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## Morocco Emerges as Project Powerhouse

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### Economic growth brings opportunities

Morocco is emerging as a quiet project powerhouse, contrasting the political turmoil that has consumed its North African neighbors Algeria, Libya and Egypt.

“Morocco’s economy has picked up in the last few years, so there are many opportunities here,” says Jalal Rabbah, PMP, a mediation and traffic control expert at telecommunications firm Mediatecom, Casablanca, Morocco.

Morocco has averaged economic growth of 4.9 percent over the last five years, but that momentum is only one attraction for project sponsors: Organizations favor the Arabic country’s political stability; relatively inexpensive, multilingual workforce; and proximity to both Europe and the emerging markets in Africa.

Projects are popping up in multiple sectors, from automotive and oil to IT and energy. Last year, French carmaker Renault completed a US\$1.5 billion factory near Tangier. Oil companies plan to have up to 10 well-drilling projects in Moroccan waters in 2014—double the number drilled between 2000 and 2013.

But there are downsides. Despite rapid development, organizations may find that Morocco’s project management practices are inconsistent. “The biggest challenge is stakeholders’ lack of awareness when it comes to risk



management,” says Loubna Hidraoui, PMP, a project manager at Hightech Payment Systems, Casablanca. “The concept is still in its embryonic state here; it’s secondary when we talk about projects, deadlines and quality.”

Project management is “still struggling to take off as much as it deserves,” says Abdessamad Moatassime, PMP, an electronic delivery prime at Alcatel-Lucent, Salé. “Public and government administrations have been slow to recognize project management skills as a must for their projects. These practices are now being recognized by stakeholders. In the next five to 10 years, businesses are going to see project managers as a must.”

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## Projects Across Morocco

### A Country in Motion

The government’s planned US\$4 billion high-speed railway promises to improve Morocco’s infrastructure, providing an additional draw for outside organizations. The railway, slated for completion in 2015, will link Casablanca with the capital city of Rabat and Tangier. “It answers a true need of Morocco,” Mohamed Rabie Khlie of the national railway office told Al Arabiya News. In later phases, another branch will connect to Oujda, a city near the Algerian border; the railway could eventually extend to other North African countries, according to Oxford Business Group.

Other transportation projects are also on the docket: The National Airports Authority planned to spend MAD2 billion this year on construction projects in five cities, and the Tanger-Med port’s expansion continues until 2015.

## Culture Calling

Bab Al Bahr, an eight-year, US\$800 million urban development, is under construction in Rabat. The largest mixed-use development in Morocco will feature seven districts, including an arts district, home to galleries, museums, apartments and restaurants. Project plans also include two marinas, offices, a school, stores and hotels.

## Warm Welcome

Morocco welcomed nearly 10 million visitors in 2010, up 210 percent from ten years earlier; the country is aiming for 18 million a year by 2020. To host the influx of people, 35 hotel projects, including those launched by luxury brands Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton, were in Morocco's pipeline as of last year—the most in Africa after Nigeria.

To encourage more development, the government plans to invest MAD3.6 billion to enhance ecotourism spots and will build up to 10 affordable vacation locales catering to Moroccan tourists, according to Oxford Business Group. The US\$40 million Marrakech Health Care City project, launched in 2012, will be aimed at medical tourists. Wealthy Arab travelers are another potential audience, says tourism minister Lahcen Haddad. "The places where they used to go, Egypt and Lebanon, they can't now because of security reasons, so they are coming to Morocco," he told the Associated Press.

## Sunshine, Blue Skies

Renewable energy projects are particularly appealing in the country, given its sunny, windswept desert and proximity to energy-hungry Europe. Morocco plans to generate 2 gigawatts of electricity from solar power by 2020. That level of production would first require project investments as high as US\$9 billion. "We are counting on mobilizing all our efforts to reach this goal," Mustapha Bakkoury of the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy told the Associated Press.

In May, the construction phase began on Saudi Arabia-based Acwa Power's MAD7 billion solar-power plant near the southern city of Ouarzazate. The ambitious project, slated for completion in 2015, is the first phase of a project expected to cover 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres) and have a generation capacity of 500 megawatts (MW), meeting the energy needs of the city's 50,000 residents.

Yet that's just one of the solar plants that will soon dot the desert. State power utility ONEE announced plans to build 10 solar photovoltaic plants

around the country, each generating 30 MW of energy. In September, the government issued contracts to build two additional plants of 200 MW and 100 MW. The World Bank, the European Investment Bank and German state-owned KfW Bank have agreed to help finance the project.

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