



TAKAMUL CENTER FOR STUDIES AND RESEARCH



Unleashing Women's Economic Rights for Equal and Sustainable Societies

Multidisciplinary Perspectives from the Global South



Coordination
Oifaa Tribak & Sara Rguig

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Preface

The present volume, "Unleashing Women's Economic Rights for Equal and Sustainable Societies: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from the Global South", is a timely and crucial addition to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and inclusive development. Addressing the persistent barriers to women's economic participation and decision-making power, this collection of scholarly contributions sheds light on a critical issue that has long remained sidelined in the global development agenda.

Across the MENA region and the broader global south, women continue to face systemic obstacles in accessing economic opportunities, resources, and leadership positions. Despite legislative frameworks and policy initiatives aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment, the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity remains stubbornly wide, with women occupying only 16.2% of company leadership positions in Morocco and facing alarmingly high rates of unemployment and economic inactivity.

This volume scrutinize the complex web of factors that have perpetuated the economic marginalization of women, exploring the role of international laws, religious interpretations, social representations, and gender approaches. By bringing together diverse disciplinary perspectives, the authors chart a comprehensive understanding of the problem and offer innovative solutions to unlock women's economic potential.

Importantly, the publication of this book coincides with a pivotal moment in the global discourse on gender equality. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and

heightened the urgency to prioritize women's economic inclusion and resilience. As the world works towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, this book serves as a clarion call to unlock women's economic potential and build more equitable and sustainable societies.

At the heart of this work lies the recognition that women's economic empowerment is not merely a gender issue, but a fundamental driver of inclusive and sustainable development. When women are able to fully participate in the economy, make decisions, and control resources, it not only benefits individual women, but also strengthens families, communities, and societies as a whole.

This book is a clarion call to policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to prioritize the economic rights of women and work collaboratively to dismantle the structural barriers that have long hindered their progress. By amplifying the voices and experiences of women in the global south, the authors invite us to reimagine a future where gender equality and economic justice are not just aspirations, but tangible realities.

In this line of argument, professor Saad Alami in his article entitled 'Emerging Voices: Civic Activism as Resistance among Migrant Women in Morocco,' examines migrant women's civic activism and involvement in civil society as a pathway for integration and for gaining agency. The analysis suggests that self-organization is utilized as means of/for empowerment for migrants, where migrant women highly contribute to reshaping policies of integration as well as raising attention towards the struggles specific to migrant women in Morocco.

On the same magnitude, professors Halima OULAMI and Moulay Abdellah TAIBI in their article, 'The Role of Civil

Society in The Economic Empowerment of Women in Marrakech: Case Of El Amane Association,' emphasize the critical role of civil society in promoting gender equality and empowering women on a global scale. The case study explores how the NGO El Amane, based in Marrakech, has played a significant role in empowering women in Morocco through civil society initiatives. The article provides an impact analysis of the organization's activities by comparing the situations of a sample group of women before and after receiving support from El Amane association.

In addition, 'Local Cooperation Empowering Muslim Rural Women in Morocco' is another article designed by professors Hmad Benaissa and Souad Eddouada that tackles the role of local cooperatives in fostering vital conditions for the social and economic advancement of Muslim women in rural areas. Through quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the article aims to identify factors that enable Muslim women in oasis communities to become proactive contributors to societal development. The objective of the study is to examine how cooperative efforts impact the empowerment and economic participation of rural women. The findings of the study highlight the beneficial effects of cooperatives on the economic empowerment of women and their financial independence.

In her article, professor Norazlina Abdul Aziz explores the current state of women's involvement in Malaysia's political and agricultural sectors, and its effects on their economic rights. The findings indicate that although there has been some progress, Malaysian women still face significant barriers to achieving equal rights and opportunities. Accordingly, women are markedly

underrepresented in leadership positions and face challenges in being included in decision-making processes.

