

# Morocco/Mauritania: Common Strategic Interests

By Youssef Tobi & Youssef El Jai

## Summary

This Policy Brief aims to:

- present Mauritania through its geography and domestic politics;
- examine relations between Morocco and Mauritania, and
- explore avenues for more sustained cooperation between the two countries.

## Introduction

Morocco and Mauritania enjoy geographical proximity conducive to trade and cooperation. Moreover, the high stakes currently at play in the Sahel-Saharan strip and the role played by Morocco and Mauritania in Africa at both the political and economic levels call for a review of shared strategic interests that bind the two countries. Despite geographical and historical proximity, relations between the two neighbors are not as intense as one might expect.

Building stronger relations with Mauritania requires an understanding of Mauritanian geopolitics. Its geography

is a key factor in both its domestic and foreign policy. The purpose here is to identify major trends shaping Mauritanian policy in order to shed light on the possible motives for Mauritania's position vis-à-vis its neighbor, Morocco. Various possible avenues for rapprochement between both countries will be highlighted.

Although already underway, cooperation in counterterrorism and economic trade are two of the pillars upon which the two countries can build. Since the challenges of development and security are common, they constitute clear points of rapprochement, given the geographical, cultural and worship proximity between Rabat and Nouakchott.

# I. Geopolitics of Mauritania

Mauritania, a North-West African country, has an area of 1,030,700 km<sup>2</sup>. Its borders with Morocco (1561 km), Algeria (463 km) and Mali (2237 km) are in a straight line due to the fact that they were drawn by French colonizers. Mauritania's only natural border is the Senegal River, which it shares with Senegal, one of its main economic partners. Largely desert, Mauritania is bordered by 800 km of Atlantic coastline.

Mauritania only acquired sovereignty over its territory through the Franco-Mauritanian agreements signed on 28 November 1960. The history of this country is thus rooted in colonialism, as its territory is the result of decolonization. Drawing on this rich history, it is easy to understand Mauritania's attachment to the intangibility of post-independence borders<sup>1</sup>.

Mauritanian space is more than just a territory, it is a claim. Mauritanian policy is, in several respects, defined by this principle of sovereignty; decisions relating to the preservation of its borders are tied to this attachment to the integrity of its space, which stems from the very history of its founding. As a result, nationalistic arguments are a powerful bias in Mauritanian politics, reflected in a sovereignty-based presidential doctrine which, through a set of symbolic and regulatory measures, positions the preservation of territory as a guarantor of sovereignty, as the common thread of national political discourse.

## 1. Mauritania: Nationalism and territorial integrity

Mauritania's political identity is founded on three principles: Islam as the state religion, territorial integrity as a priority and attachment to democratic principles<sup>2</sup>. These common values are essential to the unity of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania given its diversity. Indeed, the country is multi-ethnic, with a majority of Arabic-speaking "Moors" divided into "white Moors," known as Beidanes and "black Moors," known as Harratines<sup>3</sup> as well as a population of West African origin (mainly Fulani, Soninke and Wolof). In order to prevent

1. The intangibility of borders is based on a principle of law derived from Roman law "uti possidetis, ita possideatis" which means "you will possess what you already possess". In 1964, the Organization of African Unity used this principle to settle territorial disputes on the basis of a treaty based on pre-existing borders.

2. Preamble of the Constitution (Islamic Republic of Mauritania)

3. The world Factbook. [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)

any sectarian tendencies, the Mauritanian constitution represses any propaganda based on race or ethnicity<sup>4</sup>. These domestic policy factors account, in many respects, for the various symbolic and regulatory measures taken recently by the country to affirm its attachment to its territorial integrity and its own identity:

- Modification of the national flag with two red stripes symbolizing the blood of the "martyrs of resistance" during the French colonial period.
- International treaties and agreements can only be ratified by law. No changes to the territory can be made without the consent of the people<sup>5</sup>.
- Repression of domestic media that undermine the principle of territorial integrity<sup>6</sup>
- Sub-regional security diplomacy aimed at countering the spread of terrorism on its territory<sup>7</sup>

Geopolitically, Mauritania often finds itself in an awkward position between its two neighbors, Algeria and Morocco. The conflict over the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Morocco underlines the complexity of the Mauritanian position. Often ambiguous, this position is shaped by several factors, including the balancing act that Nouakchott must operate between Algiers and Rabat. For other reasons, other considerations must also be taken into account to understand the Mauritanian position with regard to Morocco's territorial integrity.

