

Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE

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EDITORIAL

Workforce

Mohamed Ali MRABI

EFFORTS made over the last few decades have failed to correct the imbalance between rural and urban areas. This is one of the main conclusions of the latest report on the agricultural sector by the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies. The ambition to foster the emergence of a rural middle class still seems to be wishful thinking. The vulnerability of rural households to the impacts of climate change, with the succession of drought years, is not conducive to anchoring them in their homelands. Economic difficulties are compounded by other constraints, notably disputes over land ownership and the fragmentation of plots of land... forcing many young rural dwellers to try and find work in cities. The result is a countryside emptied of its human capital. Yet the agricultural sector is regaining importance worldwide, against a backdrop of calls to guarantee food sovereignty and security. Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics are

revolutionizing the sector. The aim is to achieve a new mode of production that is more efficient, more resilient, and more sustainable. In Morocco, we're still a long way from achieving this. Small and medium-sized farmers are poorly qualified. They lack supervision and generally have a low level of education. Over 78% of those employed in the agricultural sector have no qualifications.

It is precisely by tackling the thorny problem of training that the trend can be reversed. This will improve the ability of our peasants to access new technologies, in order to increase their productivity and income. The first step is to raise the awareness of small farmers themselves. They need to be convinced that letting their children spend a few extra years at school can be more profitable than when they are sent to work in the fields at an early age, due to a lack of free... and forced... labor. □

Weekly highlights

A Marshall Plan for urban transport

FACED with the many problems encountered by citizens in urban transport, the Minister of the Interior could not stand idly by. To meet the challenges facing this sector, a new strategy was needed to efficiently manage its various aspects. Abdelouafi Laftit has drawn up an initial program for the 2024-2029 period. This Marshall Plan covers more than 32 cities, with the acquisition of a total fleet of 3,500 buses. The cost of this operation is estimated at 10 billion Dirhams (USD 10 billion). These investments include fleet components, maintenance centers, bus depots and parking facilities, ticketing systems, and management support systems, said the Minister of the Interior during question time in the House of Representatives on Monday.

To implement this program, the Ministry has adopted several measures. Firstly, the need to carry out preliminary studies to prepare for the delegated management of bus trans-



«To be perfectly frank, urban transport in most Moroccan cities, with the exception of a few, is not at the desired level». said Abdelouafi Laftit, during his appearance before the House of Representatives.

port. Secondly, it will be necessary to separate the investment and management functions, as the investment costs will be covered by contributions from the Ministry of the Interior, from local authorities, as well as from inter-municipal cooperation bodies, groupings of local authorities and regions.

This will guarantee the completion of all investment components and ensure the continuity of this vitally important service. The next stage will be to draw up specifications for assistance with project supervision, to support the new model of delegated management contracts, and finally to draw up specifications for the acquisition of buses, to ensure a more appropriate choice of vehicles and their owners. This will be achieved by issuing invitations to tender as soon as possible, giving priority to the local manufacture of buses. In parallel with this operation, the Ministry of the Interior is revising all documents relating to delegated management contracts in the light of the new model. The department will also be reviewing existing contracts, which are experiencing a number of financial and management problems. The aim is to adapt them and take all necessary measures to restore budget balance and improve services. □

Mohamed CHAUI

Illegal buildings

Less than a year to comply

IN 2019, the Government had launched a regularization campaign targeting illegal constructions except that the operation did not deliver the expected results since, according to figures ob-

tained from the Ministry of Housing, only 2,898 regularization requests were filed with the relevant departments in accordance with decree no. 2.18.475 of June 12, 2019 setting the procedures and modalities for gran-

ting permits for repair, regularization, or demolition. The decree provided for a two-year regularization period, at the end of which 51% of applications were approved. The regularization process had been disrupted by the coronavirus epidemic, which led to nationwide traffic restrictions until September 30, when Covid-related restrictions were lifted. Other constraints had made it difficult to bring illegal constructions into compliance, including the exclusion of constructions that had been the subject of a statement of offence (provided for in Article 7 of Decree no. 2.18.475), so a new decree (no. 2.23.103 of May 08, 2023) relating to the granting of permits to regularize non-regulatory constructions was published in the Official Gazette no. 7194 of 11/05/2023. To date, 5,737 regularization applications have been submitted, in compliance with the conditions and rules in force in the field of urban planning and construction. Of these, 37% have been approved within a one-year period.

As a reminder, decree no. 2.23.103 introduced two main flexibility measures. The first concerns the extension of the regularization period for non-compliant constructions, since those concerned have a new 2-year period in which to apply for a regularization permit. The second new feature is the elimination of the infringement report as a procedural hurdle. This has helped to speed up the rate at which buildings are brought into compliance. In fact, the number of requests for regularization remains below the Government's targets. Many of those concerned are unaware of the possibility of bringing their buildings into compliance, or of the procedure involved. Other people have tried to regularize their situation, but to no avail.

