**Thematic report on the nature of poverty**

**and inequality in the Kingdom of Morocco**

**This report destined to Mr. Olivier De Schutter**

**The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights**

**November 03, 2022**

**General Context**

The African Organization for Human Rights Monitoring (Africa Watch) has prepared a thematic report on the nature of poverty and inequality in the Kingdom of Morocco, as well as their impact on the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, along with the possibilities and challenges of the current social protection system and the labor law to combat poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

Based on our work in the provinces of Western Sahara located in southern Morocco, the information provided will include explanations and approaches to the problem of poverty and its nature and inequality in the Sahara region, the extent to which social disparities exist or not, and the impact of poverty on the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including rights related to health, adequate housing, education and social protection, as well as the role of public funds in reducing poverty and bridging disparities, and the impact of climate changes in the Western Sahara on the groups affected by the effects of poverty.

Considering that the Western Sahara region is linked to the ongoing dispute over sovereignty over the territory between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario organization supported politically and militarily by the State of Algeria.

The subject of the report requires a different treatment in view of the contribution of the effects of the conflict, the contexts and campaigns organized by the Polisario organization, to disrupting the wheel of development in the Sahara region, contribute to deepening the poverty gap and pushing the situation to collapse, and attempt to stop the normal course of business in the region despite the great efforts made by the Kingdom of Morocco to reduce the differences between the regions of the south and the north in relation to achieving development indicators related to health, education, work and social protection, as well as the enjoyment of civil and political rights.

**The nature of poverty and inequality in Morocco, efforts that require concerted will**

1. Saying that poverty is a combination of income poverty, absence or weakness of human development and social exclusion[[1]](#footnote-1), is a matter of concern and motivates to work collectively and participatory on more than one level to overcome the effects of this dilemma, the complexity and intertwining of its causes and results.
2. The involvement of the Kingdom of Morocco in the fight against poverty is a sovereign commitment, in which governmental and institutional agencies[[2]](#footnote-2) and the living forces of society overlap, in order to agree on a comprehensive social pact to overcome the obstacles that lead to the creation of more areas of vulnerability among the classes of Moroccan society.
3. The Sahara region[[3]](#footnote-3) is subject to the same development indicators applied in the northern Moroccan provinces[[4]](#footnote-4), and it has been the focus of development strategies and programs since its recovery in 1975. It should be noted that indicators of sustainable development were non-existent during the Spanish colonial period for more than nine decades[[5]](#footnote-5) in the Saharan provinces.
4. On this basis, and in order to achieve a rapid integration of the Saharan regions into the course of national development, the Moroccan authorities have allocated generous support to this region, directed at combating the poverty hotspots prevalent in the Sahara, by adopting various programs in addition to sectoral policies that have been engaged in providing infrastructure in line with the requirements of national standards, and related international issues, such as the construction of modern roads to connect the Sahara region with the northern provinces[[6]](#footnote-6), the establishment of networks of potable water and liquid disinfection[[7]](#footnote-7), and the construction of hospitals[[8]](#footnote-8).
5. The Moroccan government spared no effort to support the income of the Sahrawi families and their purchasing power, by taking a decision to grant financial aid estimated at 200 USD to poor families, in the various regions of the Sahara, to support them to withstand daily expenses and face urban life requirements[[9]](#footnote-9), in addition to a large -scale distribution process for residential homes and land equipped to build[[10]](#footnote-10), on the most fragile groups of the Sahrawi population within the framework of the Rural housing program, and in support of the stability of the Saharan cities, and the contribution of the Moroccan state and its local departments to bring education and health services as well as the right to decent housing and development of the region's inhabitants.
6. Despite these efforts, the Sahrawi population still suffers from high rates of vulnerability, due to the wasted 16 years of development time in the conflict over Western Sahara with the organization of the Polisario and its sponsor Algeria, a conflict that left direct and clear effects on the standard of living and well-being of the local population, and the lack of financial allocations directed to development and investment, and their diversion to support the war effort.
7. However, the Kingdom of Morocco was able to remedy the situation after the cease-fire agreement in 1991.
8. The fight against extreme poverty and its devastating effects will not take place without following the transparent policies and measures to determine the delivery of aid and support for the Saharan residents to those who deserve it.
9. This is something that is still plagued by bureaucratic procedures and a network of mediators from representative and administrative bodies, often dependent on the values of linking responsibility to accountability, transparency and integrity that the state has been emphasizing on adherence to during the disbursement of public money.
10. Therefore, we note the need to apply standards of transparency and integrity in distributing benefits in the regions of the Sahara among the most vulnerable groups, in compliance with the principles of social justice, and as a contribution to the implementation of Morocco’s commitments in relation to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, foremost of which is the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including adequate food, adequate housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, by targeting the most vulnerable groups, and strengthening the possibilities of access to resources and opportunities that guarantee access to rights of all kinds.
11. This strategy should include targeting the most vulnerable groups, including their recovery from the effects of protracted conflict as well as the remnants of climate change.