## 2. Reasons behind Mauritanian ambivalence

Morocco's territorial integrity is a priority and the defense of its sovereignty over its southern provinces is at the heart of its foreign policy. Mauritania recognizes the "Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic", which claims sovereignty over Morocco's southern provinces, although relations between Morocco and Mauritania are strong and Mauritania is an important potential ally. There is not enough basis for a clear-cut opinion on the reasons for Mauritanian ambivalence towards Morocco. Several hypotheses can be advanced:

4. Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Article 1

5. Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Article 2

6. 4 journalists suspected of having received illicit funding in 2017 placed under judicial supervision.

7. This security-focused diplomacy is notably illustrated by the creation of the G5 Sahel (a joint institutional framework between Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad).

- Mauritania fears violence from armed factions of the SADR organization should it take a position in favor of Morocco
- Mauritania is divided between Algeria and Morocco in its choice of alliance.
- Some Mauritanian tribes feel an ideological and cultural proximity with the SADR organization.

A possible transparent agreement between Morocco and Mauritania is thus contingent upon the recognition or non-recognition of the SADR and, therefore, all the more so, upon future relations between Morocco and Algeria, which have been at a stalemate for more than 7 years now<sup>8</sup>.

## II. Common strategic interests

Due to its rich subsoil, the Sahel-Saharan zone is of global importance. The stability of this region will determine not only the future of the countries within it, but also that of relations between European powers, particularly those involved in the Malian conflict<sup>9</sup>. The Kingdom of Morocco has positioned itself as a major player in West Africa. As a result, cooperation between Morocco and Mauritania is an important means of establishing regional integration capable of meeting the common challenges of fighting terrorism and economic development. Although the correlation between terrorism and underdevelopment may seem obvious, the link has not always been accounted for in counter-terrorism policies. Indeed, it can be considered that:

*“a strong correlation exists between conditions of underdevelopment and the various forms of conflict. This suggests that the failure to recognize the link between security and development has reduced the effectiveness of the more traditional methods of preventing or mitigating conflict, that is, the use of military force, diplomacy, intelligence sharing, and international law.”*<sup>10</sup>

8. Statement by Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita during a meeting with Jeune Afrique on 10 September 2017.

9. As an example, Barkhane is an operation launched on 1 August 2014 led by the French armies. It is based on a strategic approach rooted in partnership with the main countries of the Sahel-Saharan strip (BSS): Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina-Faso. It is under the command of Major General Jean-Pierre Palasset

10. J. Brian Atwood, “The Link Between Poverty and Violent Conflict”, New England Journal of Public Policy, 19 (1), 2003, pp. 159-165

Linking the challenges of terrorism and development is not insignificant. Stability in the region is a prerequisite for its development. The link between combating terrorism and economic cooperation must be borne in mind in relations between Morocco and Mauritania to establish intelligence ties between the two countries.

There are a number of arguments in favor of a strategic relationship between Nouakchott and Rabat in matters relating to combating terrorism:

- Precariousness and poverty are a significant factor in the recruitment of young people from the region into terrorist groups.
- Religious fundamentalism has the power to transcend borders, with risk coming from all countries in the region.
- The development of lawless zones is a fertile breeding ground for the spread of terrorism and drug trafficking.

These shared realities indicate that Morocco and Mauritania have common interests. In terms of cooperation, the imperatives of development and counterterrorism, which are often interdependent, call for consideration of these strategic priorities, as they could bring Rabat and Nouakchott closer together. As security cooperation between the two countries is strengthened, it is likely that greater economic cooperation will be developed and trade routes will be established, providing access to the various West African markets.

