



# Capable Partners Program Learning Agenda on Local Organization Capacity Development

## Country Report Series

### #2: Morocco

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## **THE RESEARCH**

This report is based on two and a half weeks of field research in Morocco between June 18<sup>th</sup> and July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The research was conducted by Thomas Dichter and Nadia Guessous. Both are anthropologists by training and have done prior research in Morocco. Thomas Dichter was a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco in the 1960s and wrote his PhD dissertation on culture change and schooling in Morocco. Nadia Guessous is of Moroccan origin, did research for her PhD dissertation in Morocco and is writing a book on the Moroccan feminist movement. The research was conducted in English, French and Arabic. Both Dichter and Guessous speak French and Arabic. Because of time constraints, the research was limited to four cities: Rabat, Sale, Casablanca, and Marrakech. Most of the research was concentrated in the capital city of Rabat where a large number of civil society organizations are concentrated. In addition, we conducted a field visit to Douar Timzgida in Tidili Mesfioua which is located in the Alhaouz Province, outside of Marrakech. This was to visit a USAID DGP grantee and was the only rural area that was included in the field research.

We met with the local USAID Mission staff, one USAID DGP grantee, two declined USAID DGP Applicants, two donors, two organizations that work with the private sector, two government bodies that work with civil society, 19 civil society organizations, two research centers and five scholars. The civil society organizations we met work in areas such as health, education, violence against women, women's literacy and financial independence, sustainable development, youth, street children, poverty alleviation, refugees, human rights, rural development, water, sanitation and the environment. Two are civil society organizations networks and two focus on civil society capacity development. Some of the organizations are just a few years old while others have been around for much longer. Some have lots of experience working with foreign funders while others have only had one or two experiences, if not none. Some have many members and a large staff, while others are entirely volunteer-run. Some are family foundations run by one or two family members that depend on personal networks; others are run like corporations and follow a private sector model of management. Some work in urban centers while others work in rural areas. In preparing the field research, we also consulted with two local intermediary organizations. In total, we spoke to 68 individuals.

## **RELEVANT LEGAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND**

As everywhere, context is key and one cannot understand Civil Society (and capacity development) in Morocco without understanding the recent history of a series of political and socioeconomic events and transformations, the most important of which are noted in what follows.

The civil society sector in Morocco is regulated by Law # 58 on the right of association, public generosity, and public utility (*la loi 58 sur le droit d'association, la loi sur la générosité publique, le décret d'application d'octroi de l'utilité publique, le décret relatif à la générosité publique*), as stipulated by the Dahir of November 15, 1958 as it has been modified and completed by law # 75-00 (*le Dahir N°1.58.376 du 3 jourmada I 1378/15 novembre 1958 relatif*

*au droit d'association tel qu'il a été modifié et complété par suite et notamment par la nouvelle loi N° 75-00).*<sup>1</sup>

Under international pressures, King Hassan II, who ruled Morocco with relentless control from 1962 to 1999 in what are known as the “years of lead,” started “liberalizing” the public sphere in the last two decades of his rule, and especially in the 1990s. Although some human rights and feminist NGOs were created as early as the late 1970s and early 1980s, most NGOs were created in the 1990s and 2000s.

The initial growth of civil society took place in the context of the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s when NGOs were called upon to start filling gaps in the delivery of public social services. The “liberalization” of civil society in other words was directly correlated with the partial withdrawal of the state from the public sector under pressures from international agencies such as the World Bank. This correlation between the withdrawal of the state and the growth of civil society continues to have serious implications today. We were told that regions of Morocco where the state has been most absent are the ones where civil society has been most vibrant. This includes the Souss/Draa region, the Tensift/Haouz region, and the Oriental region.<sup>2</sup>

When Mohammed VI inherited the throne upon the death of his father in 1999, he proclaimed himself “King of the Poor.” He invested in “social issues” such as poverty alleviation, unemployment, literacy, slum eradication, the rights of the disabled, and women’s rights. He created the Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity (1999) to support the poor, the needy and people with special needs. He also created the Agency of Social Development (ADS) (2001), the Ministry of Social Development (2004) and the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) (2005). In addition to providing services to marginalized and vulnerable populations (the youth, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, etc.), all these agencies, foundations and ministries have been given the mandate of providing support to and working in close partnership with civil society. The Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity, for example, describes itself as a partner of civil society. In its latest activity report, it states that its mission would be impossible to accomplish without the know-how and expertise of civil society partners who work in proximity with local populations.<sup>3</sup> Since its creation in 1999, the foundation has spent 3.73 billion dirhams (about \$470 million) on its various projects.