The Ministry of Housing is currently finalizing a large-scale communication campaign, which is due to be launched at the national and local levels. □

Hassan ELARIF



Caption: Illegal constructions that cannot be regularized and for which a list of irregularities has been drawn up are to be demolished. (Photo by L'Economiste)

Gitex Africa

How to speed up Tech made in Morocco

THE biggest continental event for the digital economy and new technologies (Gitex Africa Morocco) is experiencing unprecedented success this year. The 2nd edition of Gitex opened its doors to over 1,400 exhibitors (major technology groups, inventors, experts, institutions, a hundred or so government delegations...), 350 investors, 700 start-ups, fintechs, agritechs, educ techs, health techs, telecoms operators, payment solutions developers... 130 countries are taking part in this 2nd edition, held in Marrakech from May 29 to 31. Artificial intelligence is of key importance this year, along with the cloud, the Internet of Things, cybersecurity, big data, and blockchain. The opening ceremony was packed to the rafters in the presence of the Head of Government, Aziz Akhannouch, who announced the main thrusts of the new 2030 digital strategy. «In a few weeks' time, we will unveil the Maroc Numéric 2030 strategy. It is a long-term project that has been developed in consultation between members of the Government, the public administration, and



«In a few weeks' time, we will unveil the Maroc Numéric 2030 strategy. It is a long-term project that has been developed in consultation between members of the Government, the public administration, and the private sector», announced Aziz Akhannouch, Head of Government, at the packed opening ceremony

the private sector. The challenge is to promote the development of Moroccan digital solutions», announced Aziz Akhannouch in front of more than a thousand participants. According to the Head of Government, «the success of the new strategy remains dependent

on the challenge of human resources, training and skills development among young talent, both quantitatively and qualitatively». To this end, the Chief Executive continued, a strategic agreement has been signed with a major international reference group (editor's

note: the American giant Oracle, a technology company specializing in databases and the Cloud). The aim is to triple the number of graduates in the digital sector within a 3-year period.

For Ghita Mezzour, Minister Delegate in charge of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform, «today more than ever, Africa needs technological initiatives to unleash its full potential». Mezzour mentioned the success of Morocco's outsourcing business, which has risen 12 places in the global rankings (to 28th position)». The Kingdom ranks 2nd for outsourcing in Africa,», said the Minister. This activity generated sales of 17.2 billion Dirhams (USD 1.71 billion), versus 14 billion Dirhams (USD 1.4 billion) two years ago, i.e. strong growth of around 20%. Another reason for satisfaction is fund-raising. Within one year, Morocco has moved up from 16th to 5th place in Africa, a sharp acceleration of around 250%. This performance is attributable to a number of financing mechanisms that have been put in place. □

Amin RBOUB

Morocco eyeing the e-fuels market

MOROCCO is keenly aware of the opportunities offered by the e-fuels sector. It has the assets to meet this challenge, such as renewable energies and green hydrogen, which are used in the production of e-fuels. Exchanging experiences with other countries on the advances made in this sector will certainly be of great use to Moroccan decision-makers and operators. This was the aim of the international conference on E-Fuels held by the Green H2 Cluster in Salé on Friday May 24, 2024. More than 250 green hydrogen players took part.

The participants at the meeting examined the various aspects of E-Fuels: the market, technological innovations, applications in the chemical, aeronautical, marine and automotive industries, as well as sustainable production policies.

The opening session of this event was marked by a speech by Leila Benali, Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development, who called for «the establishment of an integrated and agile ecosystem to promote the development of e-fuels in Morocco». The Minister stressed the importance of creating a favorable environment, including «R&D, innovation, infrastructure and the necessary human capital».

The issue of costs was raised by Ryad Mezzour, Minister of Industry and Trade, who considered it decisive for the viability of E-fuels.

In terms of bilateral cooperation in the field of green energy, the Salé meeting was an opportunity to present the experience built up between Morocco and the Netherlands. This experience was marked by «the signing, in Rabat in 2023, of a memorandum of understanding on cooperation between the two countries



Leila Benali, Minister of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development, recommends setting up an integrated ecosystem to promote the development of e-fuels in Morocco.

in the field of renewable energies», recalled Jeroen Roodenburg, Dutch ambassador to Morocco. To move

forward, the two parties signed an action plan dedicated to renewable energies and green hydrogen for the 2024-2025 period. The signing took place last week at the World Hydrogen Summit in Rotterdam.

