

MOROCCO GATEWAY TO SAHEL AFRICA

CONNECTING THE WORLD

Suresh Kumar

Introduction

The Kingdom of Morocco connects Sahel Africa having natural semi-arid, pastoral nomad character of different tribes, an abundance of minerals, and disordered Geopolitical borders remain significant sources of underdevelopment. Sahel represents Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal highlights under Agenda 2030 for sustainable development of UNO support plan and African Union (AU) Agenda 2063. Map-1 represents Sahel Africa connecting Morocco through Saharan region and act as a Gateway to the world community. Gateway as a misnomer idea need to locate in the pages of history of Toucouleur Empire and Wassoulou Empire connected the whole West Africa with the Atlantic Ocean. Zerbo emphasized the stories of African heroes fought against the European colonizers and particularly French one in the Atlantic Ocean (Zerbo, 2024) that ultimately led to redrawn of internal boundaries in Africa known as Scramble of Africa. This scramble ultimately responsible for the creation of landlocked countries in general and Sahel Africa in particular. Geopolitical importance of this Gateway today refers to the connectivity of more than hundred countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean including Europe, USA, South America and Africa continent. The 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) of AU harmonizes the maritime rules and avoid double governance systems including all kinds of tariffs and taxation for the member countries. Gateway idea of access to navigation for the landlocked countries will support this AIMS and enhance blue economy and the infrastructure of road, railway and port. The whole Sahel Africa deserves peace and prosperity primarily, end to all sorts of terrorism, coup d'état and sustainable livelihood of people. 'Sahara province's territory, a northern part of Morocco, is stretched over a vast area of 102,703 sq miles (266,000 sq km) touches Sahel Africa. It is

bordered by the Atlantic Ocean along the west, Algeria in the northeast and Mauritania along the east and south. The 2007s estimate of population is 382, 617 in this region. El Aaiun, having a population of 198,200, is the largest city in this region' (Suresh Kumar, 2020: 239-240). The northern part of Moroccan Sahara divides into four districts such as Laayoune, Essemara, Boujdour, and Oued Essemara, which consists the famous towns of Laayoune (formerly El Aaiún), Dakhla (formerly Villa Cisneros), Boujdour, and Essemara become link source of Gateway to Sahel Africa.

The major part of Sahel Africa (as shown in Map-1) such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger refer to landlocked countries and need an oceanic connectivity for the trade and commerce in their region. The development of international ports in Moroccan Sahara facilitates all the Sahel African countries, encourage and enhance their trade and commerce activities in the world. The direct connectivity of Sahel Africa, Morocco and Europe surely will encourage the development activities and reinforce the growth. The result of stable and market friendly economic policies of Morocco has been keenly understood by the international market and having its encouraging position in the World Bank's Doing Business ranking received widely appreciation. The economic reforms in the last decade including the modifications in the legal and regulatory framework for business, simple administrative procedure and development of services through electronic platforms and the single window has developed affirmative business environment for the international investment become the path in developing the Gateway to Sahel Africa. The investor friendly tax system, business prone land lease and construction policies, good infrastructure for industries, tele-communication & ICT facility attracts the Sahel Africa along with the worldwide investors in Morocco. Morocco New Development Model recognizes human face, strong social content and responsible economic policies and has recognized the Millennium Development Goals and Copenhagen Agreement of environment and ecological balance under Climate Change Action Program

Map-1 Sahel Africa & Morocco

Source: <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/sahel-region-africa-political-map-ecoclimatic-2285957945>: accessed on 09.11.2024