The creation of the INDH in 2005 led to significant growth in the numbers of NGOs; some estimate that as many as a third of currently existing NGOs were created after 2005. The INDH is a royal initiative that was announced by King Mohammed VI in his speech to the nation on May 18, 2005. The INDH operates under the tutelage of the Ministry of Interior and is endowed with a large budget (10 billion dirhams over a period of five years – \$1.14 billion at a recent exchange rate of 8.95 to the dollar). It is based on a tri-partite governance structure that includes state services, local elected officials and civil society organizations. Its activities receive a lot of media coverage, especially when the king is called upon to inaugurate a new center or initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> For a full text of the law see, <http://www.indh.gov.ma/fr/doc/Module3.pdf> and/or [http://www.tanmia.ma/article.php3?id\\_article](http://www.tanmia.ma/article.php3?id_article)

<sup>2</sup> Though especially in the Souss, the influence of a large diaspora community in France plays a role

<sup>3</sup> See the 2010 Activity Report of the Foundation,

<http://www.fm5.ma/sites/default/files/Rapport%20d%27activit%C3%A9%20FM5%202010%20VF.pdf>

As a result of all this, and in contrast to Hassan II's rule, the beginning of a 'normalization' of civil society has taken place. Unlike the repressive "years of lead" when civil society was associated with political opposition and dissidence, today civil society is described as a "partner" of the state. At the same time, the Moroccan monarchy – a continuous line of succession since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century – did not painstakingly create an intricate system of control over the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only to let it go. That control appears to be self-confident enough and firm enough to allow a certain "*souplesse*," as one of our interviewees put it – an ability to be a 'just-in-time' step ahead of various movements for justice and rights, and to somehow send a message to those who oppose it when limits on expression and reform have been reached. One of our interlocutors described this situation as "false pluralism."

The exact number of civil society organizations in Morocco is not known. Numbers that we heard vary between 50,000 and 80,000 organizations, with some estimating the numbers at 100,000.

Recent events in the Arab world (Egypt, Tunisia, Lybia, Syria, Bahrain, etc.) have led to the emergence of new social movements such as the February 20<sup>th</sup> youth opposition movement which has been calling for greater democracy and social justice. This has given rise to major debates and, according to some, a new dynamism within civil society.

The constitutional reforms of 2011 that were approved by a national referendum are seen by many as a response to the demands of the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement and as a way of keeping the country "stable" in an era of revolutions and social change.

Among many other revisions, the new constitution places emphasis on the role of civil society and calls for the creation of a ministry in charge of relations with the parliament and civil society. Article 12 of the revised constitution for example states the right of organizations interested in public affairs and NGOs to contribute, in the context of participative democracy, to the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the decisions and projects of elected institutions and public powers. Article 13 calls on public authorities to create consultative bodies to allow civil society to participate in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of public policies. Article 33 calls on public authorities to encourage youth to participate in the social, economic, cultural and political development of the country and to help them become involved in public life/community service (*la vie active et associative*).<sup>4</sup>

Also significant to the current political framework around civil society is that for the first time in its history, the political party elected into power in the latest parliamentary elections (2011) is an Islamist party – the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) – which has always been in the opposition.

The PJD has put forward its commitment to fight corruption at all levels, and has recently started directing its attention to civil society funds and budgets, which has made some civil society actors nervous. So far however, there are no signs that the PJD is trying to silence or control civil society actors, as some have suggested.

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<sup>4</sup> See the text of the revised constitution (2011), <http://www.maroc.ma/PortailInst/Fr/logoevenementiel/Projet+de+la+nouvelle+constitution.htm>

In April 2012, a coalition of civil society organizations signed a declaration (*Déclaration et Appel de Rabat des Associations Démocratiques*) expressing concerns about statements made by members of the new government which seem to be throwing doubts on the integrity of civil society. The statement also seeks to reiterate the important contributions of civil society to the development of the country and to alert the general public to the vulnerable situation of most civil society actors whose volunteer labor is not legally recognized, have no social security, medical coverage or job security due to the financially precarious status of most organizations.<sup>5</sup>

## **THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MOROCCO**

Clearly the majority of CSOs in Morocco are new. Indeed the concept of civil society itself is new. A prominent sociologist told us that “the very vocabulary to talk about issues of civil society is still in the process of formation.” The efflorescence of NGOs (and smaller CBOs) due both to the more open space since 1999 and the various initiatives noted above, has certainly galvanized parts of Moroccan society. But the speed and amplitude of civil society growth have also created a mild form of chaos. The sector as a whole seems disorganized, with little dialogue and collaboration amongst the actors. There is, as one person put it, a “cacophony of voices” which may in part be fed by misinformation about many of the new laws and frameworks governing civil society. One person who runs a small think tank told us that in Morocco even the concept of debate as productive dialogue is relatively new. There is argument and some apparent confusion about the roles of CSOs, and nervousness and ambivalence about whether or how to be partners with the state. One reaction to the dissonance seems to be a tendency among some organizations to bend to whatever wind is blowing. One person put it this way about many CSOs: “there is no policy of demand – no articulation of what it is they want to do; they just respond to what donors say they would like.” CSOs have not defined themselves or their roles clearly, and while many have a focus on rights issues, technical areas, social welfare areas, or creating political space and voice, we did not hear much discussion of a role in the country’s development as such. Innovation is not a word we heard. As one person put it, “everyone talks about money, but money is not the issue here, what’s missing is ideas.” That may be partly because what seems to be the foremost concern of most organizations we met is simply organizational survival.

