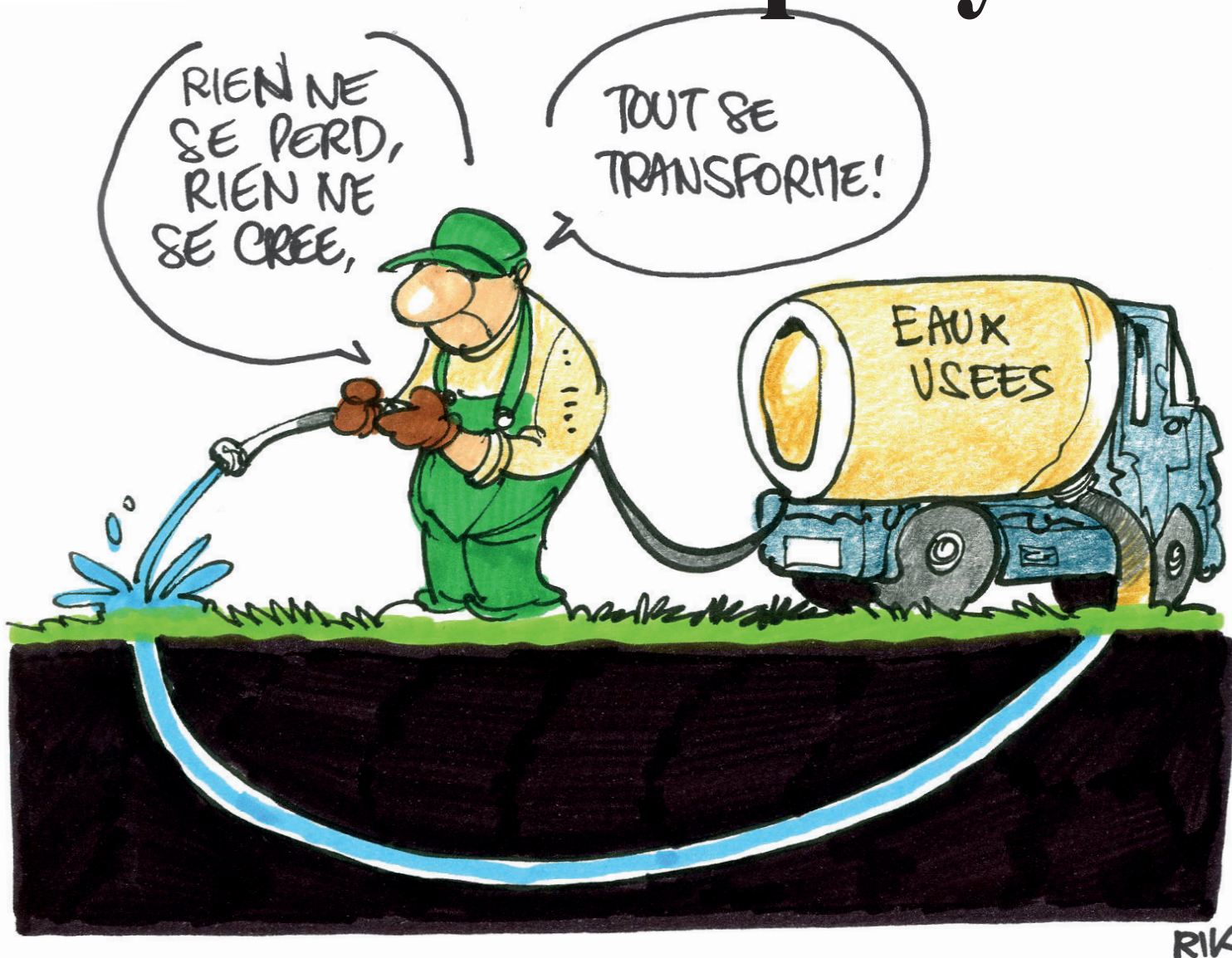


Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE

Le premier quotidien économique du Maroc

Treated wastewater Milestone of 100 million cubic meters per year



L'Economiste-Sunergia survey

Health, education, employment: the cursed trio

Morocco/Africa: Export opportunities to be seized

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Moroccan truffle growing: the emergence of a luxury market

