Overview

Morocco faces challenges in managing and using its water resources more sustainably, as well as in developing equitable and efficient water supply and sanitation services. IBRD worked with Morocco on a range of water reforms that led to a greater emphasis on resource preservation and water efficiencies, with particular focus on irrigation. These reforms also contributed to a jump in the number of rural people with access to potable water, and in the number of poor peri-urban households connected to piped water and sewage services.

Challenge

Scarce and unevenly distributed rainfall has made water a key economic and social development issue in Morocco. The country has invested heavily in dams, water supply capacity and large-scale irrigation systems, to secure water for urban and agricultural demands. While largely successful, this strong supply focus was not accompanied by balancing policies aimed at sustainability, such as water demand management, water resource conservation and protection, and equitable service development in rural and poor communities. Morocco’s water management strategies needed to adapt to meet a number of challenges: growing water deficits, persisting gaps in service access, slow changes in legislation, limited infrastructure programs, pressing demographic growth, and climate change.

Approach

In 2007, a $100 million Morocco Water Sector development policy loan supported comprehensive water reform in Morocco to address legislative, institutional, financing, and planning gaps, and inefficiencies in Morocco’s water sector. Prior to the loan, IBRD supported extensive analytical work and capacity building with $2.2 million and another $8.5 million in trust fund grants. This analytical work, along with unprecedented levels of inter-ministerial dialogue, led to a reform program in which water-demand management, conservation and resource protection became new thrusts in Morocco’s water strategy. Investments were designed to build infrastructure while supporting implementation of new policies by central and decentralized agencies on the
ground, such as for irrigation modernization and resource conservation, rural water supply, peri-urban service development and urban sanitation.

Results

Morocco is now on track to exceed the targets for water and sanitation services contained in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), thanks to greater public spending on water supply and sanitation infrastructure. Between 2005 and 2009, public expenditure in support of urban, peri-urban, and rural water supply and sanitation infrastructure programs rose to 25 percent from 5 percent of the total public expenditure for water (which also covers water resource management and irrigation). As a result of acceleration of rural water supply programs, including a $60 million IBRD-financed project, potable water access has risen to over 87 percent in 2009 from 50 percent in 2004.

The government has also placed new emphasis on water management policies, including development of new alternatives, such as desalination and water reuse. The MAD 34 billion National Irrigation Water Efficiency Program, launched in 2008, is aimed at generating water efficiency gains of 30-to-50 percent by converting conventional irrigation systems to water-saving technology. The World Bank Group also is assisting with the development of an innovative desalination private-public partnership in the Souss-Massa region, to complement irrigation resources and conserve groundwater.

Toward the Future

Besides the implementation of on-going projects, next steps in the water partnership with the Government of Morocco may include policy dialogue and lending to accompany further reforms and investment for climate change adaptation of water resources management, irrigation sector modernization, water supply and sanitation sector reorganization and regulation, and nationwide replication of peri-urban connection pilots.