

Agriculture and food security in Morocco



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After more than half a century of agricultural policies in Morocco, given that the country has gained its independence in 1956, there is growing food dependency; a considerable part of the food needs of the Moroccan population is now satisfied by the use of imports. In addition, due to the current world conditions and excessive price rises in basic foodstuffs; food imports become increasingly expensive for the Moroccan state's public finances. The Moroccan state is also obliged to continue financing the commodity subsidy system to protect the consumer against soaring prices in international markets. This is one of the main reasons for the ever-widening budget deficit, exposing the Moroccan economy to major risks that are difficult to avoid.

The food dependency of Morocco today has a cost and this cost is exorbitant and difficult to support. But this cost is the result of national agricultural policies that disregarded food security. In addition, these policies have ignored the failures and weaknesses of Moroccan agriculture which remains in a worrying situation. Although public actors always emphasize the strategic importance of the modernization of the agricultural sector, the latter is still handicapped by a multitude of constraints. This is one of the essential factors explaining the problem of food security in Morocco. In the following sections we will focus on the main constraints that still hinder the development of agriculture in Morocco.

The Moroccan agriculture, A two-speed agriculture:

The agricultural policy put in place since independence of Morocco has favored the opposition and consequently the gap between two sectors of Moroccan agriculture: the traditional sector and the modern sector.

-The traditional sector: It is a sector that has been insufficiently supported by the public authorities, although it concerns the vast majority of farmers and contains 9 / 10th of the useful agricultural area (UAA). Housing fragile rainfed agriculture¹, this sector is also marked by poverty, underemployment and many social prob-

1 The problems of rainfed agriculture, in Morocco as elsewhere, will be aggravated in the coming years due to climate change. For more details, see: Vicente Paolo Yu III, A Systemic Approach to Climate Change and Sustainable Development, South Center.

lems that limit any development opportunities.

-The modern sector: It has enjoyed most of the attention of the designers of agricultural policy. As a result, it stands out today for its modern equipment, modern infrastructure and advanced mechanization. Similarly, this sector includes large irrigation schemes with considerable water holding capacity; which allowed to irrigate a surface passed from 90000 hectares in 1961 to 218000 hectares in 1966 and 1460000 hectares in 2004². The potentialities and the performances available to it make that "in average year, the irrigated sector contributes, on 13% of the UAA, to 45% of the agricultural value added, to 75% of the exports. and 35% of agricultural employment. All production of citrus fruit, sugar, nearly 80% of vegetable, fodder and dairy production, but also nearly 20% of meat and cereal production are in the irrigated sector"³.

This dualism that characterizes Moroccan agriculture contrasts with the fundamental characteristics of modern agricultural policy, which "places great importance on technical progress and its diffusion among farmers. A powerful apparatus of research and development is gradually being put in place. Farmers are supervised by an increasingly dense network of technicians and advisers and are offered models of technical development"⁴.

The maintaining of the dominance of cereals:

In fact, cereals remain the main group of crops in terms of cultivated areas, production and as a food base. Yet, although Morocco is the largest grain country in the Maghreb⁵, its cereal production remains heavily subject to weather conditions⁶, thus experiencing extreme fluctuation

2 The High Commissioner for Planning, Prospective Morocco 2030, Agriculture 2030: what future for Morocco?, 2007, p.37

3 Ibid, pp.88-89.

4 Claude Servolin, "Agricultural Policies", in Madeleine Grawitz and Jean Loca, Treaty of Political Science, Volume 4 (Public Policies), Presses Universitaires de France, 1985, p.180.

5 Houssein Eddine Chebbi, Lassad Lachaal, "Agriculture and food security: a comparative study of the Maghreb countries", in New Medit, Vol 3, N.3/2004, p.7.

6 It should be noted that «Africa projected to be the continent most negatively affected by climate change due to a combination of particularly severe projected impacts and relatively low adaptive capacity». Mariama Williams,

due to the rainfall pattern of each agricultural year. This explains why, despite the expansion of cereal area in the late 1980s, productivity has not increased significantly. Thus, despite the considerable weight of cereals in the agricultural sector, production in this area does not satisfy internal consumption needs, knowing that cereals are the staple food of the population.

