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Original Research Paper

## Education, Illiteracy and Women in Rural Morocco: Case Study of Taounate Province



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### Abstract

In an attempt to shed light on the general situation of rural women and girls, this article makes a part of an investigation carried out in a rural area of Morocco. The survey revolves around studying of the situation of rural women and girls in the province of Taounate. It has been built on fieldwork that was accomplished in three villages of the province. The study looks through the reasons why illiteracy is still at its height amongst females in these areas, despite various literacy campaigns conducted in the province; remarkably after the launching of the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2005. Actually, there is a multitude of reasons leading to girls' non-schooling in rural zones. It has been demonstrated that poverty, often declared to be behind this issue, should not be seen the main reason but other factors.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

'When it comes to education concerning women in rural areas, it is almost non-existent' (Biadillah, 2002).

'Ignorance is the first condition of enslavement, and ignorant women will always be the tools of the men who are the enemies of freedom' (Howe and Howe, 1913).

'The whole education of women ought to be relative to men, to please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to make life sweet and agreeable to them- these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught to them from their infancy' (Rousseau, 1906).

Bing the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another by means of direct instruction, education has proven to be "a vehicle for social mobility, openness to the world, access to modernity and

development of social ties" (HDR50, 2006). It leads to greater choices that may create changes in the world as a whole.

Alternatively, illiteracy is the obvious consequence of people's non-schooling. It has been assumed to be associated with poverty, isolation, and women. It is more related to adults. The latter's literacy, on the other hand, is the percentage of people whose ages '15 and above' who can -with understanding- read and write a short and simple statement on their everyday life (UNESCO).

This is an investigation carried out in rural Morocco, revolving around the study of the situation of rural women and girls in the province of Taounate. It is based on a fieldwork realized in three villages of Taounate province. Undoubtedly, describing rural women in a specific area is a difficult matter because of the relatively recent revolutionary changes that are continuing to take place in Morocco, as a whole, since 2000; especially after the launching of the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2005. This was a particularly interesting royal initiative as it raised expectations, mainly to reduce

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poverty and ensure education for everyone, among other targets. Thus, it is likely that what was true last year or even last month may not be the same next year or next month. However, the results of the survey I carried out let me change this point of view, at least for the present time.

The importance of such a topic stems from the reality to be mentioned until now; namely, “one can find rural girls of school age still exploited in agricultural and domestic work as ‘auxiliary laborers’ or ‘family helpers’, while others have already become mothers before finishing their childhood”. Yet, what I should mention here is that each area has its own specificities as the Moroccan society is made up of diverse mosaics of societal structures.

While carrying out this research, I was besieged with a number of problematical questions. One of these is: why does illiteracy still reigns among females in these areas despite various literacy campaigns?

To answer these questions, I attempted to ‘triangulate’ my research by combining a variety of complementary research methods to some extent, in order to provide more perceptions and more depth on the topic under study. Thus, I expanded my data collection techniques to include both primary and secondary data: (questionnaire, interview and observation – making use of systematic reflection on my own involvement and intuitive understanding of the problems occurring in the region – in addition to the use of documentary evidence, in order to form the case studies.

### 1.1 An Overview of Rural Women

Recent statistics tell us that women represent 70% of illiterates in the world; 75% of these are in the rural world; performing 70% of work at the international level; while not earning more than 10% of the international income; benefitting from less than 5% of bank loans; and possessing less than 1% of international resources (Lamrini, 2010).

Conditions of rural women differ according to their environment and their families’ economic level. Rural women in Morocco (as may be the case in many other developing countries) are individuals who were obliged -by way of the geographical force- to live in marginalized zones, in areas that real development projects failed to reach.