We heard a lot of fears and complaints about the state, the dangers of politicization, co-optation, the legal status of CSOs, funding, the rise of a consultant culture, project-driven work, etc., but with few exceptions hardly any concrete proposals to remedy any of these situations. And there are many critics of Civil Society in government and in society in general. Civil Society in Morocco does not have an altogether a positive image. Many people wonder what CSOs do, and sense that there is lots of talk and little action. In sum, it seems fair to say that in Morocco there is the irony of a sector that is at an early stage of its evolution, and yet already somewhat “under siege.”

The creation of the INDH in 2005 seems to have led to the creation of a large number of small organizations motivated by the availability of funds for small projects and the construction of centers. While this can be seen as having created a more dynamic civil society, it also raises

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<sup>5</sup> For the full text of the declaration see, [http://www.tanmia.ma/article.php3?id\\_article=31173](http://www.tanmia.ma/article.php3?id_article=31173)

further questions about the relationship between civil society and the state. Some civil society actors described the effects of the INDH initiative and the proliferation of organizations that resulted from it as a negative obstacle rather than an asset. One donor (Frederich Ebert) described this proliferation as a form of NGO entrepreneurship and as a new industry. He also described it as a strategic state project that seeks to maintain stability through the “incorporation of dissidence” and as a state mechanism of control. Others seemed to suggest that the INDH is based on nepotism/clientelism and leads to/entails corruption. They also suggested that the organizations favored by INDH tend to be only those that are apolitical and uncritical of the state.

Many of the organizations we met expressed some concern about their legal status. There are two types of organizations in Morocco: what are called associations and what are called associations for public benefit. Only a small number of organizations in Morocco (some estimate 157, others about 195) are considered of public benefit; many of our interlocutors seemed to suggest that the status is political and that obtaining it depends on whom one knows and how one is positioned vis-à-vis the state. The status comes with tax benefits and gives the association the right to conduct public donation drives. The much broader category of association refers to “an agreement to achieve a constant cooperation between two or many persons using their information or activities for a non-profit purpose.” As such it has the right to receive public subsidies, duties and annual contributions of its members, support from the private sector and from international agencies; it also has the right to have headquarters and other properties that are necessary for achieving its objectives.

Among the concerns that were raised by the civil society actors we spoke to is the fact that CSOs do not receive any tax exemptions despite being non-profit. Also, organizations do not seem to have the right to engage in income-generating activities, even if these activities are aimed towards making the organization financially independent or paying for its operational costs, without having to pay taxes on that income. Technically, only associations recognized for public benefit do not pay taxes on the sale of goods and services. In addition, CSO staff members often do not receive retirement benefits or medical insurance since many of them are hired on short-term contracts.<sup>6</sup> Other concerns raised include the status of volunteer workers who are not legally recognized and therefore have no legal protection or rights. CSO members who work in the public sector, for example, have to obtain permission to attend to their responsibilities during work hours. We were told of civil society actors who work with street children and prostitutes who have been arrested by the police because they have no form of identification as civil society workers/actors.

In order to become official, an organization needs to register/file an application with the relevant authorities (generally the local district attorney as well as the local branch of the Interior Ministry). Only one organization we met with (Transparency Maghreb) discussed the difficulties it encountered when trying to become legally registered/recognized in the 1990s. While this might mean that we met with more mainstream organizations (we did not for example meet with opposition Islamist movements like *al adl wa al ihsan* which is not officially recognized by the state or outspoken human rights groups like the Association Marocaine des Droits Humains

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<sup>6</sup> We were told of one NGO activist who worked on poverty alleviation and died in a car accident. His colleagues and peers had to raise money for his funeral since he and his family had no savings.

(AMDH) whose activists and members are frequently harassed by the state), we did not get the sense that civil society organizations are operating in a climate of fear or surveillance or that they are subject to or concerned about state repression at this point in time. Some seemed apprehensive about what the new Islamist-led government of Benkirane would bring in terms of a change in attitude towards civil society. At the same time, most approvingly mentioned new clauses in the recently revised (2011) constitution that highlight the crucial role of civil society and the creation of a ministry in charge of relations with the parliament and civil society.

Government officials, for their part, worry about the lack of accountability of civil society organizations that raise large amounts of foreign funds but do not declare these funds to the state. According to one official we met, only 3 to 4 organizations have declared receiving foreign funds. He also wondered if all the money received by civil society organizations was being well used and if it was having enough of an impact in areas such as education and poverty. He also wondered what percentage of Morocco's GDP was related to this funding.

