

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: **Morocco**

Civil society in Morocco from 1999 to 2019 | Rachid Touhtou |

BACKGROUND:

In Morocco, the growing politics of the “non-governmental” (Howell, 2006) in the context of the national Initiative for Human Development the constitutionalization of the roles of civil society in the 2011 Moroccan version of the Arab-Spring, and the launching of the national dialogue on civil society¹, provide a political and social critique of our understanding regarding intervention as a societal responsibility. In this context, within a nascent civil society being transformed into a process of “NGO-ization” (Islah Jad, 2007) and comprised of secularists, Islamists and state actors in a developing country where radicalization and democratization coexist simultaneously, the civil society activism in the social arena is transforming political discourse, and the public sphere itself.

This happened during the smooth transition from the late King Hassan II to his son, King Mohamed VI, in what was called the transition to democracy that started in 1996 with a constitutional reform and legislative elections in 1997, and that culminated with the government of Alternance, which was headed by the socialist political party USFP and its socialist Prime Minister Abderrahman Youssoufi. A new phase of political opposition sharing power with the king has contributed to a form of liberalization in Morocco. On ascending to the throne in 1999, King Mohammed VI adopted a series of measures to limit the repercussions of his father’s era (the late Hassan II). These include the removal of the powerful minister of the interior, the late Driss Basri, by the undesirable powers of progressive forces, the return of Abraham Sarfati, a communist opponent to the Hassan II regime (1999) and the creation of the Independent Commission of Arbitration (2001), which dealt with the development and maintenance of the Amazigh language and culture. The measures further included the amendment and simplification of laws relating to the establishment of civil society organizations (2002) and the promulgation of the Family Code

(2003), which came in favor of women, and finally the creation of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (2004), in order to investigate past grave human rights violations. The National Initiative for Human Development was launched in 2005, through which the state has worked to involve some of the associations at various stages, from proposing projects to their completion, including the tracking and evaluation phase.

Mohammed VI accelerated the liberalization and accountability process. He established a new human rights and truth commission, the Instance Équité et Reconciliation (IER), to investigate a broad range of abuses during Hassan II’s reign (his father who reigned from 1962 to 1999), in addition to holding public hearings and recommending legal changes. Moreover, following a lengthy struggle by women’s rights organizations, the government began promoting gender equality by reforming the country’s personal status code. The gender equality debate started with the ex-Minister Mohamed Said Saadi who proposed a governmental plan for integrating women into development during the Alternance government. Mohamed VI would as a result of ideological fragmentation on the proposed plan appoint a royal commission to reform the family law. In 2011, citizens demanded greater democracy, social justice, and an end to political corruption through Arab Spring-style street demonstrations (called the 20 February Movement in Morocco). This wave of popular protests fueled a shift in activism in Morocco, bringing human rights issues to the fore. Mohammad VI proposed constitutional reforms that were overwhelmingly approved in a popular referendum. Although the new constitution preserves the king’s powers over the military and religious matters, it grants more powers to the democratically elected government. Additionally, an independent National Human Rights Council (CNDH) tasked with protecting the human rights of Moroccan citizens succeeded the Consultative Council of Human Rights (CCDH). In November 2011, the Justice and Development Party (PJD), a moderate Islamist political party, won the national elections.

¹ See the website dedicated to this dialogue: <http://hiwarmadani2013.ma/>.

Despite reform efforts since the early 1990s, there are still serious human rights concerns in Morocco. The 2011 constitutional amendments integrated new human rights protections, but this commitment has not yet translated into significantly improved practices in several areas. Human rights commentators are particularly concerned about unfair trials, freedom of speech, and freedom of association, especially for political or politicized groups and individuals. For example, convictions of political protesters or dissidents have relied heavily on alleged coerced confessions which have then been contested by defendants in court.