### 1.2 The Moroccan Educational Strategy

Since 1999, education has been declared among the pivotal national priorities. The Moroccan government has taken several reforms to improve access to education and reduce regional differences in the provision of education. There has been a great tendency to improve the quality of outcomes in the education sector which has become considered a key priority for Morocco’s government. To overcome the challenges faced by this

sector, the government embarked on a comprehensive reform of the education and training system, with the promulgation of the 1999 National Education and Training Charter (CNEF). The CNEF, with strong national consensus, declared 2000-2009 ‘A Decade of Education and Training’, and established education and training as a national priority, second only to territorial integrity. The reform program, as laid out by the CNEF, also received strong support from the donor community.

This coincides with the debate initiated on the Millennium Development Goals which Morocco endorsed the commitment to achieve. Then, the country knew the launching of the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD), as a way of developing the excluded and secluded parts of the country where women were most of the targeted. Nevertheless, during the course of implementation, the reform program encountered delays. Thus, even in present-time Morocco, the high percentages of illiteracy amongst women in the country are in the majority of cases composed of rural women (Ennaji and Sadiqi, 2008). In retrospect, the Moroccan educational system, as another vector of discrimination against rural women that seems to have, until recently, favored urban areas to rural ones. Indeed, generalized education has not systematically favored equality between urban and rural women and between men and women (Ennaji and Sadiqi, 2008; Ennaji, 2008).

## 2 RURAL WOMEN AND ILLITERACY

The problem of illiteracy and low-level schooling is especially evident in the rural areas. To recall, this term refers to the situation of people (women in our case) who had never attended school or else who had attended it but have an insufficient knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic and the basic skills to ensure autonomy in simple situations of their quotidian life. Unfortunately, this definition can be applicable only to countries where the phenomenon still prevails even among its younger generations, like ours. Whereas, it implies (for more developed countries) not being able to speak a second language as well being deficient in what concerns knowledge of new technologies of communication and information (ICT).

Although gender equality principle has been nearly achieved in terms of primary school enrolment in most developing regions, United Nations reports testify that up to now there are many children who are denied this right, especially rural girls who still continue to lag behind boys in school enrolment. This may be because in most village families, male members are given preference over female ones in terms of school attending rights.

One of the themes the study comes out with says that illiteracy is still at height. Thus, in spite of the launching of many literacy campaigns, illiteracy continues to prevail, in rural areas. An example of this can be found in Bouadel community. Illiteracy increased

with the rate of 22.47% from 60.3% (2004) to reach 82.77% (2010). Moreover, only a few part of rural girls aged up to 12 continue to climb up the ladder to the secondary stage, while pursuing studies in the higher levels of education (universities and other institutions of learning) remains a hope and a dream for the most part, as the tables in the appendix show.

The findings of this study unveil a large number of women and girls being illiterates, regardless of their socio-economic status or of the village they belong to. The majority are in the Non-Structural Education<sup>1</sup> classes: which means either they had never been to school or they had stopped before getting the primary certificate level. Certainly, this does not mean that there are no intellectual women in the study areas; it is only the nature of the sample (carried out inside centers of literacy and NSE among women and girls) came out with this result. Indeed, there are intellectuals however in small numbers.

This fact has been highlighted by other studies and reports of the World Bank. It has been found that throughout Morocco, women's illiteracy rate is higher than men's. They reach 83% in rural areas, even 90 % in some communities as testified by a recent net report elaborated by the [World Bank \(2008\)](#). Hence, although education completion and enrolment rates have improved, the possibility of achieving the MDGs for Morocco is uncertain ([World Bank, 2008](#) and [2009](#)).

Women's literacy has become a priority target of many developing countries since the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), which was held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990. The conference acknowledges the need to reduce the gender gap in illiteracy by encouraging and ensuring girls' and women's education. Morocco, now, is fully committed to eradicate illiteracy. It officially adopted its National Literacy and Non-formal Education Strategy in 2004. The launch of an integrated vision of literacy, development, and poverty reduction promoted by the NIHD, aforementioned, in 2005 is another important procedure. In fact, these efforts remain inefficient although great, and this is partly, due to high drop-out rates.