And despite the official discourse about collaboration and participative democracy, there is clear confusion and ambivalence on both the government side and the civil society side about who should play what role. Many of the civil society actors we spoke to expressed ambivalence about "doing the work of" the state. CSOs say that they do not want to do the job of the state and the state says that CSOs should not be doing the job of the state. This debate about the legitimate role and place of the state and civil society is reflected in the other countries we visited.

The dilemma can be poignant and immediate for those who see problems they believe they can solve. As one civil society actor told us: "You cannot substitute for the state, but you can't stand aside and do nothing" (Foundation Layadi). Many told us that they want to be more than service or welfare providers. Some also expressed the desire to be taken more seriously. In particular, some organizations want to be seen as more than providers of "sensibilization" [awareness building] or information – what some call "civil society light" – and want to have more impact on state policies, priorities and activities. One civil society activist (Enda Maghreb) who works in the environmental and sustainable development sector told of his frustration that the results and recommendations of rigorous studies based on successful pilot projects do not become adopted and institutionalized by government bodies even when they are carried out in collaboration with government bodies and offer solutions that are tailored to local contexts. He worried that resources were being wasted on studies that led to no implementation except on a small scale in short-term pilot projects that then become unsustainable for lack of funds. He gave the example of a successful composting and recycling project that turned trash into a source of income. He argued that such a project could easily be reproduced by the state as a more environmentally-sound trash disposal system that would be financially self-sustaining. He also suggested that one cannot speak of a collaborative relationship between civil society and the state if recommendations from civil society organizations are not taken seriously and implemented. Another civil society actor told us that CSOs are "frequently consulted but not often listened to" (Transparency Maroc).

Concerns were also raised in almost every meeting we had about the relationship between CSOs and donors. The predominant one can be called the "projectizing" conundrum. Because so many organizations are dependent for their functioning and existence on projects, they worry both about their sustainability and the identity of their organization. Very few donors are willing to pay for operational expenses (like rent, electricity, internet, phone, supplies and salaries);

instead, they prefer to pay for projects and programs. As a result organizations are constantly struggling to pay for their operational expenses. In addition, organizations have difficulty maintaining a clear sense of identity and purpose since projects often take them in directions different from the ones articulated in their mission statements. Organizations tend to respond to calls for applications from donors and determine their priorities accordingly in order to sustain themselves rather than determining their priorities and applying to fund those projects directly in line with their mission. While they don't like what they see as donor-driven "projectization," they go along with it in order to keep their offices running and their staff members paid. One person put it cynically as learning to play "the music of projects." Many individuals we spoke with worried about the loss of "*la fibre associative*" and about the fact that CSO work requires conviction and not just skill (AMSED folks for example).

## **CAPACITY, CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF DONORS**

There seem to be many capacities, skills, and talents in Moroccan civil society as well as general knowledge and experience. However, these capacities are not necessarily fully used. Good research or pilot projects do not always lead to action. And while, as elsewhere, we find a surprising level of sophistication about development concepts and an adept fluency in the terminology of aid effectiveness, there is at the same time a kind of latency in this sophistication – it is there, but not activated. And that may be because it is 'thin;' critics in Morocco talk of the "*affichage*" tendency (to create the impression of something) in some parts of CS, and it may also be a reflection of the donors themselves, who are perhaps equally un-coordinated and whose priorities change.

In any case, many CSOs seem isolated from one another – and that comes through in a tendency to duplicate efforts and resources; studies that become shelf decorations and/or ways of obtaining further funding; and a lot of reinvention of the wheel. The nature of the marketplace (as described above) often means that knowledge comes in the form of temporary, mobile, highly-paid, and disconnected expert-consultants who have no necessary commitment to the project at hand. Because of the political economy of consulting and expertise and the comparatively high fees that are paid to consultants, very few organizations can afford to permanently hire local experts. When such "experts" work as volunteers, they are less able to give of their time because of other responsibilities and because many of them supplement their incomes with consulting work. If there is a need in the area of local capacity development, it is in terms of how better to use existing local capacities and overcome the limitations of this "mobile expertise" model. When asked about the role of agencies such as USAID in local capacity development, most of our interlocutors said that local capacities exist but that one can always learn from others, especially in a context where "innovation" matters. As one government official told us "we always need the other."

What seems to be a challenge for local organizations is how to maintain independence, vision and priorities while relying on funding from the outside. The fact that most funders are project-driven and disinclined towards funding both ongoing projects and operational costs is a real obstacle to supporting sustainable and coherent local capacity development.

In fact, we were told by some of our interlocutors that over-availability of funds can itself be detrimental to local civil society, especially when those funds are linked to changing donor priorities. This can lead to cycles of rapid expansion followed by contraction, and in some cases taking on too many donors as a way of smoothing out this bumpy trajectory. When funds saturate the civil society market, this can also create an unhealthy competitive environment that discourages partnerships, networks, and the sharing of information and experiences, as seems to have happened. People we met note an inflation of consulting fees and of salaries which then makes it more difficult for smaller organizations to call on their services of consultants or to offer competitive enough salaries. We were told that the first question that some consultants ask when solicited is what is the daily rate? Some consultants will not facilitate a training session for less than 5000 Dhs (ca. \$600) a day. For a sector that used to be reliant on unpaid volunteers, this is obviously a huge shift.