### 1. Combating terrorism

The “Sahel-Saharan strip,” or SSS, is the name that has prevailed in recent years to describe the natural border between the Northern part of the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa. Stability in the region is a global issue, as evidenced by the United Nations presence with the creation in 2013 of the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The creation of an institutional framework for coordinating and monitoring regional cooperation, known as G5 Sahel, responds to the need for cooperation on development and security policy between the five countries of the Sahel<sup>11</sup> namely Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. On 2 July 2017, the G5 Sahel

11. Final statement of the Summit of the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel: Creation of an institutional framework for the coordination and monitoring of regional cooperation known as the G5 Sahel

summit was held in Bamako and officially established the joint cross-border military force, the FC-G5S, composed of five battalions of 750 men, one battalion per country<sup>12</sup>. The leaders of the G5 Sahel do, however, hope that this force will gradually be increased to 10,000 men<sup>13</sup> and the group, in the absence of financing from the United Nations, remains poorly equipped in technical means. At a time when the international community, led by France, is calling for greater commitment in the Sahel zone, the G5 Sahel is a regional solution for peacekeeping in the region. First, countries in the region are best placed to fight terrorists in the region and enjoy greater legitimacy than foreign battalions whose actions have already been met with the population's wrath<sup>14</sup>. France, for its part, has called for greater commitment on the part of the European Union (EU)) and is reconsidering its strategic positioning in the region.

The Kingdom of Morocco has expertise in combating terrorism. Moreover, the Kingdom has endeavored to set itself up as a model in terms of upgrading its security services and international cooperation in the field of intelligence. This upgrading hinges on an anticipatory approach based on the systematic diagnosis of internal and external threats and restructuring of security institutions through the creation, in 2015, of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation. Domestically, the establishment of public channels to reflect Morocco's religious orientations and the definition of the role of mosques as strictly dedicated to learning, consolidate the country's counterterrorism stance at the national level.

Internationally, Morocco is seeking to share its experience with Mauritania in order to establish viable security cooperation for both countries. Given its geographical position, Morocco is concerned by the terrorist threat in the Sahel-Saharan region. Accordingly, the kingdom's strengths in combating international terrorism should be harnessed in order to bolster cooperation with neighboring Mauritania. In addition, Morocco is also providing effective cooperation of around \$3.3 million under the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Program<sup>15</sup> (PIP).

It shares the vision of other Sahel countries regarding a Security-Development-Training triptych to deal with the terrorist threat in the region and is already active in this framework, notably through training Imams, supplying officers for peacekeeping training and contributing to infrastructure projects, particularly in the field of renewable energies.

Arguments in favor of enhanced security cooperation between Morocco and Mauritania include the following:

- The importance of West Africa and the Sahel-Saharan region as a strategic development area for both countries.
- The need for effective exchanges of information and intelligence regarding terrorist threats
- The need to mobilize resources for regional security initiatives

The cross-border nature of the jihadist threat requires regional analysis of security threats. Moreover, the porous nature of borders and the mobility of armed groups means that a unilateral approach to containment is, in the long term, ineffective. The involvement of all the countries bordering the area is thus required to combat terrorism, a multidimensional threat whose resolution calls for a global approach. On the other hand, the security situation in Mali is a stumbling block to the establishment of a zone of stability in the region.

The eventual development of a common Maghreb security approach is of paramount importance in addressing the challenges facing the region. It is with this in mind that Morocco provided support to the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Program to the tune of US\$3.294 million and, through an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, insisted on the "Security - Development - Training" triptych, as the cornerstone of a sound security architecture in the region<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. Economic cooperation

### a) An overview of Mauritania's economy

Mauritania is a desert country with a low population density. It is a land blessed with natural resources, including iron, copper, gas and oil. In recent years, the country has followed the reform drive of most countries