## 2.1 Reasons of Female's Illiteracy

As early as 1970s, many Moroccan scholars have treated this fact for the sake of investigating the obstacles preventing little girls from attending school. [Mernissi \(1988\)](#), as an instance, finds out that parents hesitate when it comes to the education of children, because they are needed to help in the fields. Moreover, most parents think that there is no necessity for the education of their daughters and there is no need to invest money on them since their future is linked to the home and because one day they are going to get married. Thus, their education is 'a kind of investment that will not benefit the family'. This justifies the high rate of underage marriage which is still a real problem in these areas (the occurrence of Article 20 of the Family Code, which allows the judge to marry the minor girl, encourages the fact).

What has been noticed and is really shocking is that dropping out of school is considered less problematic for girls than it is for boys because the former can always find a husband who can provide for them, argues [Ennaji \(2008\)](#). In addition, customs and traditions tend to be more powerful than law and the family is the main institution and decision-maker regarding women's lives. A conclusion found out is that: "it does not pay to educate women because they are going to get married [and] have children..." as parents' justification to impede girls from continuing their studies, expressed by respondents of [Havighurst and Dreyer \(1975: 434\)](#).

However, some researchers turn it to poverty; [Belarbi \(1999\)](#), for instance, assumes that parents are unable to pay for books. I see that this variable might not be one hundred percent accurate. There are some parents who may be wealthy and do not accept to send their daughters to school. Another factor, she adds, being one of the reasons hampering girls from pursuing their studies or even starting it, we find geographical – put together with– ecological conditions, which are very difficult especially in some regions. Therefore, deficiency of infrastructure at the level of roads: namely, schools are very far away from towns, then because rural parents fear the long distances that their daughters will traverse in order to reach school, they prefer for them to stay at home to help with household chores (the mother in the housework and the father in agriculture) as they are forcedly needed. More importantly, the young girl should not meet with men in the public spaces (here we find a kind of paradox: the girl is allowed to go to the fields and water sources, most of the time alone, where there are also men and it is less safe than school). Accordingly, at the age of schooling, these girls learn to do all the basic household tasks of washing, cooking, childcare, delivering messages and irrigating the field.

What is more harmful is that the majority of girls still do not attend school (mainly college and secondary school) which is due to the cultural definition of women as wives and mothers. Parents think that their daughters do not need to learn to read or write as their future life should be centered on marriage. This fact lets girls be prepared only for marriage. Hence, even though the problem is in decrease among the younger generations, early marriage patterns (as early as 14 or 15 even with the new Family Code) result in high drop-outs rates for girls. Parents want their daughters to complete sixth grade and then become housewives. For that reason, they should learn how to do the housework, how to be shameful in addition to some useful behaviour that they think will be necessary in their new families, or host families.

Table 1. Rural illiteracy in Bouadel community

	Females (%)	Males (%)
National level (2004)	74.5	46
Provincial level (2004)	76.4	43.3
Community level (2004)	60.3	23.5
Community level (2010)	82.77	17.23

Table 2. Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of population in Bouadel community

Sex	Population	Illiteracy rate (%)	Languages read and written			Age distribution of people over 10 by level of schooling		
			Only Arabic (%)	Arabic / French (%)	Other (%)	Preschool (%)	Primary Middle school High school (%)	Higher education (%)
Male	6711	23.5	17.9	47.3	11.3	3.7	68.2	4.6
Female	6980	60.3	12.6	24.2	3.0	0.3	38.4	0.9
Total	13691	42.3	15.2	35.5	7.0	2.0	52.9	2.7

Source: High Commission for Planning: 2004 Census.

Then, school, for these girls, becomes simply an intermission in the round of chores until they drop-out 'by choice'. Those who managed to continue up to secondary school level are lucky and are usually second or higher in the birth order of girls, being relieved of most of the housework by the elder sister(s). This state of affairs encourages discrimination against some girls. As in the case of many other societies, to marry and have children is a cultural imperative in these areas. Thus, 'to be a divorcee, even though a most undesired status, is more preferred over spinsterhood which may result from the effects of studies' (some women claimed).

