Finance corporation (IFC), the UNDP, USAID, the ADB, the IDB, the European Commission, EU member states, Canada and Japan. The group is structured around several working parties on specific topics. One such group, lead by the UNDP, focuses on governance.⁴⁶ This working group was never mentioned by interviewees when asked about donor coordination, however.

In practice, donor coordination is, according to most interviewees, comparatively modest in Morocco. The German political foundations coordinate between themselves, as do the American party foundations. Moreover, in specific sectors, coordination is perceived as being very good. An example is local governance where the Direction Générale des Collectivités Locales (DGCL) of the Moroccan government takes an active role in coordination. There are also informal mechanisms to avoid 'stepping on others' toes'. Several international NGOs, such as FES and Oxfam-Novib, ask Moroccan partner organisations to specify which other organisations they receive funding from. Donors differ widely in their perceptions of the need for increased coordination. According to a party foundation representative, 'we need to coordinate a lot more. If you were to ask me who to call at UNDP, I would not know'. Others, such as a KAS representative, take a radically different stance: 'I would never accept coordination. I have a political approach, and will work with those parties and organisations closest to CDU values'.

Two examples: judicial reform and elections

The rule of law

The Moroccan judiciary has been one of the main target areas of recent Western reform efforts, even though many central issues pertaining to the rule of law have yet to be addressed.⁴⁷ Emphasis has so far been placed on a variety of issues such as the effective implementation of the new Mudawana, commercial and administrative courts, and infrastructure and equipment for courts.

⁴⁵ An example of a statement in this respect is 'MEPI is blatant, it jumps out at you. We are not interested in funding from them. The American Bar Association gets MEPI funds but they are more independent, we can still work with them'.

⁴⁶ European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument Morocco Strategy Paper 2007– 013, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁷ However, exchanges, in particular with France and the European-level courts, are nothing new but date back to the 1960s

There is a general agreement that, 'We are not seeing comprehensive reform in the area of justice yet', as an EU representative concedes. A professional within the justice sector agrees: 'A pity that so much money has been spent when the impact is not there'. The verdict of some Moroccan NGOs is harsher: 'Has [international assistance in the justice sector] led to anything? It's reinforced the status quo'.

The reasons for such a paucity of results are several. One factor is that 'this is a sector which is deeply conservative', as an EU representative puts it. (For example, the Justice Ministry is the only one to be entirely Arabised. Lawyers who end up prosecuting or on the bench have often followed the Arabic university law stream rather than the French one: they are thus less exposed to a variety of legal doctrines and at times have a more conservative outlook). Another factor is that the system is so thoroughly dysfunctional. Thus, according to Transparency Maroc, there are 'increasing numbers of corruption cases which are not sanctioned or tried as well as intimidation or sanctions against those who fight corruption'.⁴⁸ Indeed, a number of recent cases reveal that whistle-blowers, rather than corrupt or outright criminal individuals in the justice sector, tend to be singled out for sanction.⁴⁹ More fundamentally, 'the justice sector is part and parcel of a socio-economic-political system' and there are strong interests at the very top of the Moroccan power pyramid that have no interest in reform, as noted by a Moroccan actor in the justice sector.⁵⁰ Many Moroccan (and international) interlocutors tend to agree with an exiled journalist when he states that 'the regime has no wish to thoroughly reform the justice system [...] because it is the justice system that today permits the regime to keep a certain check on [...] unwanted eruptions [sic]'.

However, several interviewees still believe that 'if the internationals had worked in other ways, they could have obtained results'. There is a general feeling that assistance in this sector has been scattered, badly managed, and poorly coordinated. A close observer of the system outlines the main problems as he sees them: 'First, there is no prior planning, definition of needs and of what is feasible. Second, project managers don't strive to create 'ownership' among those that will be the day-to-day managers of the new work methods; instead, projects are pre-formatted. Third, when it has become amply clear that a project is not working, it is still not discontinued. The Europeans are corrupted by the Moroccan way of life; they will say that things are working because they want to stay, to keep their jobs. And the Moroccans will not wake them up; they gain materially and in terms of trips etc. from the programmes'. To that, another interlocutor added that there is very little follow-up, at least when it comes to some international actors.