Morocco respects the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) and Copenhagen Summit 2009 and adopted sustainable development model. Moroccan government has reiterated water as a major concern and an essential ingredient in the productive sector development process. Water resource management is the real time demand that will handle the drought situations, availability of drinking water, water to agriculture & livestock and utilization in industrial segments in Sahara region. The government emphasized that ‘National Priority Program for Water 2020-2027 has built 50 large and medium-sized dams and more than 20 are under construction, development of hydraulic interconnections and construction of seawater desalination plants will act as an alternative in strengthening water resource management’ (MAP, October 2022). The chronic water resource situation ensures for rational use of water responsibly, and ensure water storage sustainably. The reuse of wastewater, rational use of groundwater by preserving the water table and a regular check on illegal pumping and erratic drilling of wells with the support of people will work for sustainable water preservation. This sustainable approach

will support the domestic investment projects of real estate and green energy. National Banking and financial sector should support the green SME, MSME and other projects and urge the Moroccan community abroad for the investment. 'The green project in industrial and agricultural sector will raise 550 billion dirhams for investment and create 500,000 jobs from 2022 to 2026' (MAP, October 2022). The collective responsibility of the Parliament and the people will work for the development of Sahara as a Gateway to Sahel Africa and will utilize save water comprehensively.

The Post pandemic period glimpses economic investment openings in chemical industries, pharmaceutical, plastic recycling sector, fiber optic components manufacturing, automotive industry and excellent education hub and attracts as a favourite destiny for the global investors in Morocco.

It has announced New Competitive Investment Charter (NCIC) in the post Covid environment of 2022. This charter has opened up two-third of total investment for the Private Sector by 2035 and will work for the employment generation and develop equitable opportunities for investment and development of all the provinces. NCIC declares that the common investment premium in the priority's areas set by the government, announcement of additional territorial bonus in terms of incentives in encouraging investment in the least favoured provinces, and additional sectoral bonus incentives to boost different growth sectors. The NCIC declares that 'the MSME & SME support mechanism has opened up the strategic sector of Defence and Pharmaceuticals for the development of Moroccans investment abroad and the government enthusiastically will implement it. The government monitors the renovation of the legal and incentives schemes. The working session of government has invited the Private Sector as a privileged investor at the regional and international level to engage with this investment charter' (MAP, February 2022: emphasis mine).

This business friendly environment of Morocco has strengthened its position in the regional market such as third position in the MENA region, third position in Africa continent and first position in the

Maghreb. This reflection of Moroccan economy has continuously proceed with the international market and will attract European, American, Asian and other world investment in the country. This background motivates the Sahel African countries in initiating the building of their sea routes through the Sahara Gateway and boost their economic sector primarily along with the socio-cultural ties through people-to-people interactions on regular basis. The sixth Triennial World Summit of the Organization of United Cities and Local Governance (UCLG-World) has been successfully conducted its election and ‘Mr. Al Hoceima Mohamed Boudra is elected as a President by unanimous consensus. Morocco has pointed out as a major victory on the soil of South Africa with unanimous voice of the world community. It is important to note that the UCLG-world represents the 24000 cities and local authorities. The unanimous choice of Moroccan President appreciates the multi-sector ongoing development projects. The world community has commended the Moroccan constitutional developmental approach of decentralized market economy, spatial justice, social equity and the promotion of solidarity in the society. The continuing achievement of the sustainable development justifies the victory of the Moroccan President in front of more than 3000 delegates belonging to the world community’ (MAP, November 2019: emphasis mine).

Today, the holistic approach of Morocco ensures political, economic, social, cultural and diplomatic development in the region. Morocco government budget ‘provides employment opportunity for thousands of Saharawi’s youths, investment in infrastructure such as Tiznit-Dakhla highway, Dakhla-Atlantic port, valorization and processing of fish products, development of more than six thousand hectares of land into agriculture field in Dakhla and Boujdour region and development of Phosphate, water & Sanitation projects. The initiative of private sector in the establishment of education & training, health, skill development for generating self-employment, promotion of Hassani language, food, music, dance & cultural field strengthens cohesive national identity. The opportunities in blue economy and renewable energy in Southern provinces has attracted big funding from private sector. Going further in strengthening sustainable green environment for future generations,

Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline (NMGP) focuses on the ECOWAS that nourishes Morocco-Africa & Sahel Africa goodwill in practice and will integrate more than 440 million people. It will nourish peace, security, development, stability and monetary union' (Field Visit to Sahara, 2018).