EDITORIAL

Puzzle

Meriem OUDGHIRI

2025 will certainly be special on many fronts. The key decision-makers we interviewed in this special edition are unanimous: they want to keep up the momentum. This year's agendas are loaded with major challenges that will determine the medium- and long-term future. The next few months will therefore be no picnic, for, as many of them will say, the major challenge will be to continue to build sustained, and also better-shared, growth. There is every reason to be optimistic. Even in the face of headwinds. All over the world, people are

looking for their own miracle recipe. For some, it is a better, more egalitarian standard of living. For others, it is more productive factories and administrations, better results at school to build a high-quality education system... For some, it is also a question of meeting the challenges that are still hurting, such as the decline in the activity rate and the rise in the unemployment rate, which require urgent responses. And let's not forget that we're still facing one of the biggest water stress tests in the world. That's why we must continue to keep a very close eye on water, to track down and be intransigent about

wastage, and to speed up all those crucial seawater desalination and irrigation modernization projects. At the same time, there are challenges to be met, such as economic diversification, particularly in the technology and industrial sectors. 2025 will also be a year of intense preparation for the two major sporting events, the African Cup of Nations (AFCON 2025) and the World Cup 2030, with their hopes for growth. Like Russian dolls, the battles will follow one another, with the view to putting all the (lost/new?) pieces of the puzzle in place.. Happy New Year! □

Weekly highlights

L'Economiste-Sunergia survey

Health, education, employment: the cursed trio

WHILE Moroccans are generally optimistic about the coming year, most are aware that a number of challenges remain. This applies in particular to a series of areas still suffering from dysfunctions that are hampering development momentum. In the latest L'Economiste-Sunergia survey, Moroccans were asked which sectors they thought would be improving or deteriorating in 2025? Naturally, three areas topped the list of concerns for Moroccans, who predicted a deterioration over the next year. These are health, education and employment.

Specifically, 36% of those surveyed expect the health sector to deteriorate in 2025, with 29% expecting a sharp deterioration and 7% a slight deterioration (more so among city dwellers, with 39%). A further 7% expect stagnation, and 15% are undecided. As for the education sector, 33% expect a deterioration next year, of which 25% a sharp deterioration and 8% a slight decline, in addition to 5% who expect stagnation and 18% who have no opinion. On the employment front, the trend is fairly similar. When it comes to employment, the trend is fairly similar. 9% expect a deterioration next year, of which 23% a sharp deterior-

ation and 6% a slight deterioration, while 6% expect stagnation and 17% are unsure.

Recovery

Nevertheless, more than half of those surveyed expect the economy to recover over the next year. 56% said they expected an improvement, with 35% predicting a strong improvement and 21% a slight improvement. By sector, technology leads the way in terms of expected growth next year. 74% of Moroccans expect an improvement in

this area, with 59% expecting a strong improvement (more so among socio-professional categories A and B with 81%). The same goes for urbanization and infrastructure, in a year marked by the organization of the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2025. 52% of those questioned said they expected a strong improvement in this sector, with a further 22% predicting a slight improvement (more so among those in socio-professional categories A and B, with 83%). The same is true of tourism, with 77% of Moroccans anticipating an improvement, 66% of them

a strong improvement and 11% a slight improvement. In industry, 54% of Moroccans expect a strong improvement and 15% a slight improvement. □

M.A.M.



High-impact sectors

RESPONSES concerning the sectors that will have the greatest impact on development in Morocco in 2025 confirm the results relating to the expected performance of the various fields over the next year. Tourism comes out on top with a 22% share. Despite concerns about climatic conditions and recurring drought, 20% of Moroccans believe that agriculture will have a major impact on development. The same goes for education and health, with 19% and 17% respectively. Industry comes 5th. Only 16% of those questioned believe that this sector will have a major impact on development over the next year. Technology, infrastructure and employment come next, with a share of 9% each. It should be pointed out that 26% of those questioned did not express an opinion on this subject. □

Morocco/Africa: Export opportunities to be seized

ALTHOUGH The volume of trade between Morocco and African countries has risen from 36.3 billion Dirhams (USD 3.63 billion) to 52.7 billion Dirhams (USD 5.27 billion) in 2023. Exports to African countries account for 7.6% of total Moroccan exports. In detail, phosphates and their derivatives account for two-thirds of these exports, followed by fishery products (36%), vehicles (38%), textiles and clothing (2%), leather products (36%) and electrical equipment (19.5%).