12. Florence Richard, G5 in the Sahel: Macron launches joint anti-Jihadist force, France 24, 1 July 2017.

13. Benjamin Roger, G5 Sahel: finally a joint force after the Bamako summit? Jeune Afrique, 30 June 2017.

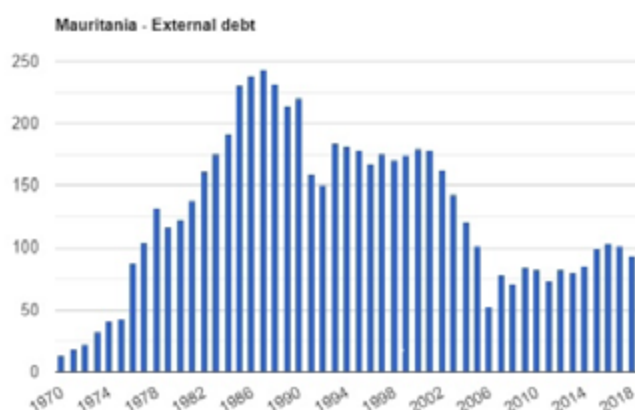
14. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/846042/politique/au-mali-la-multiplication-des-attaques-renforce-le-sentiment-anti-francais/>

15. The Priority Investment Program is structured around 6 priorities: defense and security, governance and infrastructure, resilience and development.

16. <https://afrique.le360.ma/autres-pays/politique/2019/09/18/27901-g5-sahel-le-maroc-apporte-une-contribution-effective-de-33-millions-de-dollars-27901>

on the continent and has implemented a series of reforms aimed at improving economic performance and limiting dependence on the extractive industry. As a result, it has embarked on an ambitious fiscal consolidation program, leading to a government surplus of 1.5% of GDP in 2018.<sup>17</sup> Following a consultation mission to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania under Article IV of the Articles of Agreement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), IMF experts praised the efforts made by the Mauritanian government. In particular, the roadmap established for the period 2016-2030 is being adhered to, resulting in strong and sustained growth and more fiscal space, which public authorities will be able to allocate to social expenditure. Despite this very optimistic picture, the country remains exposed to terms-of-trade shocks in the extractive sector, as well as an external debt hovering around 100% of GDP.

**Figure 1: Mauritania's external debt (private and public)**



Source: TheGlobalEconomy.com, The World Bank

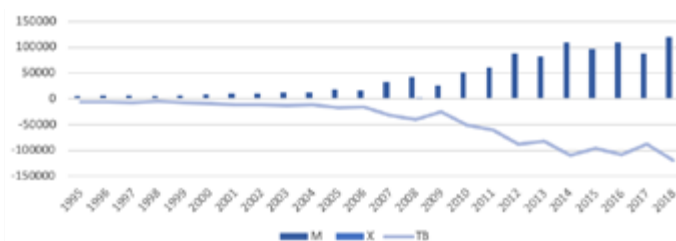
In 2000, Mauritania signed a reciprocal investment protection and promotion agreement with Morocco, which, incidentally, is Mauritania's largest supplier, according to statistics from the Mauritanian National Statistical Office (ONS). Moreover, the recent rapprochement between the two countries has made it possible to activate effective economic diplomacy. Thus, at the end of 2018, the first Morocco-Mauritania Business Forum was held in the Mauritanian capital, at the initiative of the Confédération générale des entreprises du Maroc (CGEM) and the Union

nationale du patronat mauritanien (UNPM)<sup>18</sup>. This event reaffirmed the ambition of Moroccan and Mauritanian economic operators to cooperate more in the future and to engage in joint ventures. Twelve investment contracts were signed, notably in the fields of fisheries, agri-foodstuffs and trade. Moroccan companies see the creation of the new Nouadhibou Free Zone in the north of the country as an opportunity for regional development.

## b) Trade and financial cooperation

Both countries are outward-looking, with an active trade opening strategy. Beyond its historical trade links with the European Union (EU) in the agricultural and fisheries segments, and its leading position in the phosphate products market, Morocco is making inroads into the automotive and aeronautics industries. Mauritania's exports are mostly based on iron and copper ores as well as its fishery resources, most of which are destined to Europe. Morocco has a large trade surplus with Mauritania.

