

# Communities Powering Moroccan Government

In Morocco, real political change is taking place at the people's level. After two decades of gradual government decentralization, the country's reform-minded King Mohammed VI launched the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) in 2005 to combat poverty in Morocco through community-driven development. To help consolidate these incremental steps taken by the constitutional monarchy toward a more substantial democracy, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) selected RTI International to implement the Morocco Local Governance Project (LGP).

Under LGP, RTI is working to strengthen government officials' capabilities at every level in participatory planning, service delivery, transparency, and accountability to the public. LGP has worked with the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and the governments of seven provinces and 26 communes to make effective local governments a force, not a stumbling block, for sustainable development in Morocco.

## Planning with the People

The INDH formed local committees of elected officials, public servants, and civil society organizations with the mandate to define priorities for social and economic development in their communes, adopt communal development plans, and implement and monitor small projects that address these priorities.

However, community participation in Moroccan local government is low. To improve the government's ability to meet citizen's needs for basic services, RTI introduced participatory strategic planning (PSP) for INDH committees

In Errachidia Province, one of the poorest in the country, LGP facilitated 70 public forums—involving 3,500 women, 1,500 youth, and 2,000 men—where citizens expressed their desire for better social services and more small business opportunities for women. As a result, a women's palm dates processing cooperative was established with an LGP grant, adding value to the local production of dates by turning them into jams and other products.

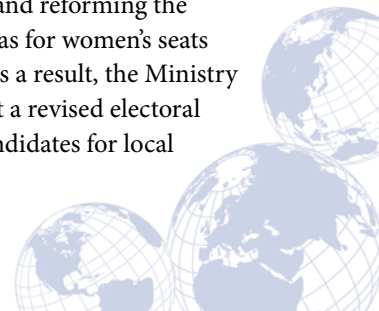


in 13 rural and urban communes. PSP training helped the committees promote a conversation between local stakeholders to identify priority projects for the commune. LGP then supported the projects with a small grant.

## Raising Women's Voices

Though women in Morocco still lack significant representation at the national level, their voice is being increasingly heard at the local level. LGP has taken care to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach into its PSP training. For example, since Moroccan women tend to defer to men in public, LGP assisted the rural communes of Ahlaf and Melilla in Benslimane Province to choose 32 meeting points for 64 forums—one forum for men and one for women in each location. This gave a larger number of citizens an opportunity to voice their concerns and needs.

LGP also partnered with civil society actors and the Ministry of Interior in 2007 to identify key actions for increasing women's seats on local councils, where less than 1% of councilors are female. Recommendations included reforming the electoral code to mandate quotas for women's seats on local councils and reforming the communal charter to mandate quotas for women's seats on the councils' executive boards. As a result, the Ministry of Interior will submit to Parliament a revised electoral code that mandates a third of all candidates for local office be women.



## Resolving Conflict in Slums

Morocco's Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is supporting the INDH through the Cities Without Slums Initiative, a nationwide program to upgrade living conditions in all shantytowns, or *bidonvilles* (literally "tin cities"), or relocate their inhabitants to formal, fully serviced neighborhoods. LGP has assisted Cities Without Slums by mediating a dialogue between local housing authorities and residents to mitigate and resolve conflicts sparked by rumors and lack of communication. LGP has assisted slum-upgrading initiatives in the cities of Casablanca, Kénitra, Mansouria, Meknès, Mohammédia, and Nouaceur.

## Unlocking Municipal Investment Potential

Among its innovative approaches to local governance strengthening, LGP facilitated the very first credit rating of Moroccan municipalities to open doors for private financing. Internationally recognized Fitch Ratings completed credit ratings of three cities: Casablanca, Marrakech, and Salé. All three cities showed low municipal debt and received ratings worthy of domestic capital investment; these ratings were just one step below the Kingdom of Morocco's international "investment grade" rating.

The cities are now more confident that they will be able to finance ambitious infrastructure upgrades and are seeking to diversify funding beyond high-interest federal loans. The ratings also demonstrated to public officials how their decisions impact their cities' credit worthiness. With LGP assistance, officials are now taking steps to improve transparency, strengthen internal audits, and remedy local tax collection—a common deficiency pointed out by Fitch Ratings.

LGP has taken the following three approaches to fostering transparency in Moroccan local government:

- Training and writing manuals for the Ministry of Interior's local government inspectors on international best practices in audit and oversight
- Improving systems for sensitive local government functions, like facilitating consultations to the design of a decree reforming local procurement procedures
- Helping the cities of Casablanca and Témara to adopt model codes of conduct between elected officials and city workers that uphold professionalism and accountability



Women of the slum neighborhood of Ennakhil learn about low interest housing loans that could help them finance their new housing units. [Photo: LGP staff]

## Sustainability

LGP has taken care to ensure that its local and national partners have full ownership of activities implemented jointly. For example, the project has worked closely with the Ministry of Interior to sustain the PSP approach. The Ministry has introduced an ambitious plan that all Moroccan local governments adopt development plans using PSP, for which LGP has developed a guide. LGP is also leaving behind a number of important tools that will help the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and local stakeholders replicate social mediation in slum areas. As USAID prepares a new strategy to support Morocco's progressive decentralization, they will be in a good position based on the capacity built and results achieved by LGP.

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