6.1.8 Morocco



Context

The conflict is located in Morocco's Souss-Massa region, particularly the 111,130-hectare Western Anti-Atlas Natural Park announced in 2024 across 72 douars, 13 municipalities and the provinces of Taroudant, Tiznit and Chtouka Ait Baha. The same Amazigh territory is already affected by the approximately 2.5-million-hectare Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve and the 33,800-hectare Souss-Massa National Park. It is a dry and increasingly water-stressed landscape of argan forests, terraced farming, pastoralism and export agriculture. The case study traces present tensions to protectorate-era laws that displaced Amazigh customary governance, or Azref, and strengthened state control over land and natural resources. Customary institutions such as the Jmaa, councils of elders and collective systems including Agdal historically organised resource use. After independence, much of the colonial legal architecture remained. Recent conservation, pastoral and collective-land reforms have therefore entered a territory already shaped by dispossession, economic marginalisation, drought and competition over land and water.

Conflict description

Communities describe the new natural park as another stage in a long process of enclosure undertaken without meaningful consultation. The conflict is not confined to a single park boundary. Overlapping conservation classifications, state control of communal land, intensive agribusiness, industrial pastoralism, quarrying, mining, tourism and renewable-energy interests combine to reduce community access and authority. The Souss-Massa National Park's 1995 management plan formally included traditional-use and natural-resource-management zones where grazing, beekeeping, agriculture and tourism were to continue in consultation with communities. The study reports that these provisions were not respected. Export-oriented agriculture has expanded into argan areas and consumes most water demand from the Chtouka aquifer, while climate change and prolonged drought have accelerated depletion. Indigenous smallholders face declining access to land and water, while large farms and greenhouse production generate substantial export value. Law 113-13 on pastoral transhumance is presented as sustainable management, but the study argues that it favours large camel herds linked to wealthy investors. Local goat keepers require permits to enter argan areas, whereas outside herds allegedly enter with impunity, damage trees and crops and take argan fruit. Communities report intimidation, violence and official inaction. Conservation management has also introduced or failed to control wildlife, notably wild boar and mouflon, causing crop and terrace damage while residents face penalties for killing protected animals. The 2019 collective-land reforms removed earlier inalienability protections and gave the Ministry of the Interior greater authority to lease or transfer communal lands without community consent. Private investment further intensifies the dispute. The LafargeHolcim quarry operates within the argan biosphere reserve and treats local people as

holders of use rights rather than owners. Across these processes, residents experience impoverishment, displacement and erosion of social structures. Men and youth migrate, while Amazigh women who once held key roles in household and ecosystem knowledge are pushed into low-paid agricultural labour. Legal action is costly and prolonged, producing a war of attrition in which formal procedures, influence and unequal resources favour investors and state institutions.

Resistance and pathways forward

Resistance is led by communities, the Akal Movement, the Amazigh Indigenous Network AZUL and allied local organisations. They organise frequent demonstrations, document land and resource violations, issue statements and bring claims to international mechanisms including the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Universal Periodic Review. The movement links defence of specific lands to a broader demand for recognition of Amazigh status, customary governance and self-determination. It also promotes legal literacy, documentation in Tamazight and stronger coordination among tribes, associations, women and youth. The study proposes a far-reaching settlement rather than minor mitigation. Morocco should constitutionally recognise Amazigh rights to land, territory and surface and subsurface resources; repeal colonial and neo-colonial expropriation laws; and make community participation and consent mandatory for conservation, extractive and investment projects. An independent observatory with strong Indigenous representation should identify dispossession, determine rightful ownership and support restitution or fair compensation. Current exploitation should be suspended until agreements are reached, while forced displacement, repression and criminalisation of defenders should end. Independent experts should assess damage from agriculture, extractive industries, waste, excessive pumping, introduced species and industrial pastoralism. Restoring customary institutions such as Agdal, Tajmaat and Amghar-based mediation would help reconnect conservation with locally legitimate governance. International bodies can support monitoring, training and protection of defenders, but a durable resolution ultimately requires the state to treat Amazigh communities not as obstacles to green development, but as rights-holders and knowledgeable custodians of the argan landscape.