**Figure 2: Evolution of Mauritania-Morocco trade, in thousands of US dollars**



Source: UNCTAD

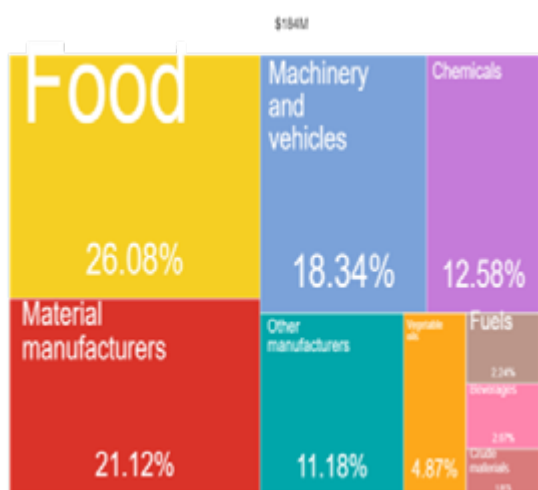
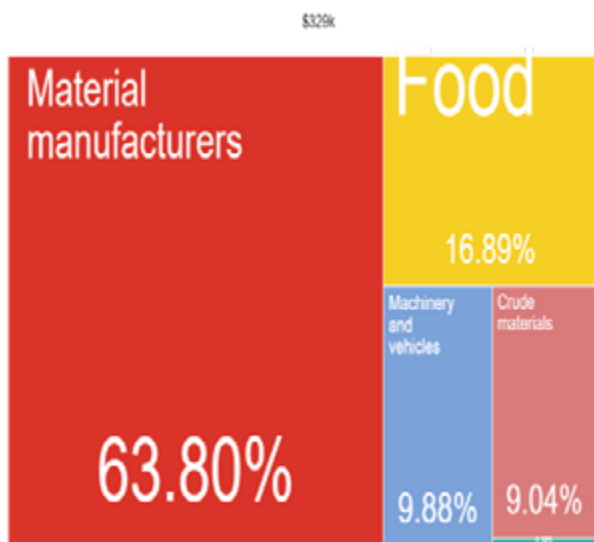
According to available data, Morocco's exports to Mauritania are predominantly composed of three items: chemicals, manufactured goods, and capital and transport goods. Imports mainly include resource-intensive manufactured goods, which are relatively more abundant in our southern neighbor, thus giving Mauritania a comparative advantage over Morocco.<sup>19</sup>

18. <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/actualites/travaux-du-forum-economique-mauritano-marocain>

19. cf. Rim Berahab, "Structure of trade between Morocco and Africa: An analysis of trade specialization", PCNS Research Paper N°1607, July 2016. Between 1995 and 2014, manufactured goods rich in natural resources accounted for 94% of Mauritania's total exports.

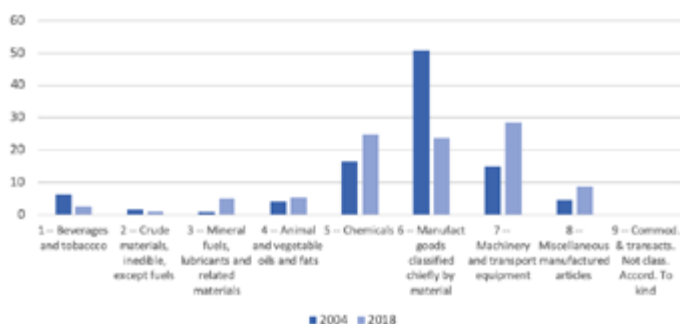
17. According to World Bank figures.

**Table 1: Exports composition (SITC 1-Digit) Mauritania (L) and Morocco (R)**



Source: The Atlas of economic complexity, Harvard

**Figure 3: Structure of exports from Morocco to Mauritania, according to the CITC Rev1 classification.**



Source: WITS

It is clear that both countries would benefit from increased trade reciprocity. According to a recent IMF study, Morocco can potentially export ten new, mainly agricultural products to Mauritania, while the latter could export four new products to Morocco<sup>20</sup>. According to the same study, advanced integration among the Maghreb countries would result in an increase of one percentage point in economic growth.