In general, there were many concerns raised about consultants. Because funders are often willing to pay for consultants but not permanent staff members and because volunteers often do not have the time to devote to conducting studies or facilitating training sessions, many organizations are compelled to rely on consultants. Often, we were told, consultants simply confirm what organizations already know from first-hand experience or contribute very little that is of use. When they provide trainings, workshops and capacity development, consultants, we are told, are often unable to communicate information efficiently and in ways that are accessible to the general public. Many are university professors who supplement their income by working as consultants. We heard many complaints about the fact that university professors lack first-hand NGO experience and are not always able to convey their ideas to non-academic audiences. Yet because spending funder money is a priority for organizations, they continue to hire and depend on consultants despite their many concerns and dissatisfactions.

On the other hand, there are many small organizations that continue to depend on the work of unpaid volunteers and because by definition most volunteers have limited time, these organizations are often overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the day to day work. For those who are able to hire salaried staff members to do the day to day work of the organization, finding skilled employees is often a challenge. University graduates often do not have skills that are applicable to the world of NGOs. More important, graduates from professional schools are often not interested in non-profit work, especially since NGO salaries are usually not competitive with opportunities in the private sector (commercial banks are often cited as a major draw on good graduates) or with the public sector as far as job security and benefits are concerned. But salary is only one hindrance – people need, as we were told repeatedly, to have a dedication to the work – the “*fibre associative*.” As one civil society actor told us (Illy Association), “staff members need to be committed even if they are salaried.” As a result, positions often remain unfilled after being advertised and despite the availability of funds. That this is the case is particularly ironic considering the high rate of unemployment among youth in Morocco. This might be an area where “capacity development” can be linked to efforts to communicate better what civil society work is about, something that organizations such as the Training Institute for Development Actors (*l’Institut de Formation des Agents de Developpement*) which offers certificates and trainings to civil society actors, is trying to do.

As almost everywhere else, we also heard much in Morocco about the “turnover dilemma.” When staff members are hired and trained, they often leave once they have acquired experience

and job skills; this makes continuity difficult although it suggest that work in the non-profit sector is often seen as a good professional stepping stone.

Very few of the organizations we spoke to have developed relationships with the private sector. We met with two organizations based in Casablanca that are working towards building connections between the public school system and the private sector and who have a large network of corporate sponsors who donate in kind (equipment, material, supplies, but also labor in the form of coaching, mentoring and workshops). Both organizations were created by a man who worked in the banking sector for over three decades. He has a very wide network of contacts and does not take no for an answer. “It might take six months to convince a company to get involved but the important thing is to persist,” he told us. The two organizations are run like private enterprises, with highly qualified staff members that could have worked in the corporate sector, and seem very professional. Otherwise, almost none of the other organizations that we met with spoke positively of the potential of the private sector as a partner in civil society. As one of our interlocutors told us, “at most the private sector might be willing to fund a music festival that is directed at foreign tourists. Otherwise, private companies have no interest in the work that we do.”

In general, we get the sense that Moroccan Civil Society’s weaknesses do not lie in the realm of capacity, and certainly not in the standard set of capacities that everyone talks about. If smaller, more rural, CSOs lack capacity in financial management, strategic planning, project cycle management, and so on, it is because of lack of exposure to these concepts and tools. This can be easily remedied and does not seem to require huge inputs from outside the country. The skills and the capacity to transfer those skills exist in Morocco.

Rather the more important capacity concerns have either to do with concrete issues like organizational stability (paying the rent, lowering staff turnover, attracting better qualified people, etc.) or with much higher level, sometimes sector-wide, capacities like the capacity to interact, build relationships, collaborate, learn, reflect, and adapt more quickly to changes in the marketplace, not to mention to play a more pro-active role in adapting the marketplace to civil society.

And since, as we found, the donors themselves have been in part a determinant (the government being equally if not more responsible) of the current dilemmas for many Civil Society actors, especially through the “projectization” phenomenon, the first step in solving these dilemmas is not for donors to presume to supply the relevant capacity development, but rather to eliminate some of the conditions they themselves have created, conditions which may have contributed to the kinds of capacity ‘blockages’ we cite above.