Moreover, Morocco has resumed its membership of African Union and determined to fulfill the AU objective of North & South Continental Unity. In this direction, the country has taken personal interest and 'Republic of Zambia and Kingdom of Eswatini has opened their Consulates General in Laayoune on 27 October 2020' (MAP, October 2020: emphasis mine) in strengthening African connectivity. No doubt, the Southern province will share its social, cultural and resource richness with the world community and develop Gateway connectivity to Sahel Africa. Different countries of Africa opens their Consulates General in the southern provinces reflects the unequivocal support for the Sahara Gateway on a continental scale.

Gateway Idea and European Support

Morocco recently addressed to the sixth European Union-African Union Summit marked African belongingness recognizing European solidarity. Human Resource Development of Morocco and its visible partnership with EU has noticed in the field of education, culture, vocational training, mobility and migrations and need to capitalize to achieve its full potential through joint action in the post pandemic environment. All Moroccan educational institution has lost 1.8 trillion working hours with the closure of schools, university and other professional institutions during the pandemic period and as a result, African-European people's cultural togetherness suffered equally. EU-AU Summit of eighty-one countries should 'reinvigorate this cultural togetherness, which will resolve the issues of mobility, migrants and essential workers on foreign soil and his/her country of origin. It will further orient towards guaranteeing education and training respectively, promoting employment generation, resolving migration and mobility challenges and promoting culture between EU-AU member countries' (MAP, February 2022: emphasis mine). This bonding of EU-AU will

promote peace, stability, shared prosperity and will commit to nourish African-European citizens future. The Gateway connectivity to Sahel Africa will be an eye opening for the EU countries and enhance mutual economic ties in the future.

Along with it, the illegal immigration from Africa has become a major challenge in Europe and particularly in Spain. Being a closest to Morocco, Spain has shared its concern about the illegal immigrants in the country. Spain's domestic concern about the employment, health and social security being the primary one and fight against international terrorism in the wider concern persuades an affirmative action plan in coordination to Morocco. Morocco being a strategic partner of Spain shares its genuine concern about the issue of illegal immigration and supports the long-term strategies. 'H M Mohammed VI and HE Mr. Pedro Sanchez, President of Spain telephonic conversation has entered into new stage based on mutual respect, reciprocal trust, permanent consultation and frank and loyal cooperation' (MAP, 1 April 2022: emphasis mine).

Spanish government along with USA, Germany, Arab League and the Gulf States recognizes Morocco absolute sovereignty over its Sahara and Autonomy Plan in the Southern Provinces. Spain appreciates the good gestures to establish strong, constructive and balanced relations with neighbouring countries. Both appreciated the building of ambitious road through Gateway to Sahel Africa such as:

1. Spain recognizes the UNO framework of mutually accepted solution of the Sahara.
2. People to people coordination with passenger shipping, area of migration and movements of goods shall be restored at land and sea with immediate effect,
3. Management of Airspace and Atlantic seaboard maritime space demarcation galvanize economic perspective,
4. Spanish-Moroccan Group on Migration in coordination with the respective presidencies worked upon a comprehensive and balanced framework,

5. Economic, Commercial, Energy, Industrial and Cultural areas of cooperation along with facilitation of economic exchanges are promoted, and
6. Education, Vocational training and Higher education, Cultural and Sports cooperation is strengthened.

Morocco-UK Association Agreement directed that there is no change in the ongoing bilateral agreement between two kingdoms. It further states that this Association ensures the benefit of both the populations and ensures the development of all the regions of the Morocco right from north to south without exception boosts the idea of Gateway to Sahel Africa. 'There is no change in the post Brexit trade agreement and the £ 2.7 billion of trade will be continued. The UK court has rejected the Polisario, a militant group status and directed to continue the trade exchange between Morocco and UK after December 31, 2020. The strategic partnership guarantees both the countries companies undertaking economic and trade cooperation in each other kingdoms' (MAP, 14 December 2022: emphasis mine).