On the financial front, Morocco has stood out over the last decade for its ambitious African economic strategy. As the guarantor of the Kingdom’s African identity, King Mohammed VI, in the course of his speeches, has affirmed the ambition of regional, economic and financial integration, promising gains for the entire continent. As such, Morocco has stepped up investment in Africa in various sectors, including financial services (Attijariwafa bank, BMCE bank) and telecoms (Maroc Télécom). In terms of the stock of Moroccan FDI abroad, Côte d’Ivoire, the most successful economy in the West African Economic and Monetary Union, holds first place, and by the end of 2017 attracted more than 13% of the total stock. In terms of flows, the same country attracted 23.2% of cumulative flows between 2013 and 2017, while Mauritania only captured 1.9% over the same period.

However, an increase in outward FDI flows to Mauritania would enable Morocco to consolidate its position as an active investor in Africa and Mauritania, and to be directly linked to West African countries, recipients of Moroccan FDI. It would give Morocco access to a market of nearly 40 million consumers in Mali and Senegal, and even more as Moroccan companies penetrate West African markets.

On the Mauritanian side, cooperation between Moroccan and Mauritanian companies could create positive synergies through the sharing of expertise, particularly in the field of financial services. Moreover, Mauritania has ambitions to reform its economy, notably through sectoral diversification. Morocco, which in the past has had to diversify its business portfolio, can contribute its expertise to its southern neighbor.

20. The calculations are based on the structure of respective revealed comparative advantages (RCAs) of both countries. <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/DP/2019/French/EIMUSGFA.ashx>

**Table 2: Moroccan outward FDI flows, cumulative 2013-2017, in %.**

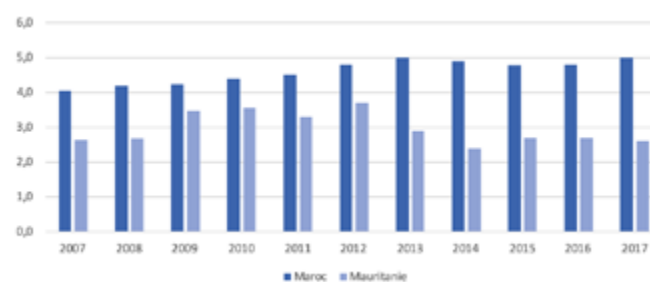
Country	Cumulated FDI
Ivory Coast	23.2
Mauritius	10.3
Egypt	27.6
Mali	3.7
Central African Republic	0.7
Guinea	1.5
Burkina Faso	1.9
Senegal	3.5
Gabon	2.8
Cameroon	5.7
Mauritania	1.7
Tunisia	3.9
Chad	0.8
Nigeria	3.2
Benin	3.7
Togo	2.6
Tanzania	0.1
Congo	1.8
Ghana	0.5
Kenya	0.1
Guinea-Bissau	0.1
Algeria	0.2
Niger	0.2
DR Congo	0.1
Total Africa	100.0

### c) Investing in common goods: the role of infrastructure

In recent years, Morocco has made considerable efforts in the area of infrastructure and has greatly improved its position in the Doing Business ranking established by the World Bank (WB). In a more strategic area for both Mauritania and Morocco, namely port activity, Morocco has developed expertise to the point where it has become a key player in Africa with the Tangier-Med port. Mauritania, with its ports of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, can contribute to the creation of a West African port hub,

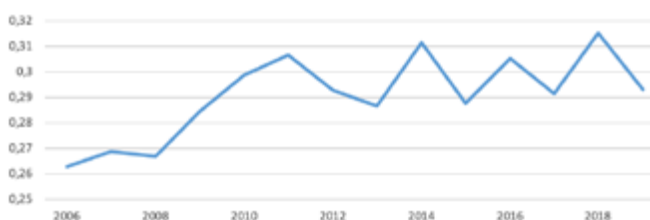
which, as such, can greatly benefit exporting companies as well as international trade logistics companies in both countries. In 2018, Morocco and Mauritania ranked 93rd and 112th respectively in terms of international trade and transport infrastructure according to World Bank figures. At present, bilateral activity between Morocco and Mauritania remains moderate. Indeed, the bilateral connectivity index of scheduled maritime transport, which measures two-way links between Moroccan and Mauritanian ports, is fluctuating and averages around 0.29 between 2006 and 2019. Over the same period, Morocco had an average index of 0.58 with Spain. Stronger trade activity goes hand in hand with increased maritime connections.

