



Avoiding decentralization traps in Morocco

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To succeed in the constitutionally enshrined, advanced regionalization is one of the most actual and critical challenges in Morocco. This challenge is to be addressed by, on the one hand, avoiding the decentralization pitfalls and, on the other hand, leveraging this decentralization to create sustainable wealth and jobs.

September the 4th 2015, the political and the institutional process of the Moroccan advanced regionalization was completed through the election, by direct universal suffrage, of the 12 Moroccan regional councils. Nevertheless, this decentralization process, aiming to a large transfer of authority and responsibility of public function from the state to the regions, should not fall in the paradox of trying to bring public decision closer to the reality of the citizens by adding inefficient political and administrative layers that could slow public service and care to the same citizens. This requires an effective transfer of the necessary authority and resources to the regions in order to be able to face the transferred responsibilities.

The second decentralization trap that needs to be avoided is to generate an additional factor of inequity within and between the regions. Regions are, indeed, unequally developed and citizens have unequal access to public services and public care. A successful decentralization process is a process where the mechanisms activating the principles of subsidiarity, substitution and solidarity are in place and efficient. Subsidiarity implies that the responsibility should be transferred to the smallest entity able to take it – substitution means that, if the responsibility is not fully assumed by this smallest entity, the superior layer has to ensure delivery and solidarity requires that entities support each other if inequity reaches a certain level.

Avoiding the decentralization pitfalls could be particularly sensitive regarding education, health and safety services as well as for water, sanitation, energy and transportation infrastructure. Citizens across the country need to have equitable access to public services even if these services are managed locally. Additionally, a successful decentralization should preserve the national identity meanwhile leveraging local potential and taking into account local specificities.

If vertical and horizontal cooperation and the availability of subsidiarity, substitution and solidarity mechanisms are required for a successful decentralization, actors at all layers should be prepared to negotiate, activate and manage these mechanisms at the central and at regional levels. Having adequate and trained human capital to take responsibility and to optimally manage the transferred and local resources is a key success factor for decentralization.

Last but not least, a successful decentralization process should be able to face all kind of resistance to change. The transfer of responsibilities and resources is not a natural process and the resistance to change could be dramatically fed by a poor quality or coherence of the regulation and by non-adapted administrative processes. To conclude, a successful decentralization is an appropriate mix of policies and programs aiming to raise the efficiency of the public action and to leverage the collective intelligence of the local population in order to find the best solutions to achieve sustainable growth and well-being. This process should be carefully driven through

(i) the establishment of adequate mechanisms in order to deploy the principles of subsidiarity, substitution and solidarity and through

(ii) a reinforced operational steering of the transition phase in order to build local capabilities and to face resistance to change.

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