

## 16th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA)

24 to 28 April 2017

### Written Statement by High Atlas Foundation

*Agenda item 3: Ensuring effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through leadership, action and means*

#### Accelerating Sustainable Development Toward 2030

Taken together, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – contained in U.N. Resolution 70/1 involving the 194 member states and civil society in its deliberation – seek an encouraging level of development of humanity's social and environmental existence. They establish a framework through 2030 that can assist nations and communities of the world in plotting what could amount to transformative, prosperous, and sustainable achievements.

How can this potential development unfold and be long-lasting? What approaches should we catalyse so that sustainable projects result and generate the human development benefits the world's local publics want and need?

As a starting point, most societies have internalized an enduring premise through experiences, particularly since World War II, of social development and reconstruction interventions: people accept and support decisions that they had a part in making. We have learned this critical principle as we have analysed human behaviour in our own and other cultures over centuries, and we find this essential premise in texts of philosophy and spirituality of civilizations over millennia. Indeed, this precept is no longer astounding, and is as true as ever.

Plans of development action that directly embody the spoken will of people naturally gain their partnership, energy, and dedication. After all, decisions people contribute to rendering, generally reflect the participants' aspirations and interests. Thus, people's active participation in creating the projects that fulfil the SDGs is ultimately the essential basis upon which the SDGs could come into fruition, expand, and uplift our society and world. The question then becomes: how do we set in motion across lands participatory democratic meetings of local communities of people so that they identify, prioritize, and implement sustainable development projects?

Morocco, for example, has a progressive national municipal charter that is intended to promote inclusive participation. Each municipality is required by law to create multi-year community development plans driven by popular participation. If nations of the world do not imbed in their national policies the essential requirement of inclusion in the creation and determination of sustainable development projects, how can we then expect to achieve SDGs when the public is not encouraged to be involved in the determination and design of initiatives?

However, we have also dishearteningly learned in Morocco's case that laws and policies are not enough for the fulfilment of widespread participatory development actions. In fact, the example of Morocco, critically underscores that we must also experientially learn methods (by applying them in reality) of community democratic planning of projects in order for these

processes to genuinely take place. We must train our teachers, our youth and retirees, members of civil society and the business community, locally elected officials, women and men, those who have and those who have less, to not only participate in identifying sustainable projects, but also facilitate the dialogue needed in order for all people to come together, speak, argue, reconcile, and achieve consensus with one another. Policies that promote participation coupled with learning by doing is a needed combination that can lead to local community movements toward accomplishing SDGs.

However, even after codifying national policies and building capacities, these two essential components are still not enough for the tangible realization of SDGs. What would become of the designed participatory and sustainable projects without finance to achieve implementation? Even when communities are in a position to provide some work in-kind to help establish their development projects, materials to construct must still be bought, seeds to plant must still be purchased, capital must still be secured in order to enable production.

Addressing the distribution of public funds and obscene levels of inequality are inevitable parts of the solution, but sitting on our hands until that illusive day arrives is not an option, and not necessary. There are no pre-conditions to sustainable development, other than people's own desire and the freedom to assemble.

In Morocco, there is what could become a self-reliant pathway to generate the new revenue needed in order to invest in projects that can achieve the economic, health, environmental, and indirect political impacts of SDGs. The needed finance can be generated by establishing the entire agricultural value chain, from nurseries to market, including growing hundreds of millions of diverse fruit trees that are indigenous to Morocco, such as almond, argan, avocado, berries, carob, cherry, date, fig, jujube, lemon, olive, pomegranate, prickly pear, walnut, and some apple varieties, as well as the more than two dozen varieties of wild medicinal plants.

This level and kind of planting and growing integrated with irrigation efficiency to vastly expand yields, in further conjunction with certifying organic and processing to markedly increasing income, and directing product toward both domestic and global markets, can multiply by five the revenue generated by the Moroccan agricultural economy. In Morocco, rural farming families, who experience most of the nation's poverty, still typically conduct subsistence practices directed toward local traditional markets.

Greater levels of agricultural income at least in Morocco's case is vitally necessary in order to secure the revenue needed to identify and achieve projects that accomplish SDGs, this sector's growth in itself being an SDG. Our experiences in Burkina Faso and Cameroon, for example, also point to the same enormous opportunity, where entirely naturally grown avocados, papayas, and mangos are sold locally for a few cents each, where peanuts are bought and sold for figurative peanuts, all the while industrialized nations of the world have retail prices for these commodities 100 times what these growers receive.

Unless we capitalize and optimize the most undervalued resources, human and agricultural, how else may we derive the sorely needed finance in order to carry through the sustainable development projects wanted by the public? We cannot wait for the justice of when there may finally be some semblance of wealth equality, but in fact it is this very integrated process described that will help achieve the income fairness, social decency, and sustainability that accompanies it.

Participatory movements driven by organic agricultural revenue inherently involve multi-sectoral and multi-tiered partnerships, whereby local communities along with government, civil, and business agencies collaborate in order to ignite community planning and establish development plans and projects. These networks of partnership also form decentralized arrangements or management channels of an evolving system committed to sustainable development. This is to say that decentralization is a by-product of pervasive participatory planning and the implementation of community-identified projects. The kind of decentralization that forms will naturally resemble the experience that gave it birth, which in this proposed case is that of participatory governance.

In Morocco, the kingdom has committed itself formally in 2008 and in its constitution of 2011 to decentralized administration and inclusion of all people, religions, and backgrounds in all rights and in the national development imperative. The national commitment helps to create a society conducive for encouraging bottom-up inclusive movements to achieve sustainable projects, whereby civil organizations are founded and strengthened and in time federate as they work together – a course we have also seen in Morocco. However, if a nation has not committed itself by its laws to decentralization and federalism, but does enable community management of their development, they still indirectly open a de facto pathway to a form of decentralized organization, and potentially a systemic one over time. This emerges from mounting and regularized inter-relationships involved in community development, but also from the politicization of participants as they internalize participatory procedures for governance and popular agendas for change – and may thus opt to enter electoral politics.

In sum, SDGs and their realization by 2030 will be a direct reflection of the extent to which people participate in the change they seek. Their participation will be a reflection of national policies that empower the sub-national and programs of experiential training in facilitating participatory community planning and development enacted in all parts of the land. That implementation of locally identified projects is dependent upon committed revenue and that requires, at least in Morocco and most developing nations, achieving the potential of organic agriculture and the rewards it is presented by global markets. Finally, by doing all of this and remaining true to the principles of participation and public-private partnerships, decentralized arrangements and federations for the management of development will emerge and institutionalize a constant bottom-up energy. Increasingly flourishing on its own successes, the model accelerates toward 2030 and to levels of sustainable development for humanity and the planet, shining perhaps as never before.

Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir is president of the High Atlas Foundation, a Moroccan-U.S. non-profit organization dedicated to sustainable development and that since 2011 has Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council.