«Our cooperation aims to support the development of a national industry to meet the needs of the domestic market, but also to develop green corridors between Morocco and the northern part of the EU market», said the Dutch ambassador to Morocco. In this respect, Tarik Hamane, Deputy CEO of the Moroccan Agency for Sustainable Energy, MASEN, highlighted «the Kingdom's considerable renewable energy potential, and its world-class infrastructure of ports, pipelines, and transmission lines, which will facilitate the transport of hydrogen to European markets and beyond». □

Noureddine EL AISSI

Weekly highlights

Fez Festival of World Sacred Music

Highlights of the first weekend of the 27th edition

TWENTY-seven editions and not a single wrinkle for the Fez Festival of World Sacred Music (FFMSM). The spiritual capital's flagship event, which has contributed over the years to the dialogue between cultures and religions, is still going strong. According to Abderrafie Zouiten, President of the Esprit de Fès Foundation, which organizes the event. He is well aware of the importance of this event for the city that hosts it, the enthusiasm it generates, its economic spin-offs and its international influence.

It is no coincidence that every year, the FFMSM is honored by the presence of HRH Princess Lalla Hasnaa. And so it was last Friday, May 24, at the kick-off of the 27th edition. Dressed in traditional garb, Lalla Hasnaa presided over the opening of the 2024 edition. As usual, the national and international top brass turned out for the «Zyriab or the Fifth String» show.

Among those present were Mohamed Mehdi Bensaïd, Fatim-Zahra Ammor, and Zineb El Adaoui, respectively the Minister of Youth and Culture, the Minister of Tourism, Handicrafts, and the Social Economy, and the President of the Court of Auditors. Mrs Zineb El Adaoui said she was «captivated by the magic of Fez and its festival», as she arrived at the Bab El Makina square (the main site for sacred music). Mehdi Bensaïd echoed Mrs El Adaoui's feelings, saying that «all cultural activities in the Kingdom have resumed», much to the delight of festival-goers. Tourism professionals were also happy, with «exceptional occupancy rates and double-digit growth». Fatim-Zahra Ammor declared to be «delighted with the momentum created by the festivals». The one in Fez is particularly popular, thanks to the historical legacy of the Idrissid city, as well as the magic of the places that host it (Bab El Makina and Jnane Sbil).

«The Minister has promised to support our destination», noted Moulay Ahmed Sentissi, President of the Fez - Meknès Regional Tourism Center (CRT). In the meantime, the diplomatic ballet witnessed on the opening night was reassuring for the image of Fez and its future. Indeed, several ambassadors accepted the invitation of the Esprit de Fès Foundation. Among them



The Sacred Music Festival kicked off in Fez on Friday May 24. HRH Princess Lalla Hasnaa graced the opening of this 2024 edition with her presence, outlining the theme of «The quest for the spirit of Al Andalus» (Photo by MAP)

were Guillaume Scheurer, Ambassador of Switzerland, Armando Barucco, Ambassador of Italy, Borja Montesino, Minister-Counsellor, Chargé d'Affaires at the Spanish Embassy in Morocco, and Seynabou Dial, Ambassador of Senegal. The inaugural evening, sponsored by Bank of Africa, was also attended by Brahim Benjelloun-Touimi,

Houria Benjelloun, Nouzha Alaoui, El Hadi Chaibainou, Driss Benhima, Nawal El Moutawakel, Najib Zerouali, and Hammou Ouhelli, among others. They were all won over by the show-creation featuring over 80 artists from 18 countries, including Spain, France, Egypt, India, and Morocco. □

Y.S.A.



Large turnout for the inaugural show celebrating «Zyriab or the 5th String». Actor Rabie Kati played the role of Zyriab, the traveler, storyteller, and wise man (Photo by YSA)



The Bab El Makina square lends a great deal of charm and magic to the Fez Festival of Sacred Music. Distinguished personalities come here to enjoy original shows. The inaugural show is one of them (Photo by YSA)

A prize for young talent

THE festival's initiators are keen to encourage budding young artists. To this end, they have created the «Young Talent Award - Esprit de Fès» for the winners of the Fes Conservatory of Music. Organized in partnership with the «Esprit de Fès» Foundation, this prize was awarded by Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Hasnaa at the end of the inaugural evening, in the violin and Qanoun category, to Khadija Amiri, Omar Benhayoun Sadafi, Yassir Tajmouati, and Meryem Chekrada. «This is a strong signal of encouragement for young musicians, and testifies to our determination to make Dar Tazi, the Foundation's headquarters, a place of exchange and learning», emphasized the president of the festival. □

Sami Yussuf, victim of his own success!

AFTER a rhythmic and well-prepared first evening, Bab El Makina welcomed the public. Over 5,000 people are expected to attend Sami Yussuf's 3rd performance at the Fez Sacred Music Festival. The star of this year's program ended up attracting more people than expected. Yussuf was a victim of his own success, with many festival-goers standing to watch the show. Others strongly objected to the disorganization. On stage, «the greatest musical star of the Muslim world» was accompanied by Nabyla Maan and Ismail Boujia, as well as an orchestra made up of musicians of Moroccan, Turkish and Iranian origin. Considered one of the most influential musicians of our time in the World Music category, Sami Yussuf said he was honored by his participation in Moroccan festivals, and particularly the one in Fez. «It is a great honor for me to take part in this festival accompanied by Moroccan artists and Mouchidines», he told L'Economiste. □