Improving the Rural Population’s Accessibility to All-Weather Roads: The Morocco Experience

Overview

Over 60 percent of Morocco’s poor live in rural and isolated areas, where a lack of access to all-weather roads has cut them off from both economic opportunities and key social services such as health and education. The Rural Roads Project was designed to support the government’s second National Program of Rural Roads (NPRR-2) aimed at identifying and upgrading strategic roads. As a result, the National Rural Road Accessibility Index rose to 70 percent in 2010, from an index of 50 percent in 2005.

Challenge

The majority of Morocco’s poor population lives in rural and isolated areas. A lack of access to all-weather roads has left them physically cut-off from economic opportunities and key social services such as health and education. The National Rural Road Accessibility Index stood at 45 percent for rural areas in 2002. There were also large differentials among provinces, ranging from 75 percent in the better-served provinces to 20 percent in the most isolated.

Approach

With its 2020 Rural Development Strategy, the Moroccan government set a goal of raising rural access to all-weather roads to 80 percent by 2015. The NPRR-2 was designed to support this goal, with a focus on roads that would improve rural access in a cost-effective manner. Strategic roads were identified through a participatory process, involving the provinces and municipalities. The project also contributed to developing a system to monitor and evaluate the achievement of accessibility targets, and formulating specific proposals to localize rural road management. Building up the capabilities of the Directorate of Roads (DoR), and the decentralized Regional Roads Directorates was also a goal, to empower them to conduct social and environmental assessments of rural road improvements.
Results
The project has led to a significant increase in rural access to all-weather roads:

- Some 11,500 km of rural roads have been constructed or rehabilitated under the program out of a target of 15,500 km.

- The National Rural Road Accessibility Index rose to 70 percent in 2010, compared to an index of 45 percent in 2002 and 50 percent in 2005. Some 1.9 million rural people are already benefiting from the project out of a target population of 3 million.

- The accessibility gap between the 10 highest-accessibility provinces and the 10 lowest-accessibility provinces rose from 0.38 in 2002 to 0.63 in 2010.

- The intercity transport service quality, measured by the Transport Service Improvement Indicator (TSII), indicates that 80 percent of sample roads that have been open for at least two years show an improvement in the quality of service, reflected in higher service frequency, more comfortable vehicles, and lower rates. The frequency of services, quality of vehicles in use, and service rates were improved.

Bank Contribution
The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development’s (IBRD) financing supported physical rural road works and institutional capacity building. About euro 141 million of financing (first project, second project and an additional financing to the second project) was provided to rehabilitate and upgrade rural roads all over the country. In addition, the IBRD provided support to establish an accessibility monitoring and evaluation system in collaboration with the Directorate of Roads and the Center for Road Studies and Research (CNER), and develop a manual for design and appraisal of rural roads.

Partners
A number of partners are supporting the NPRR2, including: the European Union (EU), the French Development Agency (AFD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Italian Development Cooperation, and the OPEC Fund for International Development. The World Bank (WB) and the French AFD agreed to adopt a joint approach to financing: pool money to fund an agreed list of roads, use Bank procurement and safeguards guidelines, no prior reviews, and disbursements in tranches following post-reviews and based on results.

Moving Forward
The WB and the French AFD have both approved additional financing for their respective loans under the same programmatic approach which has proved successful so far. The WB, JICA and the EU are supporting the preparation of a comprehensive socio-economic impact study of the NPRR2. This study will be a benchmark for the country for further accessibility initiatives in the rural areas, and an experience to exchange with other countries and other regions.