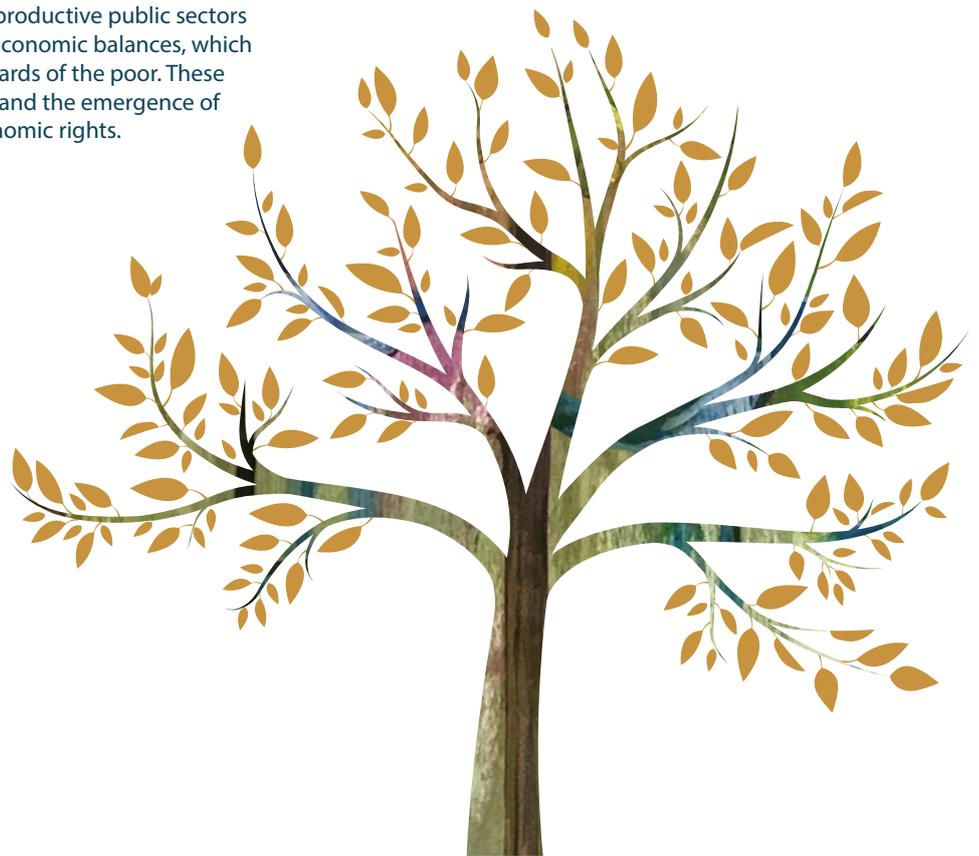
In 2004, revisions to Morocco's family and personal status code afforded women expanded rights in divorce, child custody, and other family matters, but some gendered discriminatory provisions still remain. Implementation of the reforms, moreover, has been slow. There are also serious concerns about violations of the rights of domestic workers in Morocco, many of whom are children, as national labor laws do not protect these workers. Despite prohibitions on employing children under the age of 15, thousands of children – typically from disadvantaged backgrounds – are domestic workers in Morocco and often face abusive conditions. Finally, Morocco's Truth Commission (IER) completed its mandate and produced a final report in 2005, providing acknowledgment and reparations to about 16,000 victims of past human rights abuses. However, particular perpetrators were not named (independent human rights groups organized a parallel hearing and named perpetrators), so no prosecutions have been conducted. Similarly, although the commission recommended institutional reforms to prevent future human rights violations, legal and security sector reforms have not occurred.

In the new millennium, a variety of Moroccan civil society groups went a step further and began advocating for freedom of religion, sexual orientation, secularism, and language rights. Unlike the more established rights groups, the recent local human rights organizations are often not rooted in Morocco's political left. Human rights organizations (including feminists, Amazigh and local development groups) kept their distance from the government until the 1990s, when the political environment began to liberalize. The year 2011 was the year of upheavals, giving birth to the 20 February Movement and a new constitution and government led by the Islamists. This government (from 2011 till now), through the 2011 and 2016 governments, engaged in liberalizing the economy, privatizing the productive public sectors and giving priority to controlling macro-economic balances, which led to negative results on the living standards of the poor. These neoliberal choices would produce unrest and the emergence of social movements demanding socio-economic rights.



It is possible to say that the aforementioned political, legal and institutional reforms have contributed to the emergence of many civil society organizations, which subsequently found space to interact with the various issues of the common public, which have been brought about by the changes in the general context at the economic, social, cultural and political levels. These organizations initiated the establishment of coalitions and drafted petitions and memos to demand the decision-makers to meet their demands. The February 20 protests were mixed in quantitative terms, but they were a symbolic success, which encouraged further protests.

The state-society relations and dynamics in Morocco in 20 years, from 1999 to 2019, knew decisive transformations, from an authoritarian repressive regime to a semi-authoritarian liberalized autocracy, using façade democracy as a stabilizing, social peace buyer system. Civil society has moved from a sort of NGO-ization structures to social movement landscape calling for universal rights, intermingled with identity politics.



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BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the “Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World” program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project “Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making”. This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

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