Such an imperative to marry and have children minimizes the necessity of education and continues to produce more illiterates. Those who are now in their twelfth and drop out of school after sixth grade will be illiterate mothers in the upcoming years. Therefore, when we say that schooling is compulsory but only at primary level, we are just pouring water in sand. Primary level learning cannot lead to a considerable change in a certain society, I underline.

Evidently, there are a host of reasons for not educating girls but the principal factor remains the "belittling of their worth", beyond their role as a 'wife and a mother', proclaims [Agnaou \(2004\)](#). Thus, the education of the rural girl is still largely in line with this lastly cited traditional career.

Therefore, while causes vary, stereotypically including the geo-climatic conditions, those of proximity to school, lack of local educational services<sup>2</sup>, and of safe roads and haulage means to reach the nearest institutions, the more important factors consist in the privation of girls from their movement autonomy and their individual rights as they are useful at homes and in farms for housework and agricultural work. Thus, while a number of girls have dropped out of school to support the family (acting as baby-minders, doing errands and working on the farm) others are kept away for fear that they will "get pregnant", a serious problem, which forms a real complexity to parents in the whole region.

This might show the strong outcome of the negative socio-cultural influences, what is emphasized by the results of the fieldwork I carried out during the period 2009-2012. They show that female illiteracy prevails in

the province under study with large numbers. Hence, despite the fact that, at least, primary schools are very close to the population for a long time, there still exists a wide number of illiterate girls caused by parents' illiteracy and 'ignorance'<sup>3</sup>, especially in rural areas, which has been proven to contribute to the non-schooling of children<sup>4</sup> by 18.27% (among illiterate mothers) and 18.72% (among illiterate fathers). It has also been stated to be a factor in children's drop-outs by 11.84% (from the part of the illiterate mother) and 12.11% (from the part of the illiterate father). What is more amazing is that there were some parents who had sold their cows and gave them as bribe in order to free their daughters from being enrolled in school (as I was told).

Nonetheless, while certain village women consider the acquisition of literacy -and more principally for their daughters- an individual empowerment helping them to have more control over their own lives and meet their basic needs, there are many men ([Zahid and Hamdane, 2004](#)) who might consider it inappropriate. This might be because the latter will lose an individual who used to take care of them and their children and shoulder all the housework, with no complaints or pay. Thus, they endeavor to make the girl memorize that her school life is only secondary and that her real role is to learn how 'to bake a 'loaf of bread' which her father brings and her future husband will bring.

Hence, these factors can be summed up as a lack of awareness of the necessity of education which make parents have negative attitudes towards school, lack of financial means, lack of home infrastructure<sup>5</sup>, and lack of schools or if found are very far, the fact that make parents oppose their daughters' schooling. This situation explains why little girls are not allowed to continue their education or not start it at all, and why parents prefer to marry their daughters at an early age. Obviously, the rural girl remains the most penalized concerning access to knowledge. Unfortunately, "when rural people discuss education, they are referring [...] to the education of boys; education of girls is beside the point" as Maher describes the fact ([Maher, 1974: 77](#)).

## 2.2 Effects of Illiteracy

Even though education has been made compulsory since 1960, the marginalization of the rural areas in the



various educational policies widened the gap between cities and villages and resulted in 'pockets of mass illiteracy' among rural people which effects still reign on Morocco. Hence, in spite of the considerable endeavors that are being made at the government and the civil society levels to remedy this phenomenon among rural women, the spectrum of illiteracy is still very real.

In the rural context characterized by this widespread illiteracy, women are usually in a precarious situation, [Ennaji and Sadiqi \(2008\)](#) declare. Thus, the social meaning of the rural/urban dichotomy is closely associated with the illiterate/literate dichotomy, claims [Sadiqi \(2003\)](#). Then, while not all Moroccan urban women are literate, rural women are predominantly so, she explains. They have smaller access to education than urban women do. Therefore, they are excluded from the benefits of modernization.

