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Delivering Inclusive and Sustainable Infrastructure
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Building the first eco-city in Morocco



The EIB has provided a EUR 150m loan, with another EUR 150 million by Agence Française de Développement (AFD), to help tackle Morocco's uncontrolled urbanization by developing what is essentially a new town. The aim is to create 100 000 jobs and house 300 000 residents in 30 years.

Greater Casablanca, a metropolis with 4.25 million inhabitants and the major economic centre of Morocco, has experienced very strong economic growth which has resulted in a massive rural exodus, leading to uncontrolled urbanization, and major socio-economic and spatial imbalances. Casablanca itself has grown rapidly, resulting in congestion and a shortage of housing for the growing middle income families. To the north of Casablanca lies Zenata, a commune where more than 30 000 people had settled across 26 informal slums, in housing without land titles. This 1600 ha expanse of land is what the government decided to develop into a carefully planned, appropriately densified, mixed use, energy efficient and sustainable city which will provide employment for its citizens and relieve pressure on existing urban areas.

Building a map of impacts

Zenata employs the core principles of sustainable development: public modes of transport, optimisation of water management, green corridors, high density, and social and functional diversity. The project aims to reconcile urban development with sustainable goals, and a number of environmental and social impacts had to be considered first. The EIB's rigorous due diligence process was employed to ensure these impacts are minimised.

Within the EU, projects such as this typically require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

There are no such requirements in Morocco, but an environmental impact assessment (EIA) has been carried out incorporating elements required by the EIB and AFD to align it with the typical requirements of an SEA. The EIA indicates that negative environmental impacts on air quality, soils, groundwater, etc. will be modest or negligible, and primarily concentrated during the construction phase. Environmental impacts will be mitigated through measures incorporated into an Environmental and Social Management Plan. The project is expected to generate significant positive environmental benefits, for example through the provision of sewerage infrastructure and the elimination of wastewater discharges from informal settlements.

Social impact challenges of the project

Zenata aims to create 100 000 jobs in many high value added activities (in the commercial centre, exhibition centre, education and health centres, logistics centre, tourism, light industry, municipal services, etc.). Zenata will also have an impact on the construction industry, which accounts for almost a million direct and indirect jobs in Morocco.

In line with EIB environmental and social standards, the project owner will seek to mitigate the risk associated with involuntary resettlement by drawing up a Resettlement Policy Framework and Resettlement Action Plan. At the same time, meaningful consultations will be held with the people affected by the project. These measures are expected to result in improved living condi-

tions, particularly for shanty dwellers, who constitute the vast majority of the individuals affected. This group will also benefit as a result of gaining more secure land tenure rights, whilst remaining in the vicinity of their current homes and communities. The Bank has requested the promoter to enhance long-term in-house capacity related to social impacts.

Climate change aspects

Beyond the economic aims, the Zenata project also seeks to reach new realms in urban planning in terms of its environmental impacts

The design copes with harsh natural conditions by storing seasonal flood water in retention ponds to better manage rainwater and therefore contribute to enhance the urban environment. Several features of the urban design will mitigate climate change impact. The buildings are oriented to make use of natural lighting. The planning channels wind flows to cool the city during the hottest months. Up to 30% of the land is reserved for public parks to moderate high temperatures and promote biodiversity. Energy-efficient lighting and building construction is being deployed. There is also an emphasis on sustainable mobility such as dedicated rights of way for public transport and cycle lanes.

Several measures in the urban design have resilience to climate change, and climate adaptation, in mind, notably incorporating the foundations of the rampart-like coastal line of "cabanon" houses to form a flood defence; orientation of urban development to take account of natural geomorphology and use of extensive water retention areas which provide a reserve for storm-water drainage in extreme weather events.

The EIB will contribute to the creation of an Environmental and Social Management System to guide the implementation of the project. We are committed to the close and sustained monitoring of these aspects to ensure that environmental and social risks and impacts are adequately mitigated. The project meets most EIB sustainable urban development priorities—urbanisation, migration, sustainability and climate change.