In discussing gender inequalities in economy, professor Bouchra Benyacoub in her article 'Gender and Inequalities in Access to Finance' tries to provide a comprehensive explanation and analysis of the gender disparities in access to and utilization of financial services. The study seeks to identify the various barriers that women face in obtaining finance and suggests suitable measures to overcome these challenges. Professor Benyacoub, believes that by examining these issues in detail, she will contribute to the development of more inclusive financial systems that better support women's economic participation and empowerment.

Addressing the financial security of migrant female students in Morocco is crucial for promoting their educational attainment, economic empowerment, and overall well-being. In this respect, professors Rachak Assia in her article 'Unveiling the Political Dimensions of Discrimination: Exploring Career Challenges and Inequalities Faced by Female Sub-Saharan Migrant Students in Agadir, Morocco' explores the challenges Female Sub-Saharan Migrant Students in Agadir encounter in securing internships and professional opportunities. Through a focus group discussion, the research aims to uncover the multifaceted barriers affecting this group. The study tries to explore how various intersecting factors, including gender, race, and immigrant status, influence the everyday experiences and career paths of these students.

We hope that this volume will inspire and galvanize readers to join the collective effort to unleash women's economic rights and build more equitable and sustainable societies for all.

CHAPTER 1

Emerging voices: civic activism as resistance among migrant women in morocco

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Abstract

The evolution of democratic practices along with the progressive status of human rights in Morocco have marked the country's reality during the last three decades. The implementation of various policies as well as the constitutionalizing of human rights advocated the state's efforts in fostering individual and group rights. As far as women's rights are concerned, one can ascertain that, despite the remarkable evolutions, multiple are the challenges that impede their empowerment, particularly in the economic and political fields. These issues can, indeed, be more challenging when migrant women are considered. Morocco's shift from a country of origin into a country of transit and, eventually, of settlement brings about questions related to migrants' rights and pathways of agency. While migration scholarship highlights that migrants face numerous challenges in host settings, migrant women cope with their condition as women *and* migrants. With the growing position of Morocco as a destination territory, migrants' presence has been widely overlooked on both political and social grounds. Such a condition contributed to a quasi-systematic marginalization of migrants from the state's programs addressing women's rights. However, the experiences of migrant women's activism showcase their agency as their involvement in civil

society aspires to improve their rights. Besides social and cultural impediments, migrant women also cope with legal, administrative, and citizenship-related biases which deter their 'integration'. This paper examines migrant women's civic activism and involvement in civil society as a pathway for integration and for gaining agency. The analysis suggests that self-organization is utilized as means of/for empowerment for migrants, where migrant women highly contribute to reshaping policies of integration as well as raising attention towards the struggles specific to migrant women in Morocco.

Keywords: Migration; women; resistance; civil society; Morocco.

Introduction

While Morocco's migratory image as a country of emigration evolved during its colonial and post-colonial eras, it would not be an overstatement to say that the country has long been a setting of immigration and settlement. Yet, since the last three decades, academic and political debates have marginalized migrants' presence in the country, chiefly for three main reasons. First, the social invisibility of migrants in Morocco generally evolved as a result of their legal marginalization. The lack of pathways to regular status of residence pushed migrants to socio-cultural peripheries, contributing thus to a *quasi*-invisibility in the public realm. Second, immigration to Morocco has long been considered as of transit character in a way that overlooked new patterns of South-South migration as a rising transnational and circulatory patterns of mobility. Third, the sum of social, political, and security-related problems in some regions of Africa and the Middle East -mainly in the aftermath of the 'Arab

Spring'- led to a significant rise in mixed flows, with unprecedented trends of asylum seekers and potential refugees. Therefore, these upheavals, to name a few, contributed to rethinking the country's migratory profile, and allowed us to redefine it as a country of immigration and settlement while, altogether, keeping its status as a transit territory.