Studies reveal that the Moroccan market has untapped opportunities, estimated at 12 billion dirhams (USD 1.2 billion) in potential exports to Africa, according to Omar Hejira, Secretary of State to the Minister of Industry and Trade, in charge of Foreign Trade. The studies also highlight additional prospects in various regions of the

continent. They include 60 investment projects likely to boost Moroccan exports, added Hejira in response to questions in the House of Representatives.

In this vein, he encouraged Moroccan exporters, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to increase their exports to Africa. A growth market with 1.3 billion consumers. The Ministry is preparing an exhibition of Moroccan products for export. It is scheduled for the end of next year, with a section dedicated to African products.

Omar Hejira announced that regional consultation meetings on the development of the foreign trade roadmap for the 2025-2026 period had produced 524 proposals. He pointed out that 80% of the proposals came from the regions, compared with 20% (113 proposals) from the central level.

The proposals focus mainly on improving competitiveness, simplifying procedures and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition to diversifying export markets, particularly in Africa, and strengthening the export fabric and its sustainability. These consultations mobilized all stakeholders, including the Moroccan employers union (Confédération générale des Entreprises du Maroc, CGEM), professional federations, and the presidents of chambers of commerce, industry and services. These meetings, held in less than a month, brought together more than 1,200 participants from all over the region. They showed that 85% of exports come from just three regions, highlighting the importance of establishing a balance between the different regions. □

F.Z.T.

A few figures

- Moroccan exports reached **430** billion dirhams (USD 43 billion) in 2023, compared with **716** billion dirhams (USD 71 billion) for imports, said Hejira. He stressed the challenge of reducing the trade deficit by boosting exports.
- **70%** of national exports go to Europe, mainly Spain and France, which account for **46%**.
- **92%** of Moroccan exports are concentrated in six key sectors: automobiles (**34.4%**), agriculture and food industries (**19.3%**), phosphates and derivatives (**17.8%**), leather products (**10.7%**), aviation (**5.3%**), and electronics (**4.3%**).

Health infrastructure

Inclusive access program delayed

THE universal health coverage system, which officially came into force on January 1, 2025, is starting off with a small anomaly: the delay in implementing the inclusive access to healthcare infrastructure program. In particular, the recruitment of consultants and the roll-out of training initiatives to support the Project Management Unit (PMU) in setting up efficient administrative and financial management and implementation in line with the program's environmental and social requirements.

According to the AfDB evaluation, published on December 26, no half-yearly technical and financial execution report has yet been drawn up for the program, as activities have not yet begun. No report on implementation of the program's environmental and social action plan has been drawn up either, as recruitment of the consultant



for environmental and social support and training had not yet been completed.

According to the AfDB, "the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is taking too long to take the necessary steps to recruit consultants and begin

activities, in particular to draw up the operating procedures required for the project to run smoothly".

The Bank also points out that the delay in project execution is due to the fact that "consultations for the recruitment of consultants are taking too long, and

this risks compromising the timely execution of the grant".

To avoid this risk, the Ministry was asked to draw up a new action plan, to be submitted by December 31 at the latest. A tool designed to speed up the process of building the institutional capacities of the human resources concerned in the field of project management, where four actions have already been launched.