**The impact of poverty on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to health, housing, nutrition, water, education and social protection**

1. The Western Sahara region is considered one of the regions with the highest political participation in the Moroccan elections, as it has representatives in the Moroccan Parliament in its two chambers and regional, provincial and local representative bodies, whose mission is to represent the local population in the administrations, implement economic and social programs and plans for them, plan for the development of cities in the south and complete public services in them, and to facilitate the management of administrations, in addition to managing issues related to civil status and civil transactions, as well as services related to roads, water, electricity and sanitation.
2. Although the central services of state interests in allocating annual additional budgets for the implementation of structured projects in various aspects of life in the Western Sahara region, the implementation of these projects usually falters due to the complexity of the procedures and the multiplicity of intervening, and at other times, the corruption of the electoral body.
3. The association of poverty by enjoying civil and political rights leaves a great impact during the selection of the local population for their representatives in territorial collectivities and the two rooms of Parliament, as it is not able to win the elections often except traditional elites that enrich of the economy of rent and enrichment for no reason, and the bribery of the electoral bloc and the promotion of deferred promises of the poor classes in order to seize and change their convictions regarding the choice of their representatives, despite the State’s central and regional Services to provide the appropriate conditions, security and logistical means for citizens to express their choices and political orientations freely and without any impact.
4. As for access to other civil and political rights, Moroccan law and practice did not leave the possibility of distinguishing between individuals and groups according to their class or material affiliation, and every person has the right to exercise his right of expression or belonging to an association or a political party or to move freely, in accordance with the rules of the law.
5. The Africa Watch Organization has not previously recorded any violation in relation to the enjoyment of civil and political rights in the Western Sahara region.
6. In the context of accessing economic, social and cultural rights, enjoying them came gradually, given the weakness of the general resources in the region for its desert nature, and its lack of economic structures capable of absorbing unemployment.
7. From this standpoint, the Moroccan Authorities launched several national and international initiatives to encourage investment in the region with the aim of benefiting from the dots from the revenues of these investments, strengthening their purchasing capacity and raising their monthly income to confront the causes of poverty.
8. Despite the government’s allocation of huge financial aid, in the context of supporting the poorest groups, its distribution locally to those who deserve it is still tainted by many imbalances, at the level of the selection procedure for beneficiaries, as well as the seriousness of the administrations supervising the granting and distribution of these subsidies in supervising the proper functioning of the process.
9. Based on the main role that these subsidies play in protecting this huge number of Sahrawi people from extreme poverty in its various dimensions, however, it left a sense of injustice among many people by excluding them from benefiting from this important monthly support, and created a debate about who is entitled to benefit from this aid, instead of understanding the real purpose of allocating this subsidy, which is mainly to help Sahrawi families improve their living conditions in minimum conditions, until their material and living conditions change for the better.
10. Despite the great efforts in the completion of infrastructure in the field of education and health, the poorest groups still find great trouble in taking advantage of health services to complicate administrative procedures or the high services that are not available in the public sector, and the difficulty of obtaining a Ramid card[[11]](#footnote-11), which is qualified to mediate almost free, or failure to respond to the requirements of children in the early educational levels, as well as slow to respond to other relevant services.
11. It should be noted that the Kingdom of Morocco recorded the multiplication of the poverty rate by 7 times during the invasion of the Corona virus and the implementation of harsh health stone procedures, as a third of the active population lost its sources of income due to the suspension of activities according to the latest update of the Moroccan High Commission for Planning[[12]](#footnote-12).
12. Facing all of these dimensions related to the poverty dilemma to combat its manifestations, will not take place outside the possession of a strong will to adopt public policies in order to achieve social justice and equity rules, and work to download a project to generalize social protection and start generalizing basic compulsory insurance for the disease to include all groups, as well as allocating direct social support for poor families in the Western Sahara region and the implementation of the upcoming social registry at the end of the year 2022, compensation for the loss of work and compensation for unemployment, to ensure a smooth transition to the poor population of Sahara in the threshold of extreme poverty to the possibilities of living in dignity and gaining income that enables to be satisfied with the financial aid provided by the government.
13. The Africa Watch Organization believes that eliminating poverty in the Sahara region depends mainly on the distribution of wealth fairly and fighting corruption as an integral part of efforts to reduce poverty, hunger and disease, adhere to good governance and link responsibility to accountability.