It becomes more and more clear that illiterate rural women lead difficult lives, especially when they are in situations that necessitate using reading and writing. These women identify themselves with animals (a female donkey and a cow, in most cases). Hereafter, are some extracts of interviews with some cases I came across in my fieldwork study. These women describe how illiteracy affected their lives:

Case One<sup>6</sup>: 'I used to consider suicide as a solution to my suffering':

Aged nearly 40 years old in 2005, 'F' experienced oppression from her elder brothers. She was deprived of her right to study unlike them. The day of entering school, her father asked her to go shepherding. She refused; she claimed that she wanted to study. He beat her by a stick (she said) and sent her with a sheep herd, for the family's means of living had been animal husbandry. She reports:

I had tried suicide four times. One time I got up at dawn and I was about to go out to a very far land to hang myself with a cord. Suddenly, my father got up in order to make Dawn Prayer; he asked me what I was doing at that time. I gave him the pretext that I just went to the toilet. Another day, I slept with a cord under my pillow in order to go out early, but I woke up until sun had risen. In another temptation to suicide, I took the cord and told my mother that I was going to collect firewood for cooking. I went to a river which was very deep. I entered water and started turning the cord on myself from my feet till my neck. Then, a friend of mine called on me from a very far and high place, asking me to be careful as the river was very dangerous those months because of rain. Another time, I was about 24 years old, I went to a land near the river, and tried to jump to it, but there were some people there. I felt that they are going to see me when throwing myself and obviously would rescue me before dying; and that's what I did not want. I wanted to die

without being discovered that I had committed suicide in order not to dirt my father's honor.

Case Two<sup>7</sup>: A naïve woman – "because of my illiteracy, my husband confided me his papers even those of my divorce".

After two years of marriage while she was eighteen years old, 'H' asked her husband to go to the marriage ceremony of her brother in her family's house in the same *douar* (village) where she was living within her family-in-law. The husband agreed while his mother opposed the fact. 'H' insisted to go; her mother-in-law swore to make her regret the fact. 'H' recalls the events with precise details:

One day, after some time of this incident, my husband gave me an envelope of papers and asked me to hide it for him even from my family; I hid it in my suitcase, where I used to put confidential things he used to give me. After a couple of months, he got very sick, he went to the hospital; he stayed there until he died. After his funeral, I wanted to collect his things together in a suitcase; I opened mine where I put papers, my little brother who was a student at the primary school was with me. I gave him the envelope, my husband gave me to hide, in order to see what it was about. The surprise was very shocking as I discovered that the papers had been about a plan to divorce me: two papers of testaments from the community men, stating that I was mad and did not deserve to be a wife, while the other papers concerned some procedures to divorce. I found myself as naïve as I was. I never felt complexities about literacy until that time".

Undoubtedly, the first discriminatory agent towards rural women is hampering their education while still young and then comes the agricultural exploitation, followed by early marriage which opens the gate to other kinds of exploitation, and thus injustice continues. It is true that the objective reasons behind preventing the rural girl from her right to education (mainly due to a lack of finance, lack of schools, non-ensured haulage, etc.), sometimes, become more decisive. Still, there are many other considerations that interfere: the cultural reasons are most of the time stronger and the basis in most cases. However, I hope not to generalize as this needs more studies in all rural areas.

Outstandingly, illiteracy and lack of training continue to greatly limit rural women's capacities and opportunities for advancement, hindering their abilities to acquire productive skills necessary to meet market demands; undermining their self-confidence; and, in the main, making them vulnerable in the face of all those daily activities for which reading and writing may make the dissimilarity between the two contradictory concepts: 'life' and 'death'. Thus, according to girls and their mothers, as many respondents emphasized, education should be compulsory "as a socially acceptable reason to postpone girls' marriage".