Netherland and Morocco has announced its firm support to the Moroccan Autonomy Plan 2007 in collaboration of UNO-led political process for sustainable development including Sahel Africa. Netherland appreciated the international momentum of support from USA, Germany, Spain and Philippines about Morocco Autonomy Plan on the one hand and condemned fabricated concocted artificial dispute over the Moroccan Sahara. Netherlands firm support to Moroccan Sahara in accordance with the resolutions of the UNO Security Council will nourish Gateway to Sahel Africa.

Similarly, Denmark recognizes the Autonomy Plan of 2007 and Morocco's sovereignty on Sahara reaffirms Morocco vision of credible development in the region. Both has fruitfully discussed on the sidelines of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly 2024. 'Denmark recognizes the opinion of Europe along with the global world, has familiar the international recognition of its sovereignty over its Southern Provinces, and appreciated the development work of Moroccan Sahara. The appreciation of USA, Spain and more than thirty

countries Consulate Generals commend this process, works in the Southern Provinces, and recognizes the social, economic and political development in this region. The just and legitimate position of Moroccan Sahara has been widely reciprocated by global community and support the infrastructure development in strengthening people-to-people contact. Similarly, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Holland, Portugal, Serbia, Hungary, Cyprus and Romania welcome constructive posture and maintain same consistency over proposal of autonomy that strengthen their bilateral partnership. Along with it, Jordan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and others in Arab, Djibouti, Egypt and Comoros in Africa, five regional groups of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Gulf Cooperation Council countries affirmed their support for the Moroccan Sahara and opened their consulate in Laayoune and Dakhla. Defending Moroccan Sahara is the watershed occasion remembering Revolution of the King and the people is the major accomplishment' (MAP, September 2024: emphasis mine). The opening of consulate offices of different countries apprises the idea of Gateway to Sahel Africa on the one hand and boost the economic path of Sahel countries on the other hand.

Gateway Idea and USA Support

USA recognizes the full sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara appreciated and declared it as a historic decision of country. USA signed the copy of map declaring it a tangible representation of Morocco sovereignty over its Sahara and its decision of recognizing complete map of Morocco is a symbol of deep friendship between both the countries. 'H M King Mohammed VI and American President Donald Trump recognize their bold leadership and precious support for the deep friendship is a sign of peace & prosperity in the region. The opening of USA consulate in Dakhla is the sign of development for the southern provinces' (Federal Register, 2020: emphasis mine), which approves the Gateway scheme for the Sahel Africa.

Today, there is no dispute in saying that being the de jure sovereign, Morocco has announced the number of development projects in the Sahara that is unbearable for the Algeria or so called Polisario being a

de facto claimant of the region. US under the Free Trade Agreement has invested in the Dakhla region facilitating the local economic stakeholders, promoting investments and development in the region. Prof. Kontorovich observed that ‘It also underlined that the US policy on the Moroccan Sahara remains consistent with international law. A large and increasing number of Arab and African countries have recently opened Consulates in the Sahara as a sign of full recognition of the entire de jure sovereignty of Morocco over this region’ (Prof. Eugene Knotorovich, 2020). Further, Algeria needs to convince now on the line that there is no cold war and resultantly no more peanuts are distributed, the country should come forward in reaching a UN supported political solution. It will help Algeria in regaining its image in the region and even in the Arab fraternal world. The sufferers in the Tindouf camp should allow their will under ‘Home Return’. It will enable regional integration and cooperation in the Maghreb. These efforts will resolve the regional crises in Tindouf Camp supplemented through Libya and the Sahel region. The tripartite economic cooperation of Morocco, USA and Africa strengthens the investment in the Sahara region and it acts as a Gateway to the Sahel Africa. Prof.Eugene Kontorovich said that ‘the United States of America continues to recognize at this very moment the sovereignty of Morocco over the Sahara. American investments towards the Sahara region support the social and economic development of the local population. US would benefit from strengthening and promoting security and military cooperation with the Kingdom and recognizes Morocco's strategic role in this part of the continent’ (Prof. Eugene Knotorovich, 2020). Further, Elisabeth Myers noted, “the American Proclamation on the Sahara constitutes consistent American policy and recognize the autonomy plan as a resolution of this conflict. Morocco represents a strategic ally for the United States and the current American administration supports diplomatic efforts on this issue” (Elisabeth Myers, 2024). It encourages the holistic development in the Sahara territory and opening of USA consulate in the Dakhla region rectified the promotion of economic and business opportunities for the region.