Human resources:

Agricultural public action has not been able to solve two major problems that weaken and hinder human resources, namely rural poverty and illiteracy. It should be noted in this regard that the level of human development in Morocco is the lowest in the Mediterranean area. In 2004, Morocco achieved a rural HDI⁷ of 0.537 and an urban HDI of 0.721⁸, and this situation for the least worrying, at the human, social and political levels, has naturally relegated it to the bottom of the world rankings, placing him in 125th place out of a total of 177 countries. This, of course, reflects a worrying state of underdevelopment, especially in the rural world where the most serious and glaring social problems have accumulated. The lack of a rural development strategy integrated into agricultural policy largely explains the setbacks of the latter. Indeed, it turns out today that "the great insufficiency of agricultural policies since independence has not been accompanied by rural development policies that really bring social and human progress. This deficit, which remained one of the major weaknesses of the social balance sheet of Morocco in the late 1990s, seems to have significantly slowed down the development of agriculture"⁹. As a result of this multidimensional delay that is currently being blamed on the rural world, and which is mainly manifested in low income, inadequate basic economic and social infrastructure and the isolation of most rural localities, a real limitation of the possibilities and potentialities

of human resources, supposed to be the engine of any work of agricultural modernization. Beyond the poverty that affects large categories of the rural world, illiteracy remains a major handicap for Moroccan agriculture as it affects the quality of human resources. In fact, improving the performance of the agricultural sector requires a minimum of training for the farmer. However, the 1996 general census of agriculture indicated that 81% of farmers have no level of education, 9.5% only have Koranic school level and 6% have primary school level¹⁰. To the lack of training, we must also add that farmers are relatively old, as 67.5% of them are over 45 years old. It can therefore easily be understood that poverty and illiteracy largely explain the low appeal of rural life to youth and, more generally, the inability of the human factor to become a productive and efficient agricultural working tool.

Climate finance, gender and climate change, Oral presentation in the Study Week on Macroeconomic, trade and investment policies organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development in collaboration with South Center, Geneva, Switzerland, November 2018.

7 This is the Human Development Index.

8 The High Commissioner for Planning, Prospective Morocco 2030, Agriculture 2030: what future for Morocco ?, op.cit. p.94.

9 Grigori Lazarev, Agrarian policies in Morocco 1956-2006, a committed testimony, Economie critique, 2012, p.162.

10 Najib Akkesbi, Evolutions and prospects of Moroccan agriculture, 50 years of human development and prospects 2025, Fiftieth anniversary of the independence of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat, p.165.

Financial resources:

The mobilization of the necessary financial means is an indispensable tool for the takeoff of any economic sector. However, public resources devoted to the agricultural sector in Morocco fell significantly during the 1980s, given the repercussions and financial difficulties that weighed heavily on the state finances. Under these conditions, the budget for the agricultural sector has been drastically reduced from 20% in the 1970s to 10% today, a 50% drop¹¹.

In the same direction, it should be noted that "the contribution of private investment is still modest and does not meet the expectations of the sector since the credits granted by the Credit Agricole of Morocco¹² (CAM) cover only 14 to 20% of the needs financing, and commercial banks only participate for 3%¹³". It is therefore clear that private financial resources are extremely low to such an extent that they cannot, in any case, remedy the insufficiency of those of public origin.

In addition to the inadequacy of public resources allocated to agriculture, it is clear that these are unequally distributed. The Moroccan agricultural policy has been characterized, as we have pointed out, by the concentration of most of the resources in the irrigation schemes. This has been reflected in the allocation of financial resources that have moved massively towards certain limited areas (irrigated perimeters), to the detriment of the rural environment. Thus, the structural failures of the latter, which are already large, have considerably worsened.

Despite the limited financial resources devoted to the agricultural sector, it must be emphasized

11 The decline in financial resources devoted to agriculture is explained by the structural adjustment program applied by Morocco in the 1980s. Indeed, the structural adjustment program has had negative social consequences not only for Morocco but on most developing countries. For more details on this point, see: Isabel Ortiz, (Director Social Protection Department International Labor Organization), Social Protection, Oral presentation in the Study Week on Macroeconomic, trade and investment policies organized by the Arab NGO Network for Development in collaboration with South Center, Geneva, Switzerland, November 2018.

12 Credit Agricole of Morocco it's a Moroccan bank which gives credits to farmers.

13 The High Commissioner for Planning, Prospective Morocco 2030, Agriculture 2030: what future for Morocco ?, op.cit. p.92.

that the share devoted to irrigation equipment is still colossal. Since the end of the 1980s, it has absorbed two-thirds of the agricultural sector's budget. In other words, the other agricultural development tools (training of farmers, scientific research, agricultural extension¹⁴, support for professional organizations, etc.) are becoming the subject of worrying underfunding, which favors the handicaps of farms and perpetuate the critical living conditions of the people who live there.

14 Agricultural extension is about sharing the results of research and know-how with farmers in order to equip them with new skills. See :

-Modernizing National Agricultural Extension Systems: A Practical Guide for Policymakers in Developing Countries, FAO, 2007.

-To Mobilize the Potential of Rural and Agricultural Extension, FAO, 2011.

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