If there is a model of how a donor can begin to move in a new direction in Morocco, it could perhaps be the “German model.” Those who had a solid basis for making comparisons of donor style and approach cited the German model’s key characteristic as what might be called “active listening.” That is to say, not just hearing what civil society actors say they need, and then helping them to get it, but creating a platform for debate and dialogue to sort out what is really needed, and why, and then to figure out how to help and in what way.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN USAID AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN MOROCCO

The majority of civil society actors we spoke with, including those who have been involved in civil society for many decades, told us that they knew very little about USAID. Compared to other funders, USAID does not seem to have acquired much visibility in Moroccan civil society. (In part the obstacle might be language. Because of its proximity to Europe and a history of French and Spanish colonialism, Moroccans are more likely to be fluent in French or Spanish than in English.) Words/expressions that were used by some of our interlocutors when describing USAID included: “closed, unknown, unclear, mysterious, not open, inaccessible, distant, driven by security concerns, politically motivated, not interested in real collaboration or cooperation,” etc. Other donors also did not seem to know much about USAID. One funder told us that he does not even know who the main contact person is in Morocco for USAID and that USAID does not participate in meetings that take place between the main international donors that are active in Morocco. When USAID was known it was generally in the context of aid provided to government bodies or through intermediary organizations like MSI and the SANAD project.

Interestingly, even though USAID is often associated with remoteness and opacity, many CS actors who knew of USAID’s tough requirements mentioned the financial transparency and rigor of USAID as something that can be beneficial to local organizations.

We were also told that USAID seems to prefer funding small start-up projects for which it can take full credit rather than ongoing projects and that it does not seem to have an interest in organizations that are already established and efficient. As one civil society actor told us, “by becoming too efficient, we lose out on opportunities. Because we already have expertise in different domains, we are not selected for such grants” (CDRT Marrakech). Other interlocutors criticized USAID for not being interested in real collaboration, which for them means deciding *a priori* what needs to be done, and in what way. As one prominent civil society actor told us: “Why not work with us from the beginning? There are competencies here, we know our country, we know what needs to be done. There should be real partnership from the beginning, not after USAID decides what should be done” (Injaz al Maghrib). This sentiment was reiterated by a government official who said to us that “USAID should treat us like real partners and not just like firemen or implementers of decisions already taken.”

Several organizations with knowledge of USAID’s branding and marking and security practices felt the agency was unaware of the possible damage to the U.S. image, especially given the position of Morocco in the Arab world. They said that insisting that everything from furniture and computers be labeled with stickers that say “brought to you by USAID and the American people” was at the least in bad taste, and insensitive. Similarly security measures such as, we were told, ensuring that no member of an association has ever been to Iran (as if a trip to Iran means supporting terrorism) or asking organizations to provide the names and ID numbers (if not copies of ID cards) of participants in events funded by USAID one week ahead of time left a few of our interlocutors very uncomfortable. They argue that this gives the impression that USAID is doing more than funding civil society.

## A DGP GRANTEE

Our visit to one of the DGP grantees in Douar Timzgida in Tidili Mesfioua located in the Alhaouz Province was illuminating. The association that received the grant is called Association Tissilte pour le Developpement. It has 140 members and is run by a small group of young local village residents who have been fortunate enough to receive an education (the literacy rate in the area does not exceed 30% and the poverty rate is 20%) and are motivated to improve their community's situation. The area only received drinking water in 2004/2005, thanks to funds raised by the organization. As one of the members said to us: "If we had waited for the state, we would have waited until 2020." The project funded by USAID was still in the environmental impact research phase when we visited; actual construction of the sanitation facilities is scheduled to begin in September 2012. The organization was given a DGP grant of \$1.5 million dollars to be spent over a period of three years. The project will provide sewerage and waste water reuse for agricultural purposes for 300 homes/2100 inhabitants in three interconnected villages (Timzguida, Tamatilde, and Touarte). The intended aim of the project is to "improve the health and living conditions of the population, and to protect water quality downstream of the villages."<sup>7</sup>

The organization heard about the USAID DGP program through a local website (*tanmia.ma*) that seeks to reinforce the capacities of local NGOs, build connections between them, and circulate relevant information such as calls for proposals and job ads. The organization put together their application after consulting for technical details with the treasurer of CDRT, one of the organizations that we visited in Marrakech which is well established and has a lot of experience raising funds from international donors. The woman who advised them is an expert on sanitation and gave them technical advice as a "personal favor" and not on behalf of the CDRT (this is an important detail because the CDRT takes a percentage of grants for overhead when it helps organizations raise funds). The members of Tissilte seem serious and committed. They have clearly learned how to communicate "effectively" through power-point presentations and brochures and have mastered the use of NGO vocabulary.

The organization seemed satisfied with their relationship with the USAID mission staff and are very grateful for the grant but also for the assistance and trainings. Their criticisms of USAID were few. As far as training and capacity development are concerned, the members complained that they are generally invited to training sessions on particular subjects rather than asked what they need. They also complained that the content of the trainings was often too dense and too much at once. As one member said, "all we can do is capture flashes of information. We can't possibly absorb everything at once." The problem of language was again mentioned. Most of the trainings are provided in French while most members of the organization are more comfortable in Arabic and/or Tachelhit (one of the Berber languages spoken in the region). This was obvious in our meeting with members of the organization, some of whom seemed very uncomfortable speaking in French. Finally, there was some frustration with the length of the process and the time that it took to obtain the funds after the grant was approved.