**Figure 4: Quality of port infrastructure<sup>21</sup>**



Source: WDI, World Bank

**Figure 5: Bilateral Scheduled Maritime Transport Connectivity Index Morocco - Mauritania, annual**



Source: UNCTAD

Moreover, cooperation between the two countries and enhanced West African integration also require

21. Quality of port infrastructure, WEF (1=extremely underdeveloped to 7=well developed and efficient by international standards)

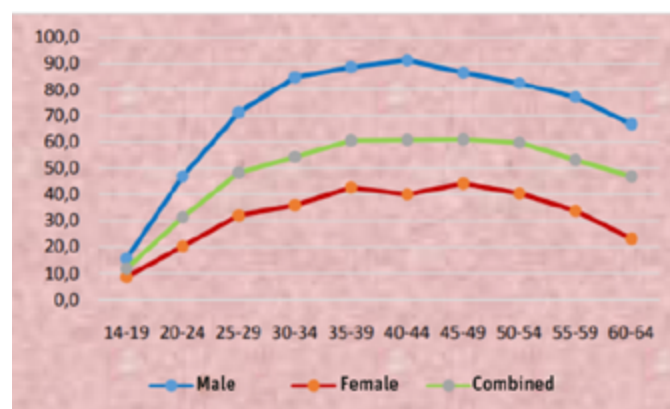
investment in common infrastructure. For example, both countries could invest in better roads to facilitate transit within the West African region on the one hand, and transit between Africa and the European Union on the other. This would create a positive spill-over effect in southern Morocco and northern Mauritania, with significant job creation. This would make it possible to strengthen local economic activity and have a direct effect on employment linked to construction sites, but also indirect effects linked to the creation of peripheral activities along the production chain. At the regional level, this would make it possible to link North and South in both countries and thus reduce internal disparities between them. In addition, the two countries could consider a joint energy project, such as the Noor station in Ouarzazate, Morocco. For example, an industrial park specializing in the energy sector, ideally located at the border, would generate agglomeration savings and productivity gains through geographical proximity and lower transaction costs.

#### d) Education: common challenges and destinies

On the human capital front, both countries have failed in their strategies for training and integrating young people into the labor market. In its roadmap for the development of Mauritania's economy, the government has pointed to shortcomings in the education system, including limited access, low parity and overall poor quality. Yet Morocco has been beset by these same deficiencies for several years (e.g. youth unemployment rate is around 26%). Cooperation between the two countries in this area can have positive spillovers for respective economies and reduce mismatch issues in the labor market. The aim is to cooperate in areas such as vocational training, enhanced university exchanges, but also the creation of research and innovation centers capable of contributing to scientific production in the Maghreb and Africa. As part of the recent rapprochement between the two countries, it has been agreed that bilateral cooperation in the field of vocational training will be stepped up. This initiative relaunched a partnership agreement, signed in 2005 between both countries, establishing cultural cooperation for the period 2005-2007. However, this remains largely insufficient in view of the potential for cooperation between these two countries, especially since they share an Arab-Berber and Muslim culture which they be leveraged to strengthen ties. According to UNESCO figures, in 2018, Morocco was the leading destination for Mauritanian students studying abroad,

with more than 1,000 students enrolled in Moroccan institutions. That same year, fifty-five Moroccan students moved in the opposite direction. Action in this sector can therefore be a means of creating positive externalities. Both countries could benefit from an exchange of knowledge and know-how, and from the blossoming of joint initiatives. Moreover, the job market in both Morocco and Mauritania is characterized by low participation of women. According to data from the Office of the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP), in 2017, only 22.4% of women participated in the workforce. In Mauritania, the rate was 28.4 % in the same year. This is largely explained by existing barriers to access the labor market: a cultural barrier, linked to the domination of a patriarchal vision of society, forcing women not stay out of the workforce as well as barrier linked to women's poor access to education from secondary school onwards (e.g. the female enrollment rate is less than 40% in Morocco). Yet, there is a positive correlation in both the Moroccan and Mauritanian markets between education level and the probability of women joining the labor force. Thus, the two countries could launch a joint initiative to encourage female employment and entrepreneurship in the southern regions of Morocco and northern Mauritania, but also to further target university exchange and scholarship opportunities for women. Placing this within the framework of a regional development plan would enable both countries to improve the functioning of their respective labor markets. But beyond the economic and quantitative aspects, it would also provide a qualitative boost to women and rehabilitate their role in society.