The first is to complete the recruitment of an environmental and social consultant to finish the training courses for E&S managers, PMU members and regional E&S focal points on the E&S requirements of the ISS and on project E&S management and monitoring procedures and techniques. To date, only 50% of the target group (10) have actually been trained. □

Aziz DIOUF

Treated wastewater

Milestone of 100 million cubic meters per year

FACED with the challenges facing the water sector and the need to rationalize and optimize the use of financial resources, an action plan has been implemented to reuse treated wastewater. The aim is to reuse it for irrigation of golf courses, green spaces and industrial uses. This plan is part of the National Drinking Water Supply and Irrigation Program for the 2020-2027 period. The goal is to achieve 100 million cubic meters per year of treated wastewater by 2027. Up to the end of 2023, projects carried out within this framework have reused around 37 million cubic meters of wastewater per year. The rate of wastewater treatment in urban areas has reached 57.5%, thanks to the construction of 188 wastewater treatment plants, according to a Ministry of the Interior document.

Major projects are concentrated mainly in Marrakech, Agadir, Rabat, Tangiers, and Tetouan. They involve the reuse of treated wastewater to irrigate golf courses and green spaces. There are also projects developed by the OCP Group for industrial uses. By 2024, there will be no fewer than 28 projects to reuse treated wastewater for water-

ring golf courses and green spaces, as well as an industrial project in the Marsa commune of Laâyoune. The total cost of these projects was 2.8 billion dirhams (USD 280 million), of which 1.2 billion dirhams (USD 120 million) was mobilized via the Liquid and Solid Wastewater Treatment and Reuse Fund. The list of projects includes those currently being finalized or implemented. They concern the landscaping of green spaces in cities such as Rabat, Salé, Témara, Skhirat,

Harhoura, Casablanca, Tangiers, Kénitra, Tétouan, Marrakech, Essaouira, and Sidi Bouknadel. The estimated cost is 1.18 billion dirhams (USD 118 million).

Other projects are also planned. These include the irrigation of green spaces and golf courses in the municipalities of Oujda, Mohammedia, Settlat, Laâyoune, Dakhla, El Jadida, Fez, and Ifrane. Also on the list are M'diq, Tangiers - Asilah, Kénitra, Benslimane, Bouznika, El Haouzia, Biougra, Erra-

chidia, Ouarzazate, Saïdia, and Béni Ansar. The budget earmarked for this program amounts to 1.68 billion dirhams (USD 168 million). Financing and implementation agreements are currently being validated and signed between these local authorities and the other partners involved. These projects will make it possible to reuse around 74 million cubic meters of treated wastewater per year, according to the Department of the Interior. □

Mohamed CHAOUI

Resources for industrial activities

FOUR projects are currently underway for industrial use, in partnership with OCP, in the towns of Safi, Fquih Ben Salah and Béni Mellal, and with a mining company in Greater Agadir, at a total cost of 1.5 billion dirhams (USD 150 million).

Similarly, in 2024, two new projects have been planned in coordination with the parties concerned. These are the watering of the Ghazala golf course in Benslimane and the royal golf course and green spaces in Meknes, at a total cost of 145.6 million dirhams (USD 15 million). There is also a project to reuse treated wastewater for industrial purposes, carried out in partnership with the OCP group, at a cost of 800 million dirhams (USD 80 million). The Casablanca - Settlat region is not to be outdone. A regional program has been set up to reuse treated wastewater to irrigate golf courses and green spaces in the region's main cities, with an estimated budget of 1.7 billion dirhams (USD 170 million)... Similar programs will be set up in other regions. □



Weekly highlights

Moroccan truffle growing: the emergence of a luxury market

MOROCCO, with its diverse landscapes and unique climate, is home to an unsuspected treasure: truffles. These underground mushrooms, true gems of the Moroccan local territories, thrive in sometimes extreme climatic conditions, revealing an astonishing resilience. Behind their discretion lies an ecological and economic treasure trove for the most vulnerable rural areas. Three Moroccan researchers, Soukaina Hakkou, Mohamed Sabir, and Nadia Machouri, from Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco, and the National Forest Engineering School in Salé, have been working on a research project to map truffle species in Morocco. Researchers have also documented their geographical distribution and productivity, and suggested ways of developing them sustainably. In the arid and semi-arid lands of Morocco, truffles, locally known as “terfès”, thrive in a discreet symbiosis with the host plants that populate these regions. There are two main types of truffle in Morocco: desert truffles, which include the *Terfezia* and *Tirmania* genera, and the “real truffles” of the *Tuber* genus. While the former are adapted to the sandy soils and harsh climate of Saharan and semi-arid regions, the latter, notably *Tuber melanosporum*, prefer the holm oak forests of more temperate regions. The diversity of species reflects the vastness and variety of Moroccan ecosystems.