Migrants' rights have been at the core of academic considerations, though with an emphasis on migrant-specific vulnerabilities. In this view, migrant women occupied much of the aforementioned debates, shedding light on particular violations of rights that they cope with in Morocco. However, their struggles and aspirations occupied little interest in the country's feminist discourses and women-rights' campaigns. Such a condition originates from multiple reasons, one of which is the excessive 'othering' of migrants in destination settings (Ghorashi, 2021). The experience of migrant women within Moroccan civil society enhanced their experiences in civic-based activism and influenced the genesis of self-organization as an essential mechanism to transcend the limitations of civic, legal, and political dispossessions.

This article aims at deciphering the interconnection between self-organization and migrants' integration in settings deemed to be new destination, with a particular focus on the experiences of migrant women activists. It first delves into the evolutions that characterize migration reality(ies) in Morocco, particularly its position as a country of transit and settlement. It then provides a review on the evolution of migrant women's specific rights and freedoms in the International Law as well as the national legal/operational frameworks. This paper eventually examines

migrant women's civic activism and activism within civil society. We emphasize self-organization as a strategy of/for empowerment of migrants, as they contribute to reshaping policies of integration as well as raising attention towards the struggles allied to migrant women in Morocco.

I. Migrants' rights as a 'new' dimension of human rights in morocco

Like many other countries of the global South, Morocco's legal and institutional frameworks on migration remain limited in prerogatives, resources, and prospective. For decades, Morocco's migration policies attributed significant attention to issues and needs of Moroccan emigrants abroad. Meanwhile, immigration and asylum in Morocco were addressed by the state as marginal questions, based on the idea of the country as only a transit territory. Similarly, Morocco's legal instruments tackled the questions of immigration and asylum from a security perspective. Thus, Morocco's national legal frameworks on migration are insignificant towards the evolutions characterizing its current migratory profile. In this view, several activists and NGOs advocate major legal reforms to protect migrants' rights and to promote their access to better livelihood resources. Nonetheless, the legal frameworks on migrants' rights remain far from attaining such an ambition.

The study of immigration *via* and *within* Morocco can, indeed, be challenging on multiple levels. To describe immigration and asylum in Morocco as recent fails to depict a reality rooted in the country's history. In fact, Morocco has long been a at the crossroads for migrants from Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Nevertheless, as far as sub-Saharan African migrants are

concerned, the “novelty” of their mobility stems from the alteration of itineraries due to the European Union’s immigration policies. Thus, European policies on migration and mobility have forged Morocco’s position as a stopover and a waiting zone, which, with time, developed towards a forced settlement territory (De Haas, 2015).

In contrast, several geopolitical considerations influenced the state’s “thinking” on migration and migrants’ position, as well as contributed to approaching these issues based on a long-term settlement perspective (Cherti and Collyer, 2015, p.592). Morocco’s *turn* towards the African continent has aimed to reinforce the country’s positioning on both political and economic grounds. In this view, Morocco has long developed African diplomacy, which combines political, economic, and cultural exchanges. This goes in line with the facilitation of mobility offered to nationals of some African states, such as Senegal, Mali, and Ivory Coast. This explains the rising patterns of irregular migrants, arriving regularly to Morocco through airports (Mourji et al., 2016). Such trends suggest an interesting shift of Africa’s migratory routes, particularly the Western and Central Mediterranean routes.

Morocco has largely been pointed out to as Europe’s gatekeeper “*Gendarme de l’Europe*” (Belguendouz, 2003), due to its role in hyper-securing its frontiers in ways that refrain migrants – including potential refugees and asylum seekers – from reaching European territories. While Moroccan authorities refute this claim (Fernández-Molina, 2016, p.143), migration partnerships with Europe are depicted as an attempt to promote bilateral governance of trans-Mediterranean migration. In this

line of thought, Morocco's new policy on migration can be viewed as a political tool that addresses the potential critiques of the Convention on the rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW) committee as well as a means to illustrate the state's commitment to a Convention which "it did not imagine that twenty years later (from ratifying it and lobbying for it), (it) would become the international legal frame of reference for its future migration and asylum policies" (Jiménez-Alvarez et al., 2020, p.8).