**Persons and organizations who must meet the United Nations the Special Rapporteur, as well as the authorities and cities to visit**

1. The Wali of Laayoune Sakia El Hamra
2. The Governor of Dakhla Oued Eddahab
3. Head of the Laayoune Sakia El Hamra Region
4. Head of the Dakhla Oued Eddahab Region
5. Director of the Regional Academy for Education
6. The Regional Committee for Human Rights in Laayoune
7. Africa Watch Organization
8. Defenders for Human Rights Organization
1. Definition of extreme poverty in the report of the independent expert on extreme poverty and human rights, submitted to the first session of the Human Rights Council on February 28, 2008. A/HRC/7/15 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Agency for Social Development and the National Cooperation Foundation, which are public institutions that enjoy financial independence and legal personality, and are under the tutelage of the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, and whose main tasks are to combat poverty and vulnerability in Morocco, including the provinces of Western Sahara.

In order to fill the existing shortcomings in combating the effects of poverty and fragility, the Moroccan authorities launched the National Initiative for Human Development in 2005, which is mainly directed at supporting the most vulnerable populations, through programs to combat vulnerability, by paying the necessary attention to the recipients of its services in specialized centers such as shelters for abandoned children and specialized services for persons with disabilities, and institutions interested in the retired category, in addition to the social integration program for the poorest groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Western Sahara region, is a territory that was subject to Spanish colonialism from 1884 to 1975, despite many Moroccan claims to retrieve it and put its file by the Moroccan government in the mid-sixties in the Committee on Decolonization and Special Political Issues, but before its exit from the territory, the Spanish Kingdom instilled the separatism of a Saharan group resulted in a long-running regional conflict between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario organization, which is supported militarily and diplomatically by the state of Algeria, within the framework of the regional competition for leadership in the North African region between Algeria and Morocco. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See poverty statistics and rates in Western Sahara provinces for the month of October 2022 on the database of the Oxford Initiative on Poverty and Human Development (OPHI).

<https://ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CB_MAR_2022.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Sahara region was subjected to a Spanish occupation that lasted 91 years, and it never invested except to serve its security and logistical needs to support its war effort and establish its presence in the vast desert space, which was subjected to unjust looting of the country’s bounties such as phosphate and fish wealth, in addition to strengthening the ranks of its army with locals to control the rebellion of tribes and the rejecting local population for any foreign presence on their land. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Kingdom of Morocco has adopted a new development model, which came in response to a royal decision to reconsider the development strategy in Morocco, and to make the Sahara region a top priority in this project.

The road link axis is one of the most important projects of the new development model, linking the north of the Kingdom with the desert regions, starting from the city of Tiznit. The project includes the completion of a motorway and the restructuring of National Road No. 1, with a length of 1,055 km, passing through all urban areas in the desert regions, with a financial envelope of more than 7 billion and 250 million dollars.

<http://www.onep.ma/news/2022/CDP-13-10-2022-Laayoune-DG/accueil.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The National Office for Electricity and Drinking Water has invested two billion and eight hundred million dollars in the implementation of water, liquid purification and electricity projects in various regions of the desert, since its recovery in 1975. Sources from the National Office of Electricity and Water indicate that the flow of production in the water sector did not exceed 5,000 cubic meters before 1975, while 15 plants were established in the last four decades, including seven desalination plants and others for the removal of minerals. It exceeds 160,000 cubic meters per day actually.

<http://www.onep.ma/news/2022/CDP-13-10-2022-Laayoune-DG/accueil.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Moroccan authorities have built 59 health units in the provinces of Western Sahara, since 1975, that include regional and provincial hospitals, clinics, blood transfusion centers and blood purification centers, in addition to health centers belonging to the private sector.

<http://cartesanitaire.sante.gov.ma/dashboard/pages2/agregat_2021.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. These aids were granted to families without income, because most of them are characterized by the Bedouin nature that prevailed in the Sahara region before it was retrieved by the Kingdom of Morocco, and the amount of these grants per month exceeds 15 million dollars, according to officials of the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The number of houses and land plots that have been distributed according to the testimonies of the Africa Watch Organization focal points has reached 50,000 housing units and land areas, since the return of the Sahara by the Kingdom of Morocco in 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The poorest classes benefit from the Medical Aid System (RAMED) for three years, while people in vulnerable situations are given a health card for one year. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These statistical data were mentioned in the national report of the Kingdom of Morocco, submitted to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism in the fourth cycle, as well as the Kingdom's voluntary report to implement the Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ma-index>

<https://www.hcp.ma/Rapport-National-2020-sur-la-mise-en-oeuvre-par-le-Royaume-du-Maroc-des-Objectifs-de-Developpement-Durable_a2592.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)