The example of the computerisation of the courts is often mentioned. 'They bought the computers but did not train people', stated one judge. 'What they did not understand is that IT changes the power structure in an office. It would have been necessary to do a psycho-social grounding of the project with the 'base' for the programme to be successful', explains another actor.

International efforts in the area of justice have also been too focused on issues close to Northern interests, according to many Moroccan interlocutors. 'We don't get the impression that there has been substantive international implication except in the areas of migration, drug-trafficking, foreign direct investment, and anti-terrorism, that is in areas which directly concern the donors', according to some NGO representatives. 'There is a blurring of concepts, whereby justice reform is not separated from the security concerns – migration, anti-terrorism – of northern states', stressed another.

Some positive aspects were mentioned, nevertheless. 'There are certainly some small projects that are working, on e-learning for example', declared one close observer of the system. 'International financing permits us to prepare studies and to reinforce national expertise', stresses another. A lawyer interviewed for this study was hopeful that the twinning between the bar of Madrid and that of Rabat would prove a good method for advancing reform: 'we badly need an exchange of experiences, methods, and tools'.

⁴⁸ Transparency Maroc 'Rapport moral 2007', author's translation. http://www.transparencymaroc.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=61&Itemid=88888895

⁴⁹ See 'Dossier: Justice contestée, en quête de réforme' in *Transparency News*, No. 2, April 2008.

⁵⁰ See also *Transparency News*, No 2, April 2008, p.12.

Justice is perceived by certain donors as a test case for the entire reform project: 'Reforms in and dialogue on the issue of the administration of justice is going less well [than in other areas of reform]. In fact, the credibility of the whole project of reforms in the country is at stake here', observed an EU representative in Rabat. This interpretation is reinforced by a recent speech by Mohammed VI, in which he singled out six areas of imminent reform, including issues promoted by civil society such as judicial independence and the enforcement of rules to prevent corruption and abuse of office.⁵¹ Reform in the justice sector is also underlined as a key component of democratic reform by a large number of Moroccan actors.

Elections

Electoral support has come in several forms in Morocco: the international observation mission of the 2007 parliamentary elections, support for national observers, encouragement to participate in elections, training for candidates (in particular female candidates), and campaign training including helping set up national campaign strategies and teams. Separate, but nevertheless related, is the continuous work with political parties, including training, party building, and focus groups to bridge the gap between the parties and the electorates. Although several international actors have been involved in this area, the main actors have been US organisations such as NDI and IRI. The IRI resident representative noted that there is 'so much work around elections, I'm a fan of that kind of work'.

Electoral participation continues to be a problem in Morocco. After a record-low 37 per cent voter participation in the 2007 parliamentary elections, the participation in the 2009 municipal elections was 52 per cent of registered voters, not least because of strong participation in rural areas where tribal and personal affiliations make people more inclined to vote (participation in Casablanca was only 30 per cent and in Rabat 25 per cent).⁵² Several interlocutors of varying backgrounds noted, in the words of representatives of an NGO close to the PJD, that 'Nowadays, it is mostly the poor that vote because they are paid to do so. More educated people, the middle class, they don't vote anymore'. The very low participation in the 2007 elections seems to indicate that voter turnout encouragement, such as that organised by internationally-funded 'DABA 2007', did not have a great effect.

The international observation mission of the 2007 parliamentary elections led by the NDI is perceived to have been relatively 'light', with few observers deployed on the ground and a relatively small number of experts present before and after the poll. 'This was a symbolic mission, with some observers visiting polling stations', according to one close observer. This has led to some criticism: 'The control on election day was not good', according to one PJD representative. Others brush that idea aside: 'it is a favourite Moroccan tradition to be dissatisfied once the election results are known'. A Moroccan NGO representative noted that the international support 'permitted us to mobilise and train almost 3200 observers' and that 'several of our recommendations were adopted by the government'.

A number of interviewees found that there were great similarities in the analysis and recommendations of national and international observers. The international observation mission, through its first report and the press conference 'put its finger on crucial problems', such as the Moroccan constitutional arrangements and the lack of a proper role for parliament. However, subsequent Western national congratulations stating that 'Morocco is advancing on its path to democracy' undermined the conclusions of the report, according to NGO observers.

