

Ben Clark, Axel Fisher

The WFP 1968–72 rural housing program in Morocco

1 Introduction

Drawing on an ongoing reconstitution of the *Centre d'expérimentation, de recherche et de formation's* (CERF, “center for experimentation, research, and training”) archives,¹ this chapter deals with the 1968–72 Rural Housing Program,² jointly prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Moroccan government. Its main objective was to “improve” rural habitat and local equipment using the food-for-work method, in order to support the territorial transformations required by the country's agricultural development project. It was also conceived as a practical measure to curb rural exodus and support agrarian reform. Eventually, the implementation of this WFP-backed operation spanned from 1969 to 1975, covering over 170 worksites throughout the country.³

This chapter approaches the Rural Housing Program from the perspective of its continuities and discontinuities with a set of development actions initiated by actors both national and international, from the late colonial to the early post-independence eras. The first part traces the context of the program's origins, exploring three aspects: (1) the gradual emergence of “ruralism,” a new technical and ideological approach to rural planning; (2) the rise of policies promoting “self-

1 The CERF's archives are currently dispersed across various Moroccan institutions (mainly the Ministry of Housing and the *École nationale d'architecture* [ENA] in Rabat) and individual archives related to former CERF members (in particular the Fonds Jean Hensens held at the Faculty of Architecture of the Université libre de Bruxelles [ULB], as well as the Alain Masson and Jean Dethier collections held at the Archives du Maroc). In addition, important documents concerning CERF and the Rural Housing Program have also been located at the United Nations Archives, the *Centre national de documentation* (CND), the library of the *Institut national d'aménagement et d'urbanisme* (INAU), the archives of the Aga Khan Foundation, and the archives of the human sciences department of the *Institut agronomique et vétérinaire* Hassan II in Rabat.

2 This program was known in Morocco as PAM 68–72, after the French acronym for the WFP: *Programme alimentaire mondial*. In UN archives, the program was named “Project MOR416.”

3 According to WFP, *Morocco 416. Rural housing and Community development in selected areas* (draft report for the WFP, 1975), in United Nations Archives, United Nations Registry Section 1946–1979, S-0175–1472–0008.

help” approaches (such as the *Promotion nationale*, a national program of public works relying on a volunteer workforce, or early UN-supported “Community Development” programs); and (3) the expanding involvement of international organizations (e.g. foreign expertise within the renewed context of Western patronage embedded in *coopération* [“foreign aid”]).

In the second part of the article, we first look at the establishment of the CERF, which was created by the Ministry of Interior in Rabat to implement this rural development project. We then analyze the Rural Housing Program by detailing its initial objectives, the methods advocated by foreign experts, the operation’s achievements, and its criticisms.

From this perspective, in line with recent scholarship which questions the country’s independence (1956) as a moment of clear rupture,⁴ the Rural Housing Program generalizes and intensifies a set of intentions, policies, and practices that had already been initiated and promoted in post-war Morocco by various national and international actors. In this sense, the Rural Housing Program should be regarded as the climax of the development methods promoted in the 1960s, globally known as the “development decade” and locally as the “countryside decade.”⁵

2 Post-war rural development

2.1 The emergence of ruralism

In the early days of the Protectorate and throughout the interwar period, rural development was almost exclusively oriented towards the development of colonial-owned lands, mostly located within what colonial administrators often referred to as *Maroc utile* [“useful Morocco”]. Colonial authorities focused on providing infrastructures (roads, railways, irrigation networks, electric power supply) support-

4 The continuities of architectural and planning policies between French-ruled and independent Morocco have recently been put forward by A. Chaoui, D. Williford and M. Tenzon. Aziza Chaoui, “Depoliticizing Group GAMMA: contesting modernism in Morocco,” *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity*, ed. Duanfang Lu (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 57–84, doi:10.4324/9780203840993–9; Daniel Williford, “Concrete futures: Technologies of urban crisis in colonial and postcolonial Morocco” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2020); Michele Tenzon, “Village design and rural modernization in the Moroccan Gharb, 1946–1968” (PhD diss., Université libre de Bruxelles, 2023).

5 Alain Claisse, “Stratégies d’aménagement et supports sociaux au Maroc,” *Annuaire de l’Afrique du Nord* 22 (1983): 243–257.