Gateway Idea and Consulate Generals Support

The world community recognizes and appreciates the development work of Sahara region. More than thirty countries has opened their Consulate Generals and has recognized the social, economic and political development in this region. The just and legitimate position of Moroccan Sahara has been widely reciprocated by global community and support the infrastructure development in strengthening people-to-people contact. Even the USA has maintained the statuesque as far as Moroccan Sahara recognition is concerned and supported all social and economic activities of Moroccan government. Similarly, 'Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Holland, Portugal, Serbia, Hungary, Cyprus and Romania welcome constructive posture and maintain same consistency over proposal of autonomy that strengthen their bilateral partnership. Along with it, Jordan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and others in Arab, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Haiti and Liberia. Different five regional groups of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Gulf Cooperation Council countries affirmed their support for the Moroccan Sahara and opened their consulate in Laayoune and Dakhla. Moroccan Diaspora equally defends the territorial integrity of the Moroccan Sahara is appreciated and called for investment in this region and will work for the Gateway to Sahel Africa' (Different Issues of MAP, 2024: emphasis mine). Similarly, Laayoune region has also developed as the hub of diplomatic representations in the capital of Moroccan Sahara.

The opening of Consulate offices strengthens the legitimate positions of the Moroccan Sahara in East Africa, African Union and United Nations Organization, which inspires the global community to come forward for cohesive development in the region. It further supported the idea of African Union in real sense, which will connect whole Africa from North to South and East to West via road, railway, navigation and air route.

Challenges & Conclusion

International experts regularly commented on the Polisario and its connection with the international terrorist groups has marked as a big

challenge in the Sahel region. One has spoken ‘vehemently about Polisario and Al-Qaeda connections evidently during his interview to Jeune Afrique magazine yesterday. The indoctrination camps by the Imams are active in Tindouf camps become a real threat to the Sahel region. Polisario already engaged with the AQIM or the Islamic State, terrorist outfit in greater Sahara has received the blanket protection of Algeria and has become a broader security challenges in the Sahel region’ (Hassan Toumi, March 2021). As the security surveillance is difficult, Morocco faces political, social and economic unrest in its region due to unchallenged Polisario alliance terroristic activities. Al-Qaeda and Daesh terrorist organizations found Sahel region as a fertile ground and received support from Boko Haram and other.

The continuing threat of ISIS/Daesh in Africa has invoked separatist tendencies. Morocco government has determined in fighting against international terrorism including Daesh militia. The non-state actors support to Polisario in North, Boko Haram in West and Al Qaeda splinter in the East have reinforced destabilization and violence in the region, which proliferated in serving their individual interests in the region. Africa Focus Group has bolstered counterterrorism capabilities and fostered synergies in collaboration with regional players. Morocco government focuses civilian collaboration in countering terrorism and destabilizing terror group’s impact among civilians. Non-State actors, separatist groups and their intermingling with the ISIS and Daesh groups has been seen creating insecurity in the region, political instability and economic burden, which only checked through concrete measures.