⁵¹ Siham Ali, 'King Mohammed VI calls for overhaul of judicial system', Magharebia, 24 August 2009. http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2009/08/24/feature-01

⁵² http://www.telquel-online.com/378/actu_maroc1_378.shtml

Most interviewees, Moroccan as well as international, agree that elections ‘cannot be macro-manipulated’ any longer, thanks to a combination of internal political will and international efforts. The fact that ‘the administration of elections has improved markedly and [...] there are few hang-ups on the technical level’ means that core systemic problems ‘are laid bare now’, according to an NDI representative. An EU interlocutor agrees: ‘The transparency of the electoral process has improved markedly. Of course this reveals other problems’. A Moroccan NGO representative clarifies ‘there is a move away from elections that are systematically rigged by the territorial administration to fraudulent practices on the part of the candidates, often, however, with the tacit knowledge of the state’. Indeed, Moroccan interlocutors of various political persuasions openly discussed the problem of money in politics and the purchase of votes.

Training for candidates receives a mixed press: ‘I used the NDI method and got zero votes’, laughed one PAM candidate in Casablanca. ‘The theory is good, but perhaps 20 per cent is useful. The programmes are a bit pre-formatted’. She stressed that the candidate who won had used fraudulent methods. This puts international democracy promoters in a conundrum: in this case, they provided training in more ‘ideal-type’ methods, but the candidate lost as the system rewarded bribes. A colleague and MP from the Istiqlal party (which limits its participation in training activities) agreed on the issue of programme design: ‘I always say that USAID and NDI make a huge effort, but that the results are not there. Political parties are not part of elaborating the programme and themes are pre-defined. The training does not take into account the specificity of campaigning in Morocco’.

In contrast, the political party training – which is not strictly related to elections – was viewed positively by some of those with a first-hand experience of the work: ‘The focus groups were very good, useful for finding out what voters actually think’. Others regretted the lack of links between the training centres of the political parties and the donor side.

Both Moroccan and international interlocutors clearly felt the limits and frustrations of working on elections and political parties when parliaments and local governments are so powerless in the Moroccan political system: ‘At the end of the day, what are [the political parties] fighting for? I’m not saying that it is not a good thing to support elections, but one should ask oneself the question: what are the possible results? It seems to me that these organisations should not work within the logic of the electoral timetables, but more long-term and on an essential question: how to reinforce political actors in Morocco [...] And in particular help the country to have a political culture, otherwise efforts will be in vain.’ Organisations such as the NDI stress that they try to heed advice such as this, with continuous longer-term activities on party development, and electoral assistance designed to be useful beyond specific electoral deadlines.

Conclusion

Morocco is a country where international democracy promoters almost unanimously find it easy to operate. The political constraints set up by the state are comparatively few and Moroccan partners are of a very high level in most fields. This report shows that even in such a context, which on the surface is relatively favourable, international democracy promotion has had difficulty making a real impression. This is not to say that democracy promotion has not had any effect: in fact, there is relatively wide agreement that international support for reforms of women's status, electoral procedures, and the development of civil society, for example, has helped reinforce nationally led processes for change (quite partial in the case of electoral procedures). However, this report confirms a few core findings from other studies on the effectiveness of democracy promotion. First, if there is no or little national will to reform (such as, so far, in the areas of judicial reform, anti-corruption, and the effectiveness of political parties) not much of substance will come out of democracy assistance. Second, there are wide variations in the quality of design and implementation of democracy promotion projects in Morocco. Third, the importance of a country such as Morocco to the West is such that there will be little serious pressure put on the government to reform against its will. Fourth, and finally, the West has other, overriding interests in Morocco which sometimes run directly counter to democracy promotion: European counter-terrorist and anti-immigration policies are two of the most illustrative.

It is disheartening that so many interlocutors mentioned 'dos' and 'don'ts' for international democracy promoters that have been fixtures of the development literature for a number of years now: seeking knowledge about past democracy promotion activities and their success before launching new programmes, being open about which partners you are working with, avoiding 'giving lessons' and making sure to treat partners as equals, working with national actors in a participatory manner, integrating evaluation and performance assessments into programming, and keeping in mind that existing democracies differ greatly as concerns political structure.

A problematic aspect on the Moroccan side is a sometimes contradictory stance towards democracy promotion: on the one hand, there are demands for increased international action, but on the other, Moroccan actors – of all stripes – are quick to criticise specific actions of which they disapproved as 'undue intervention'. The line between the two seems blurred and thus presents a serious challenge for democracy promoting agencies.