But this DGP project highlights a number of issues that were reflected in discussions with civil society in general. The first is the issue of whether there is any coordinated, integrated strategy

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<sup>7</sup> See Organization Brochure

on the part of donors who fund “projects.” Is this project part of an overall plan or strategy for Morocco’s rural development? Or is this just another isolated project? And if it is simply a one-off project that is essentially construction, then why the overlay of training on USAID compliance and other subjects? And why this community and not others? Can a poor and remote community like Douar Timzgida be able to handle a grant in the amount of 1.5 million dollars? This is a huge amount of money by local standards and what is being provided with it will not generate any income for the community. Of course this DGP grant raises again the question of who should be “doing the job of the state.” Finally, the question of what happens in the long term once the three-year grant period is over needs to be asked. Who will maintain the system, and with what funds?

The budget breakdown of this DGP project suggests that little effort and thought went into the sustainability issue – the creation of mechanisms in the community to manage and repair the system.

Studies	5.4%
The construction itself	64.1%
Personnel	19.3%
Trainings and seminars	2.95%
Travel	3.4%
Equipment	3.45%
Indirect	1.3%

This is why we ask why this project wasn’t simply construed as a ‘plain vanilla’ construction project. As it is, training, sensitization on gender, formation of youth groups, some of the studies, some of the personnel, the time spent on branding and marking, etc. take up at least 10% of the budget and, by one estimate from a project staff, at least half the time. Indeed, when we asked what the community has been saying about the project, we were told that they want to know why the construction hasn’t started. As the CDRT said in our talk with them the day before – “the music of projects is now playing” – there is an overlay of trainings and workshops, much of which is at the behest of USAID and in a sense is a diversion of the project away from what it is – construction. And will these trainings contribute to the sustainability of the project?

The time we spent at the Rabat USAID Mission Office was also illuminating. When we consulted with the Mission staff in the planning stages of our research, we were referred to intermediary organizations like the Peace Corps and MSI, who then suggested some names and organizations. To take just one example, we were told that there are very few organizations that work with the disabled in Morocco, when in fact there are a very large number of them. The website *tanmia.ma* lists 439 organizations that work in the area of health and disability. Our sense that the local Mission staff does not have deep knowledge of the civil society scene in Morocco was confirmed by our non-USAID Mission staff interlocutors. When the FSNs were cc-ed on emails asking for ideas and names of organizations, and even though they might have better knowledge of the local NGO scene, none of them offered much advice. Yet when we met with some of them one-on-one, they were passionate and insightful and offered some useful tips. For example, one of the FSNs referred us to a small organization that works with rural girls and women in the region of Oulmes (Illy Association), is not particularly plugged into the civil society scene, and has only worked with a foreign donor (French) once in its six years of

existence. Also, when we visited a well-respected local feminist organization (LDDF) that works with women victims of violence in a working class neighborhood of Rabat and is not particularly plugged into the international funding world, we were surprised to find out that one of the FSNs we had met with had visited the organization in an official capacity just the day before. Yet this was not an organization that was recommended to us by USAID. We wonder if the FSNs' knowledge of civil society is trickling down to the non-national mission staff.

The Mission staff was very forthcoming with information about the local DGP grantees and helped us set up our visit to the Tissilte association. We encountered some resistance however in obtaining information about the rejected DGP applicants. In addition to concerns about confidentiality, they did not want the rejected applicants to misinterpret our interest in meeting with them and to develop false hopes, which is a legitimate concern. Ironically, the two rejected DGP applicants that we met with (one in Marrakech and the other in Rabat) were nonchalant about having applied to USAID and being rejected. They seem to suggest that they submit so many applications in response to many calls for proposals that they barely have time to notice who has not selected them. They did however mention that they had no idea why their applications were not selected since they received no feedback whatsoever on their applications.

As for USAID Mission staff's experience with the DGP program, they expressed enthusiasm about the program but difficulty in implementing it. They would have liked to be better briefed by Washington on the DGP program so as to be better equipped for the selection and implementation process. Although the DGP program is supposed to solicit applications from all sectors of civil society, the mission staff decided to limit applications to water and sanitation in order to make the evaluation process easier for themselves. "It would have been very difficult to do an open call, especially with very nascent groups," we were told by one mission staff member. "It would have led to an open floodgate of applications." They advertised the call for proposals on websites such as *tanmia.ma*. They also said they regret not having organized a bidder's conference or information sessions early on in the process. They regret also not consulting more with other Missions with DGP experience to coordinate efforts and share ideas. As one Mission staff member told us "We do not do a very good job of learning from other Missions." They received 17 concept papers, selected four organizations, and received the funding for all four. The selection process did not entail field visits. Of the four selected, the Mission staff told us that one would not have been selected had a field visit been conducted. The process from the call for proposals to the first disbursement of funds took 15 months. It was a new experience for the Mission staff and involved a high learning curve in matters such as security clearance, pre-assessment, etc. None of the Mission staff have much experience in dealing with construction projects, and that too was a challenge. Unexpected issues that the Mission staff encountered in working with the DGP grantees include politics and dynamics within the organizations, which led to a change of plan for one of the organizations. Also, they found that DGP grantees needed more "hand-holding" than initially expected.