With prices reaching up to 1200 Euros on European markets, the black truffle is truly the gem of gastronomy (Ph. Private)

From north to south, regions such as the Maâmora, the Sahel Doukkala-Abda, the North-East region and the Moroccan Sahara are all home to their own species. The Maâmora, for example, is famous for its sandy soils and oak and pine plantations, which favor the emergence of species such as *Terfezia arenaria* and *Tuber oligospermum*. The Sahara, despite its scarce rainfall, remains the preferred domain for species such as *Tirmania nivea*, capable of surviving in extreme conditions. Each region has its

own specific ecological characteristics, challenges and potential. These truffles are not only a natural treasure, they are also a luxury product sought after well beyond Morocco's borders. Markets in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar) are crazy about white desert truffles, which can fetch up to 1,500 Dirhams (USD 150) a kilo on the market, while the

so-called “true truffle” species find takers on Europe's gourmet tables. In Spain, Italy and France, for example, Moroccan truffles such as *Tuber oligospermum* are highly prized for their resemblance to the white Alba truffle, while black truffles can fetch 12,000 dirhams (USD 1.200) a kilo on French markets. □

A.Bo

Poorly exploited potential

DESPITE its strengths, the industry's potential remains under-exploited. A SWOT analysis highlights its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Among its major assets, the diversity of species, with almost 12 types of desert truffle and 5 real truffles, is an invaluable asset. These truffles, a gift of nature, require little or no human intervention for their production, which sets them apart from conventional agricultural crops. They are also adapted to difficult climatic conditions and play an essential ecological role in preventing desertification. In economic terms, their designation as a “local” product can boost the competitiveness of producing regions, while offering a

specific territorial identity. However, major weaknesses remain. The lack of regulation and formal organization is holding back the structuring of the sector. In the face of these challenges, there is no shortage of opportunities. Strong international demand, particularly from luxury markets, is opening up promising prospects. The development of truffle cultivation, as demonstrated by the success of *Tuber melanosporum* on the Debdou and Imouzzar Kandar farms, could reduce pressure on natural production while increasing yields. In addition, proper regulation, combined with development and marketing initiatives, could transform the sector into an economic pillar for the country. □

ALTHOUGH truffle growing is a recent phenomenon in Morocco, it represents a promising innovation in the development of the truffle industry. Two regions, Debdou and Imouzzar, stand out for their pioneering initiatives in the cultivation of black truffles, which have been adapted to local conditions through research and investment. In Debdou, the history of truffle cultivation began in 2000 with Dr. Abdelaziz Laqbaqi, who introduced the first holm oak seedlings inoculated with truffle spores. Set up on the Tifezouine farm, this experiment covers 4.2 hectares in a semi-arid valley with limestone soil. The climatic conditions were favorable, and the first black truffle harvests began in 2006. Encouraged by this success, Dr. Laqbaqi extended his project to Imouzzar du Kandar, in the Fez -Meknès region.

Two truffle farms were created: Ain Jarrah, covering 12 hectares, and Ain Chiffaa, covering 1,000 hectares. These farms benefit from conditions similar to those in Debdou, but with higher rainfall. The results are convincing. At Imouzzar, black truffles begin to be harvested in the third or fourth year after planting. The cultivation method includes innovative practices such as targeted irrigation and the use of “truffle traps”, holes filled with spore-enriched substrates. This approach guarantees optimum yields while preserving the sustainability of the plantations. These two exemplary projects show that truffle growing can not only diversify Moroccan agriculture, but also offer a viable alternative to the collection of wild truffles, which are increasingly vulnerable to climate hazards. □