



## MOROCCO

### Relieving Urban Pressures through New Towns and City Extensions

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Being a gateway to Africa and Europe, Morocco is home to over 33 million inhabitants of which 6.3% are urban. Since the twentieth century, most major Moroccan cities have been newly planned either through urban extensions of historical cities or through new towns development. The slum population however grew 5.6% per year between 1992 and 2004, reaching 8.2% of the urban households in 2004, which represented around 1.7 million people living in 1000 slums. In 2004, building on the commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the government launched two major national initiatives to tackle slums and housing issues: the Cities without Slums Programme and the development of four new towns. These initiatives, based on a twin-track approach, were part of a larger government strategy to enhance the supply of affordable and adequate housing.

The Al Omrane Group, a government-owned holding company that acts through local subsidiaries, was established in 2007 to implement the development of new towns and the programme of Cities without Slums. The development of new towns has mostly targeted low income households in the region of Marrakesh (new town of Tamansourt), Rabat (new town of Tamesna), Casablanca (new town of Sahel-Lakhyayta) and Tangiers (new town of Chrafate), which accounted for more than 50% of the households living in slums countywide. Despite responding to increased housing demand, several shortcomings emerged following implementation, including site locations that are fully state-owned land, weak feasibility studies, a lack of adequate mixed land-uses and social diversity.

Nevertheless, new towns are rethinking social housing through an urban scheme, rather than solely pursuing interventionist projects that are often not proportionate with the scale of demand. Accordingly, since 2009, a “second generation of new towns”, such as Zenata, Benguéir Ville verte and Khouribga Mine verte, was developed to address the above shortcomings. This new group of new towns has been launched with new stakeholders in the private sector and in partnership with state companies, such as the Office Chérifien des Phosphates (leader in phosphate industry) and the Caisse de Dépôt et de Gestion (state-owned financial institution active in real estate development). The “first generation” was mainly focused on new towns development, while the “second generation” pursued the planning of large urban extensions of existing cities.

Despite huge financial investments, the first generation of new towns has had a limited impact to date on responding to the housing demand and relieving pressure from metropolises. The first two new towns – Tamansourt (2004) and Tamesna (2007) – have attracted a total of 85 000 people out of the 700 000 expected (12%). The government has however taken corrective actions to revitalize these towns through appropriate recovery plans and appointing an inter-ministerial committee to implement them. The key lesson learnt from these practices is to invest in non-residential assets and employment opportunities in order to create attractive, productive and liveable and cities. Financial mechanisms and investment frameworks, such as public/private partnerships, have also helped in structuring and modernizing the construction, real estate and housing sectors.