## **SOME CONCLUSIONS SPECIFIC TO USAID**

USAID seems to be seen by many as relatively unknown and inaccessible. As a result, its practices and decisions are seen as mysterious, if not suspicious. Moreover many of our interlocutors suggested to us that USAID does not have the necessary knowledge to select civil

society partners that are locally respected and have the skills, knowledge and experience to make the most out of a partnership with USAID. This may be in large part because of USAID's lack of presence and participation in civil society and a lack of continuity in staffing. The fact that some non-national USAID Mission staff members often have no knowledge of Arabic or French comes in the way of their ability to develop ties with civil society actors.

There seems to be no good reason to assume that local capacities are lacking and thus need to be imported. The challenge is how to provide capacity services that do not just contribute to the "consultant" industry.

If USAID is known for one thing by almost everyone we spoke to, it is the heaviness and opacity of its procedures. This procedural heaviness is seen as burdensome, time-consuming, rigid, and getting in the way rather than facilitating the work of local organizations. It also leads to a privileging of organizations and individuals who have acquired the capacity to communicate in USAID's technical terms but whose projects are not necessarily substantial and/or responsive to local needs and priorities.

## APPENDIX: ORGANISATIONS AND PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

### *Salé:*

- La Fondation Bouabid [Research Center and Think Tank]: Ali Bouabid
- Association Marocaine pour l'Education de la Jeunesse (AMEJ) : Hicham Benhanzaz and young volunteer

### *Casablanca:*

- Injjaz al Maghrib: M'hammed Abbad Andaloussi
- Al-Jisr Ecole-Entreprise: Fatima Zahra Kadiri

### *Rabat:*

- Institut de Formation des Agents de Développement (IFAD) : Youssef Laaraj
- L'Espace Associatif: Mustapha Bouhadou
- La Fondation Orient-Occident: Chawki Fouzia
- Transparency Maroc: Michèle Zirari Devif
- Association l'Avenir des Parents et Amis des Enfants atteints de Cancer : Fouzia Msefer Alaoui, Fatma Chraïbi Bennani Smires, and Mohammed Madi
- Association Marocaine de Solidarité et de Développement (AMSED): Abdelkader Moumane, Hamid Benchrif, Aziz Louabali and Rachida Aglabid
- Carrefour Associatif : Mohammed Mouddene, Fatine Ettouhami, and one French volunteer
- La Ligue Démocratique Des Droits des Femmes : Fatima Mekkaoui, Halima Benaoui, and Fatima
- Enda Maghreb [Declined DGP Applicant]: Hamid Chrifi
- Association Illy pour le Développement Rural: Hennou Allali Maamar
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Maroc Foundation [Donor]: Mourad Errarhib
- UNDP [Donor]: Yassir Benabdallaoui
- Agence de Développement Social, Département de Renforcement des Capacités des Acteurs (DRCA) [Government] : Monsieur Benchrif
- Ministère du Développement Social, de la Famille et de la Solidarité, Direction du Développement Social [Government] : Abdellatif Bouazza, Nadia Taki and Aziza Belamaalem
- Institut Jacques Berque pour les Etudes en Sciences Humaines et Sociales au Maroc [Research Center]: Baudouin Dupret and Jean-Noël Ferrié
- Mohammed Guessous [Retired University Professor]
- Driss Bensaid [University Professor and Freelance Consultant]

### *Marrakech:*

- Association ATFALOUNA pour la protection des enfants en situation précaire ainsi que les mamans en difficulté (veuves, divorcées ou célibataires): Hakim Serrakh
- La Fondation Lachemi Layadi: Souâd Layadi
- L'Association des Amis du Lycée Salah Eddine (ALSE) : Laila Bensliman and 10 other people
- Centre de Développement de la Région de Tensift (CDRT) [Declined DGP Applicant] : Lahcen Belbahri, Abdelkader Mokhlisse, and Ahmed Chehbouni

*Douar Timzgida, Tidili Mesfioua (Alhaouz Province):*

- Association Tissilte pour le Developpement [DGP Grantee] : Lahcen Belbahri, Abdelaziz Allaoui, Hamid, Mohamed, Mohamed, Hayat, Hakima, and Marie

*USAID Mission Staff:*

- John Groark
- Jude Aidoo
- Nadia Lamrani
- Matthew Burton
- Nadia Ben larbi
- Najia Mesfioui

*Consulted With:*

- Alae eddin Serrar (USAID Parliament Support Project)
- Madame Aoud (MSI, SANAD Project)
- Mousieur Lamqaddam (Peace Corps)
- Latefa el Bouhsini (Local professor, Activist, Consultant)
- Yasmina Sarhrouny (UNDP)