



## North Africa

### ECONOMICS

## Moroccans Confront Their Future

*Morocco has both a glorious and a difficult past. It once ruled an empire that stretched from Spain to Libya. However, it also was invaded and colonized by the Romans, Muslims, Portuguese, Spanish, and finally the French. Moroccans are proud of the culture that their checkered history has produced. Yet, at the same time, many are concerned about what the future holds for their small nation.*

Today, 40 years after gaining their independence from France, Moroccans are facing an array of challenges perhaps greater than all that have come before. A high birthrate means that half the population is under 20 years of age. That overwhelming reality already exerts pressure on virtually every aspect of society, especially on education (too many students, not enough schools) and on the economy (150,000 young people a year enter a job market that can handle only about 130,000). So many Moroccans emigrate to find work that the money they send home is one of the nation's main sources of hard currency. More and more people abandon the countryside to try their luck in the cities; 30,000 arrive in Casablanca every year. And there remain deep rifts [divisions] between rich and poor, city and countryside. Even within families there are often sharp differences of opinion between generations. . . .

In Morocco the struggle to make a living is ubiquitous [everywhere]. I saw young men in the foggy forest outside Rabat, the capital, tending makeshift stands piled with white truffles [mushrooms], the common local variety. Arranged in neat pyramids, the fungus sold for about three dollars a pound. There were stands strung out along the road for miles, one stand within sight of the next. I never saw a car stop.

There was the ancient man walking slowly down the street in Casablanca carrying a censer [incense burner]. He would enter a shop, a café, or an office and spend a moment gently swinging the censer on its chain to send perfumed clouds into the air. There was no fee; he accepted whatever people wanted to give for this unbidden service.

More common and less beautiful were the shoeshine boys constantly circulating through the cafés, tapping their brushes against small wooden boxes that served as footrests. Then there were the little boys roaming the streets of Fez with mere handfuls of things to sell: small packets of tissues, flashlight batteries, cigarettes. They would pass the cafés and offer these things in a whisper, urgently, watching for police. . . .

Slums—the worst I saw spread northward from the edges of Casablanca, with crude little huts made of corrugated iron, bits of plastic, scraps of wood—are the most vivid example of the poverty many Moroccans continue to endure. . . . Moroccans confront their problems

with particular dignity. Newcomers to the cities endure [bear] the hardships of their new surroundings with the stoicism [acceptance] essential to farmers and shepherds. . . . Protest and criticism exist but come mainly from the middle and upper classes; the Moroccan of the countryside simply doesn't complain. . . .

As the only North African country without oil, Morocco has had to make the most of its other advantages. The ocean off Morocco's Atlantic coastline is one of the richest fishing grounds in the world. . . . Morocco also contains the world's largest phosphate deposits, and although the market was recently depressed, mining remains a major enterprise.

But agriculture has always been Morocco's strength. Morocco's farmers produce everything from wheat and olives to flowers and kiwifruit, and there is a growing export trade—primarily citrus fruit and tomatoes, to Europe, Canada, and now the United States. A range of climate and soil is kind to a variety of crops: in the north, grapes, fruit, olives, and wheat; to the west, more wheat, oranges, vegetables; in the south, dates. . . .

As recently as 30 years ago 70 percent of the people lived in the countryside. Today, rural folk account for slightly less than half the population. Yet except for the Imperial Valley-like farms [large, commercial farms in California] near Agadir and Fez, most agriculture continues on small holdings with a minimum of technology.

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**Understanding What You Read** After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. In what ways have population trends affected Morocco?

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2. What strengths does the reading note in Morocco's economy?

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**Activity**

Imagine that you are a Moroccan teenager. Write a journal entry expressing your views about your country's future. Explain why you will stay in the country of your birth.