Another interesting finding is that there have been relatively few democracy promotion projects targeting economic actors, such as the CGEM or actors closer to the heart of power (the makhzen). This is no doubt due to the reluctance of such actors to get involved; but ingenious ways of targeting them would be a novel development in democracy assistance in Morocco.

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Appendix: Country Report Methodology

Scope and aims of this report

This report assesses external democracy assistance in one country according to the views of local democracy stakeholders.

The report does not aspire to provide an exhaustive record of external democracy assistance to the country in question. Neither does it aspire to be a representative survey among local civil society at large. The scope of this project allows reports to provide only a rough sketch of external democracy assistance to the country assessed, and of the tendencies of local civil society activists' views on the latter.

Sample of interviews

The report's findings are based on a set of personal interviews that were carried out by the author between spring and autumn 2009.

For each country report, between 40 and 60 in-country interviews were carried out. The mix of interviewees aimed to include, on the one hand, the most important international donors (governmental and non-governmental, from a wide range of geographic origins), and on the other hand, a broad sample of local democracy stakeholders that included human rights defenders, democracy activists, journalists, lawyers, political party representatives, women's rights activists, union leaders and other stakeholders substantially engaged in the promotion of democratic values and practices in their country. Wherever possible, the sample of interviewees included representatives from both urban and rural communities and a selection of stakeholders from a broad range of sectors. While governmental stakeholders were included in many of the samples, the focus was on non-governmental actors. Both actual and potential recipients of external democracy support were interviewed.

Donors

The term 'donor' is here understood as including governmental and non-governmental external actors providing financial and/or technical assistance in the fields of democracy, human rights, governance and related fields. Among all the donors active in the country, authors approached those governmental and non-governmental donors with the strongest presence in this sector, or which were referred to by recipients as particularly relevant actors in this regard. An exhaustive audit of all the donors active in this field/country is not aspired to as this exceeds the scope of this study. While many donors were very open and collaborative in granting interviews and providing and confirming information, others did not reply to our request or were not available for an interview within the timeframe of this study. While we sought to reconfirm all major factual affirmations on donor activities with the donors in question, not all donors responded to our request.

We do not work to a narrow or rigid definition of 'democracy support', but rather reflect donors', foundations' and recipients' own views of what counts and does not count as democracy assistance. The fact that this is contentious is part of the issues discussed in each report.

Anonymity

External democracy assistance to local activists is a delicate matter in all the countries assessed under this project. It is part of the nature of external democracy assistance that local non-governmental recipients, especially when openly opposed to the ruling establishment, fear for their reputation and safety when providing information on external assistance received to any outlet that will make these remarks public. In a similar vein, many donor representatives critical of their own or other donors' programmes will fear personal consequences when these critical attitudes are made public on a personal basis. In the interest of gathering a maximum of useful information from our interviewees and safeguarding their privacy and, indeed, security, we have ensured that all interviewees who requested to remain anonymous on a personal and/or institutional basis have done so.

Interview methodology

In order to carry out field work, authors were provided with a detailed research template that specified 7 areas of focus:

1. A brief historical background and the state of democracy in the country;
2. A short overview of donor activities;
3. A general overview of local views on impact of democracy aid projects on the micro, meso and macro levels (including best practices and variations of the local and international understandings of the concept of 'democracy');
4. Local views on specific factors that have weakened the impact of democracy aid;
5. Local views on diplomatic back-up to aid programmes (including conditionality; diplomatic engagement; donor coordination; relevance, quality, quantity and implementation of programmes, etc);
6. An illustration of the above dynamics in one or two key sectors of support;
7. A conclusion outlining the main tendencies of local views on external democracy assistance.

Along these lines, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were carried out by the authors in the country between spring and autumn of 2009.

Key sectors of support

Transitions to democracy are highly complex political, economic and social processes. No study of this scope could aspire to fully justice to them, or to external assistance to these processes. Aware of the limitations of our approach, we have encouraged authors to let their general assessment of local views on external democracy support be followed by a closer, slightly more detailed assessment of the dynamics in one or two key sectors of support. These were chosen by the respective authors according to their estimated relevance (positively or negatively) in the current democracy assistance panorama. In none of the cases does the choice of the illustrative key sectors suggest that there may not be other sectors that are equally important.