Morocco government and US Secretary of State ‘has appreciated this ministerial meeting that ensures fight against Daesh/ISIS international terrorism in Africa. The Joint Communique signed by seventy nine countries has been issued at the end of the meeting condemned the nexus between separatist (like Polisario) and terrorist collusion in polarizing vulnerabilities to destabilize the region on the one hand and supporting Daesh/ISIS in flaring the violence in the region on the other hand’ (MAP, 8 April 2022). To break this epicenter of terrorist organizations, USA has offered five million dollars on the arrest or

killing of a terrorist belonging to Laayoune city and responsible for the killings from 2016 to 2020 in Sahara. Mr. Cherkaoui Habboub of BCIJ has recalled that about 1654 Moroccans has joined these terrorist organizations but 270 Moroccans returned to Morocco to justice (Hassan Toumi, March 2021: emphasis mine). The government acknowledged counter-terrorism strategy and 'has adopted a global, integrated and multi-dimensional approach in neutralizing increasing Polisario, Al Qaeda, AQIM and Boko Haram terrorist movement in Sahel region and bringing back the Moroccans from the clutches of terrorist organizations.

Along with it, Morocco provides counter-terrorism training to the officials of different countries such as Mauritania, Gabon, Burkina-Faso, Guinea-Conakry, Madagascar and Tanzania and strengthening peace and security in the region on the one hand and strengthening the movement of Terrorism Free World on the other hand' (MAP, March 2021: emphasis mine). Countering international terrorism through economic and social development, Sahel Africa earmarked special attention under 2030 Agenda for sustainable development of UN support plan and AU Agenda 2063. ICG observes, "The AU in one of its meeting (held on 1 July 2018) explained that the organization has full faith in the functioning of the United Nations dealing the Moroccan Sahara issue. AU does not convince to draw a parallel process in the issue of the Moroccan Sahara and will strengthen the efforts of the UN in the management of the issue of the Moroccan Sahara. The AU report further explained and justified their support to the UN in resolving it will attain more possibilities of resolving it and the creation of parallel proceeding will lead to chaos and confusion only. AU supports the resolutions of the UN Security Council dealing with the Moroccan Sahara and it is the only mechanism to support the UN and respect the mandate of the UN" (International Crisis Group, 2024: emphasis mine). Mr. Cyril Ramphosa, President of the African Union (AU) has "disowned the Polisario separatist and did not recognize their action in disturbing the buffer zone of El Guerguerat and reminded them the decision of 693 of July 2018 AU Summit. This decision of 693 refers to the regional conflict has regional solution and has exception to the UNO and explained the example of Troika mechanism. Being a Head

of State of South Africa, Mr. Cyril Ramphosa has appreciated Morocco's great restraint despite the Polisario underhanded maneuvers against the territorial integrity of the Kingdom. Africa is capable of building its future and the valuable contribution of Morocco in this direction is well recognized" (MAP, 7 December 2020: emphasis mine). The world community has recognised international terrorism as a big challenge in this region and appreciated the affirmative action of social and economic development through Gateway in Sahel Africa. This is the only possible solution in fighting against the international terror and overall development will genuinely change the mindset of the local population of this region.

Morocco government has always pleaded for a humanist, global, pragmatic and responsible migration policy that allowed the regularization of tens of thousands of Sub-Saharan people. This policy has strengthened South-South cooperation, provided education to 'more than 12,000 students, and provided working visa to youth from African continent. In addition to this policy, a National Integration Plan allowed Sub-Saharan community full access to social, educational, medical and economic services. Any migrant wish to return to country of origin has provided by journey ticket by the Ministry of Interior and it has benefitted more than 8100 African nationals. The Covid 19 pandemic had reserved to-and-fro movement from Bario-Chino post to Melilla only for local residents. As a result, the illegal trafficker's network misguided the innocent people and unfortunate tragedy of Nador in which 23 migrants killed and 76 injured. Similarly, Ukraine war crisis and looming food crisis in the Africa continent has exacerbated the migration challenges and this illegal network took it as an opportunity led to massive influx of attackers into these cramped corridors caused a great jostling. Morocco government has condemned this tragedy and wages a strong action against all illegal trafficker network and dismantled them. The Security forces injured in this action plan but all irregular attempts have aborted' (MAP, June 2022: emphasis mine). One further noted that countries of the North must focus on a balanced approach, which must not be security-based, but rather based on

structural solutions for the sustainable development of the countries of origin and on the promotion of legal mobility between the two shores.