More importantly, a “barrier to women’s emancipation is the prevailing conservative mentality that women are inferior to and dependent on men, that men deserve to have jobs more than women because men must earn a living before they can get married, whereas women may have husbands who can cater for their socio-economic needs” (Ennaji, 2004b: 119).

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Area

This is an investigation carried out in a rural area in Morocco, revolving around the study of the situation of women and girls in the province of Taounate. It is based on fieldwork conducted in three villages of the area. My choice of the province under study, as a case study, was not done arbitrarily or coincidentally. It was made intentionally because of my familiarity with the area as I am one of its natives and also because little attention is given to the situation of rural women in this particular region.

I planned to include more case studies and tempted to visit more villages. Nonetheless, with the immense population of the province this could have been very difficult and time consuming. It was impossible to visit every geographical area of the province then, the investigation of all women has been far from being attainable by one individual researcher. Thus, I tried to delimit my study in terms of area, population and respondents. Accordingly, I decided to carry out this research on only three representative villages<sup>8</sup> – Ain Mediouna, Aouled Azam and Beni Qurra that belong to two communities (Ain Mediouna and Bouadel for the two latter). The selection of these villages was based on a non-random sample using the ‘purposive’ and ‘snowballing’ sampling techniques.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The research component of this paper is based on primary data gathered from interviews and observations. I also made use of secondary resources in the form of published articles and literature. Besides, data collected from some administrations in the form of statistical reports to support the survey results have been of great importance in this paper. One cannot avoid the use of secondary data because sometimes they are necessary as they allow the researcher to shed light, or supplement primary data. They may confirm, modify or contradict the findings. In addition, because a research study should not be conducted in isolation from previous research, it is legitimate and necessary to rely on the existing literature.

Concurrently, with the secondary data collection phase, I started my fieldwork in which I designed two lists of questions. In view of that and prior to data collection in each village, I tried to revive contacts with some of my high school and university colleagues in the neighbouring villages, whom I found working as literacy instructors. Their help was so significant to me, as I was living far away from the province. They facilitated my tasks by letting me interview the women inside their classes.

#### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

In the present paper, I used several sources of data: 1) documents of different categories- publications, government statistics, meetings and conferences reports and notes, etc.; 2) perceptions and experiences of the respondents- summarized in responses to questions in the form of interviews; 3) observations performed in the study areas before and during the research period; and 4) my own contribution and intuitive understanding of the problems occurring in the region. Hence, these data sources seem clear and straightforward. This diversity of sources fits my topic and lets me divide my data into the two main abovementioned families of research- deskwork and fieldwork.

##### 3.3.1 Interviews

As a way of diversifying my methods of research, I carried out a series of interviews, exclusively with women; I made use of some of the questions included in the questionnaires for the interviews which were conducted mainly with illiterate women. The majority claimed that they could not read or write, except one respondent who was a student in high school. I managed to convince her, by the way, to return back to school to pursue her studies after her decision to drop out because of family problems.

Accordingly, my questionnaires, in some respect, turned into group interviews. Based on the same questionnaire schedule, the interview was a semi-structured one; yet, each interview had the character of an informal free conversation. However, even though group interviews, as it is argued, might be more likely to produce valid data than a one-to-one interview, I tried, also, to conduct face-to-face and individual interviews for the purpose of ensuring confidentiality and not distracting the respondent or influencing her by the presence of other interviewees. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and took place in multiple places: either in the association or in respondents’ houses in the areas under study, on the train, or in my house. The questions were prepared in English, translated into Moroccan Arabic and then the responses were translated into English again. I tried to avoid offering opinions and also expressions of approval and disapproval in order not to affect the answers. My close involvement was significant because it explains how I gained access to the women I interviewed and provided relatively easy access to the intimate family lives of some of them.