**Figure 6: Labor market participation rate in Mauritania, 2017**



Source: National Statistics Office



**Figure 7: Female employment rate (%) by status in main occupation: national level**

Main occupation	2007	2017
Employees	20.7	19.7
Freelancers	13.8	12.3
Employers	6.7	7.2
Caregivers	55.1	57.5
Apprentices	11.6	13.4
Associate Cooperative Members	10.3	9.5
Others	40.5	63.7
Total	27.2	23.2

Source: National Employment Survey 2017, HCP

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Evolution of relations between Morocco and Mauritania is contingent upon the overall context in the region. North Africa, at grips with the resurgence of counter-revolutions in the Arab world, and the Sahel-Saharan region, grappling with terrorist threats in the region, make it difficult to establish a climate of peace, which is necessary for economic development and progress. Nevertheless, with regard to bilateral relations between Rabat and Nouakchott, several positive signs have been sent by both capitals with a view to usher in a new stage in their relations, including a royal message carried by Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, calling for

enhanced cooperation between the two countries. On the continental scene, Nouakchott supported Morocco's return to the African Union in January 2017. A year later, Mauritania supported the Kingdom's candidacy to the Peace and Security Council of the pan-African organization. In terms of governance, both countries aspire to collaborate on the themes of decentralization and local development, two themes at the heart of the Moroccan and Mauritanian development project.

Given its importance for the institutional future of both countries, cooperation in the field of decentralization could be the cornerstone of a rapprochement already initiated between Morocco and Mauritania.

On the economic front, both countries have made significant progress in recent years. Nevertheless, they would benefit from greater cooperation in certain strategic areas. Firstly, with regard to international trade, it has been noted that both countries have a relatively untapped trade potential. It would therefore be in their interest to increase their trade and to push for greater trade integration across the North African region. In the sub-Saharan zone, Mauritania, by cooperating with Morocco, can become a hub for the region. Investment in common infrastructure and energy projects can have important spillovers in terms of job creation and boosting local activity. Morocco, for its part, would strengthen its economic presence in Africa. In terms of human capital, both countries are performing below expectations. Cooperation in university and vocational training and harnessing cultural and linguistic similarities as a vector of prosperity. Cultural and academic dialogue, in particular, can be a means of disseminating common knowledge and intelligence.

## About the authors

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Tobi Youssef has joined the Policy Center for the New South in 2017. He is currently working on Politics and Governance in the Maghreb Region; his areas of expertise are geopolitics, political risk and nation building. Youssef Tobi obtained a Master Degree at Sciences Po Lyon where he wrote two thesis on “ the role of Moroccan Bank in Africa, a non-state actor in service of the Diplomacy” and the “ Chasm between the mediatic and associative representation of refugees : a case study”.

Prior to working at the Think tank, Tobi Youssef participated in a Social Entrepreneurship Project in Beirut, Lebanon and conducted an internship in a NGO based in Marseille where he assisted refugees and helped raise funds.

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Youssef El Jai est Research Assistant in Economics au Policy Center for the New South. Il a rejoint le think tank en septembre 2019 après avoir obtenu un Master of Analysis and Policy in Economics de Paris School of Economics et du Magistère d'Economie de la Sorbonne. Il a par ailleurs enseigné la Macroéconomie internationale à l'Université Paris Dauphine et occupé la fonction de chargé de travaux dirigés en macroéconomie à l'Université Paris Descartes. Il se spécialise sur des thématiques d'économie internationale, d'analyse de cycles d'activités ainsi que des questions de croissance de long terme et de développement.

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The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership, and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

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