Morocco worries about the Polisario group insensitive kidnapping, killings and recruitment of Tindouf camp based children for insurgency, which will destabilize the North and Sahel Africa. 'Morocco in collaboration with MINUSCA, MONUSCO AND UNMISS plays its major role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the region since 1960s and happy to host the Dakhla International Research Centre in strengthening peace, security and stability. This Center also seeks to provide precise, qualitative and quantitative data in order to carry out an action based on academic research and equip the UNO' (MAP, 1 April 2022). Article XI of the Constitution supports the idea "of a global village and enshrines the advanced regionalization to develop all the regions of Morocco and establish peace and security. This peace and security will attract global investors to contribute to the development of infrastructure, telecommunication, transportation, power generation, mining, housing, education, health, and other projects in strengthening the Gateway from Sahara to Sahel Africa" (Suresh Kumar, 2024). Morocco constitution further attracts the international partnership for economic development. "The idea of self-management (Section 35 of the Moroccan constitution) by the Regional governments is a step to attract global investors and sign the agreements for different development projects. This regionalization will support all the regions of Sahara. This approach will connect Sahara and other regions of Morocco with the global village and move towards international integration through Gateway. The autonomous regionalization would guarantee the best future for the Sahara, connecting it as a part of the global village and strengthening Maghreb's idea of peace, unity, integration, and sustainable development" (Suresh Kumar, 2013: emphasis mine).

Overall, "in accordance with the principles and democratic procedures, population of the Sahara Autonomous Region Act through legislative, executive, and judicial authorities within the region and will have broad skills, particularly in the economic, social, cultural, and environmental. They will have, for this purpose, financial resources appropriate and

adequate for the development of the region. These resources come from local taxes, contributions, and other territorial revenues from the exploitation of natural resources and heritage of the region as well as grants from the state and fund inter-regional solidarity. The population of the Sahara autonomous region represents in the national parliament and other national institutions and participates in all national elections” (Suresh Kumar, 2024).

Summing up, “Sahara province has become one of the favourite destinations for investors with the creation of a number of economic investment opportunities in all sectors. With sixteen international airports, two shoreline Ports, and thirty-eight ports, of which thirteen are dedicated to foreign trade, the development of urban infrastructure in terms of Highways, high-speed trains, and 4G network connectivity has been proliferating. The Industrial Acceleration Plan (IAP) 2014-2020 of Morocco has drawn up a road map to create 500,000 jobs in the industry, of which half of them would be through foreign investment (IAP, 2018). The IAP is the cornerstone of the Industrial Cluster Strategy, and developing clusters is a key to modernize and integrate each industry under this plan. The government has adopted supportive measures and announced the industrial fund of 20 billion MAD, allotted 1000 hectares of land exclusively for industrial development, having dedicated financial products, coordinated training programs, and developing import substitution. The IAP strategy is to raise 23% of the GDP share in the industry for value addition” (Suresh Kumar, 2019: 18). Morocco government renaissances the IAP in the post pandemic period as per the requirement of the different cities in the Sahara. ‘The IAP’s cross-functional aims are to rebalance the trade accounts by prompting exports and substituting local sourcing for imports, including the informal economy, and work for inclusive development. Morocco has made tremendous strides in industrialization of different sectors. It is today focusing on the building of education hubs through global best universities. Besides, the IAP focuses on the agriculture sector under Green Morocco Plan, tourism under 2020, mining sector, liquefied natural gas, IT plan under 2025, renewable energy plan, and Logistics Plan under 2030’ (The Green Morocco Plan, 2020). Morocco

intends to consolidate relations of cooperation and solidarity with the Sahel and Sub-Saharan countries, does not drown the Sahel in the mass of Africa and refers to African sister countries (His Majesty, 6 November 2023). Today, Morocco adopts an affirmative action approach in stabilizing trade and commerce activities, which will open the Gateway to Sahel Africa is another step in strengthening global village economy. It will further embolden the employment opportunities among Sahel youth, which further attracts the digital industry, renewable energy, health, tourism, and the automotive industry in the long terms. It will dissuade the military coup d'état in Sahel Africa (such as Chad, Mali & Niger) and promote the constitutional people elected democratic government, which will pave the way in implementing the Agenda 2063.