During some interviews, notes had been taken simply using a paper and a pen or computer. The full writing up of the interview was done, most of the time immediately at the end of each interview. I avoided the use of a tape recorder since it might be damaging for the development of an atmosphere of immediacy and trust between the interviewee and me. Also, I hadn’t recorded the interviews on the tape because most of these women didn’t allow me to do so. One of these women was about 40 years old. She accepted to be recorded at the beginning. She had revealed many important things about her relationship with her close family (father, brothers, and mother), about how she was oppressed,

and how she was not allowed to go to school. Nevertheless, when I finished recording, she asked me to give her the audiotape. She regretted the fact of revealing that she has attempted suicide many times. I promised her not to give it to anybody. She refused and insisted on this, and I relinquished.

### 3.3.2 Observations

In addition to questionnaires and informal interviewing, I employed the observational method. I adopted it in cases of families that I know very well -like members of my family and neighbors- whom I felt they would be embarrassed if I ask them about their private life. Also, I was given the opportunity to observe some families I was introduced to by my former classmate who helped me in the completion of the questionnaires.

I also used observation in my study as a participant (both as a 'complete participant' and 'participant-as-observer') even before starting the research since I belong to the region. I used my memory to recall and recollect memorized data as a 'complete observer', when still young, even before my university studies, because of my daily and natural interaction with people in the area. Likewise, I made use of some comparisons I used to do during my interaction with other female students from different villages who had been with me throughout my high school studies, even though at that time I knew nothing about gender or women's rights, and also it was so little spoken of.

More importantly, I was a 'participant-as-observer' when conducting research in Ain Mediouna and Beni Qurra. I visited some of my respondents' homes not as an observer but as a guest. People there, as the majority of countryside people, are very welcoming and generous. They learnt that I have no family in the villages and I had to go back every afternoon to Aouled Azam, as there are no hotels where I could have a rest after finishing my job in completing the questionnaires. Thus, some respondents and friends in these villages used to refuse that I leave; so, I stayed and seized the opportunity to observe 'as-observer', and this allowed me to scrutinize more women about most of the issues.

## 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Actually, despite the many literacy campaigns that have been launched in the rural areas, illiteracy still reigns among women. Also, it should be mentioned that primary level learning cannot lead to a considerable change in a certain society. This, evidently, should be an impetus to act against this phenomenon.

Being a vital necessity in today's world which should increasingly be seen as a right (unfortunately still violated) rather than just an opportunity, education must serve as the vehicle for transforming attitudes, beliefs, and entrenched social norms that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Accordingly, policies for young rural girls, I assume, might focus mostly on education and schooling, the starting point to cure most societal problems.

When doing research, I noticed that most of my respondents wished that education be compulsory. This way, their fathers and brothers "would not force them to drop out of school to take care of them and marry at a younger age", as they revealed. "I remember when I began my first days in the sixth grade, my elder brother came back home shouting", claimed one of the girls. "He said to my mother: 'it is either me or my sister at school', justifying he could not bear his male classmates looking at me as I started to take shape", she said. Thus, "Education should be compulsory not only in the primary school, but at least till secondary school", summarized the girl.

Therefore, all revolves around one word: 'education', which is the most important factor to liberate women from subordination and marginalization. Nevertheless, it is not disseminated among all rural women, except in some rare cases. However, the real solution to face illiteracy cannot be by building scattered schools here and there, which most of the time, do not encourage girls to study. It is by providing the infrastructure and the necessary equipment in rural areas that may allow the family to do without the services of the girl and accept the idea of her schooling. The following are some salient propositions to be taken into consideration:

- Compelling girls' enrolment at school by strict laws.
- Improving the overall environment of rural areas. This includes providing infrastructure (build and staff more schools, boarding schools, *dar t'alib-a*, health centers, piped water, sewage, safe roads and structured haulage means, etc.); services and utilities (training centers to teach girls professions); in addition to applying good governance.
- Implementing programs that encourage young girls to continue studies like affording more scholarships and other study grants (for girls coming from rural areas) in order to encourage them to continue their studies.
- Criminalizing child labor, even as assistants or helpers for their parents.
- Hampering underage marriage and imposing sanctions on fathers and officials caught implicated in this act.
- Encouraging corrective education for female drop-outs (the appropriately named Non-Structural Education).
- Integrating students who had profited from the NSE when finishing their primary educational levels in the structural classrooms.
- Creating non-formal and vocational training centers to develop skills for elder girls who had already left school and are unsuitable to join the formal educational system, then think of jobs and development projects (appropriate to every specific area) targeting these girls.