References

- Different Issues of MAP (19 December 2020 to 15 November 2024), 2024. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>: accessed on 21.11.2024.
- Elisabeth Myers, 2024. <https://pimdnow.org/teams/elisabeth-r-myers-jd/>: accessed on 12.11.2024. Federal Register / Vol. 85, No. 241 / Tuesday, December 15, 2020 / Presidential Documents, USA.
- Field Visit to Sahara, 2018. Prof. Suresh Kumar has been visiting since 2012 in Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh and Tantan, southwestern part of Morocco. He has extensively visited Sahara province and met different tribal groups of Sahara in the year 2018.
- Hassan Toumi, 16 March 2021. the Africa report. <https://www.theafricareport.com/71894/we-regret-there-is-no-cooperation-with-algeria-in-the-fight-against-terrorism-says-new-head-of-bcij/> : accessed on 12.11.2024.
- His Majesty, 6 November 2023. HM King Mohammed VI speech. <https://www.cg.gov.ma/en/node/11526>: accessed on 12.11.2024.
- IAP, 2018. Industrial Acceleration Plan (IAP), Minister of Industry. <http://www.mcinet.gov.ma/en/content/renewable-energy>. Accessed on 29. 9. 2024.
- International Crisis Group, 2024. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/western-sahara/relaunching-negotiations-over-western-sahara>: accessed on 25.11.2024
- MAP, 27 September 2024. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.9.2024.
- MAP, 6 December 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.5.2024.
- MAP, 15 October 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.09.2024.

MAP, 28 June 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.09.2024.

MAP, 8 April 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.4.2024.

MAP, 1 April 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.4.2024.

MAP, 18 February 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 19.2.2023.

MAP, 17 February 2022. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 18.2.2023.

MAP, 11 March 2021. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 18.8.2024.

MAP, 29 October 2020. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.10.2024.

MAP, 14 December 2020. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.10.2024.

MAP, 7 December 2020. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 30.10.2024.

MAP, 30 November 2019. <https://www.mapnews.ma/en/>:accessed on 11.11.2024.

Eugene Knotorovich, 2020. Professor and Director of the Center for the Middle East and International Law at George Mason University.

https://www.law.gmu.edu.in_the_news/2020/eugene_kontorovich_moroccan_sovereignty: accessed on 12 November 2024.

Suresh Kumar, 2024. <http://www.africaindia.org>: accessed on 25.11.2024

Suresh Kumar, 2021. *Drivers of Socioeconomic Development and Underdevelopment in Moroccan Sahara* in R B Singh & Others,

Practices in Regional Science and Sustainable Regional Development. Springer Nature. Singapore.

Suresh Kumar, 15-31 January 2019. *Morocco: Fast Tracking Progress*. Afroasian Business Chronicle. Vol. 9. No. 1. Delhi.

Suresh Kumar, 2013. *Geopolitics Regionalism under New Moroccan Constitution and Autonomy of Sahara*. Indian Journal of African Studies. Vol. No. XVIII. April & October 2012. No. 1 & 2. University of Delhi.

The Green Moroccan Plan, 2018. A Challenge strategy for a Green Economic Growth. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269699953>. Accessed on 29.10.2024.

Zerbo, 2024. https://books.google.com/books/about/Histoire_de_I_Afriq_ue_noire_d_hier_%C3%A0_de.html?id=8PYEAQAAIAAJ: accessed on 12.11.2024.