- Urging rural parents to treat boys and girls on an equal footing. Equality, here, means 'equity' rather than 'sameness'.
- Making use of school handbooks in order to challenge stereotypes via eliminating gender segregation in classrooms, promoting the use of gender-blind word and teaching students that women can succeed in all fields – just like men do; taking into account the values of equity and equality in the specifications relating to textbook development.

Hence, while general imperative change is mostly needed in education, health and work sectors, policies for young rural girls, I assume, might focus mostly on education and schooling, the starting point to cure most societal problems. Actually, unfortunately, even though illiteracy seems to be that of languages and ICT knowledge, we are still debating how to overcome the phase of illiteracy related to reading and writing one's native language. Evidently, the word 'illiteracy' should provoke reaction and encourage us to act in a consistent and effective way by focusing our efforts where they are truly necessary if we want this phenomenon to be eradicated. We would like to see disappear.

Therefore, of great importance is to grasp that: while it is believed that people need to 'change' in order to have a 'chance' to take a 'choice', rural girls should first be allowed and helped to have a 'choice' in order to take a 'chance' to make 'change' in their lives. Otherwise, we will continue to hear and see reactions of suicide attempt as they may find no other choice as most of those said after being saved.

However, while all these need a will at the level of government because in any case infrastructure should be enhanced, the real challenge remains the change of minds and mentalities of both women and men: what is still not achieved and not easy to achieve, but can be reached gradually through education. Hence, in order to attain the basis of any empowerment program, one must begin with the very young. These changes will let fathers enroll their daughters in primary school and allow them to pursue their education to, no less than, a higher school level. Likewise, addressing women's strategic needs is vital if fundamental change is to occur. Moreover, the real challenge that remains is the change of mentalities of both women and men which can be achieved step by step through educating and sensitizing people. To do this we are in need of an intellectual revolution to escort, enable and facilitate the implementation of the reforms.

Last, but by no means least, I dare attest that much more remains to be done and a long road lies ahead for promoting rural women. However, it would be appropriate to finish with inviting every intellectual to act; to be an agent of change in his or her town, village or city to try to change people's negative view of women. Thus, I prefer to end up with Byrne's words:

"It is not only an attempt to provoke new thought and to strengthen existing knowledge; it is an

impassioned call to all educated women (and men) to accept their own responsibility and direct duty, to walk back down the ladder which they have climbed and to build in all the missing rungs to help less fortunate girls and women to the freedom of status, career and personal fulfilment to which only the fullest educational opportunity is the key (Byrne, 1978: 14).

To close up, tomorrow's stakes are essentially embodied by today's actions.

## NOTES

1. A program launched by the Moroccan Government to reduce illiteracy among minors.
2. There is a general lack of secondary schools and colleges outside the cities but it is greatly exacerbated by the fact that the facilities that do exist, cater first and foremost to male students.
3. What I mean by 'ignorance' here is: unawareness of the importance of education.
4. Some parents say: "We will not eat books, we are in need of money to buy things not buy books to produce jobless girls and boys. Girls should get married thus they should learn what concerns home and marriage. Whereas, boys are required to bring money and support their families. Thus, they should work and do commerce".
5. Girls are obliged to drop out of school because their duty is to help with water and wood fetching as most villages lack piped water at homes and still use firewood for food preparation.
6. Personal interview on September 2005
7. Personal interview on August 2011
8. From the large number of villages, the province is composed of 49 communes distributed throughout more than 1600 douar (Monographie of Taounate Province 2010).

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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