From another perspective, migration governance in Morocco can, too, be interpreted as part of the democratic evolutions in the country. It could be argued that the major reforms were the constitutional amendment of 2011, highly influenced by the social movements of the "Arab Spring" in the region. Multiple reforms sought to address the democratization of public life, reinforcement of the state's *deconcentration* and *decentralization* (referred to as Advanced Regionalization), as well as the enhancement of participatory democracy, through the reinforcement of civil society's roles. Of course, specific rights were subject to perpetuate reforms, such as the reform of the Family Code in 2004 (*Moudawana*), the nationality Code, legal provisions for environmental protection, and so on. In this view, the implementation of a new migration policy is, thus, inscribed in the process of democratization and human rights' promotion. To Moroccan authorities, the *National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum* (NSIA) was not the result of pressures but rather derived from the state's willingness to meet its national and international commitments (MDCMREAM, 2018; 2016; NHRC, 2013). Therefore, Morocco's new migration policy is inscribed in the state's rhetoric on human rights, particularly with a

diplomatic orientation towards offering better life opportunities to nationals of African sub-Saharan countries (Fernández-Molina & De Larramendi, 2020, p.14).

Morocco ratified the major conventions for the protection of fundamental rights and has made significant improvements in implementing these changes on constitutional, legal, and institutional levels. For instance, one can underpin the efforts made to preserve fundamental human rights such as the right to life, dignity, freedom of mobility, and participation in public life. These, merely legal, progresses are depicted in the country's ratification of most international covenants and the legal reforms. Nevertheless, and as far as migrants' rights are concerned, there is a need to address several blind spots where foreigners (as legally addressed by the Moroccan Law) still cope with various forms of discrimination.

As far as the national legal framework on migration is concerned, one can notice that the legal and procedural instrument does not fully meet the human rights-based discourse pledged by Moroccan authorities. The 02-03 Law on immigration reinforced this view due to its *securitized* nature. This law is generally perceived by scholars and activists as security-based, providing little guarantees for migrants, including women. In this context, Morocco's new policy on migration came to light and suggested a strategy (SNIA) that tackled migrants' needs and fulfills the country's international engagements. In 2014 and 2016-2017, Moroccan authorities launched two exceptional campaigns to regularize¹ immigrants on its territory, based

¹ The two regularization campaigns targeted irregular immigrants falling under one (or more) of the following criteria: 1) Foreigners who are spouses of Moroccan citizens; 2) Foreigners who are spouses of other foreigners in irregular residential situations in

particularly on humanitarian considerations (MDCMREAM, 2016). Yet, legal framework remains unchanged, despite the work on two bills; one as a new migration law and a second which intends to regulate asylum seeking procedures (MDCMREAM, 2021). Therefore, migrants in Morocco cope with a legal paradox which combines the new migration policy's vision and the ongoing reality which is marked by security-based concerns and a sense of *exceptionalism* (Alami Merrouni, 2022).

II. Migrant women in the midst of morocco's migration policy

The feminization of international human mobility represents one of the most remarkable features of modern international migration. Migration patterns are characterized by a growing proportion of women moving within and out of their countries to seek new opportunities and to improve their living standards. The feminization of migration has been increasingly recognized as a key aspect of global migration (Castles et al., 2014), and has become an issue of interest for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in the field. However, discourses on women migrants usually infer victimhood, which rarely unveils the empowering patterns of their mobility, hindering, thus, their potential agency. Victimhood discourses widely influence women migrants' conditions as much as disorients migration-related policymaking. Such discursive patterns fail to address migrant women's real needs and experiences.

Numerous factors such as globalization, trade liberalization, and labor market demands, have created new opportunities for

Morocco; 3) The children of the two aforementioned cases; 4) Foreigners with effective work contracts; 5) Foreigners who could prove five consecutive years of residence in Morocco; 6) Foreigners afflicted with a severe illness (MDCMREAM, 2016).

women to enter the labor market and earn a living, particularly in the service sector. This resulted, on the one hand, in an increase in women migrating for work, mainly from developing to developed countries. By the same token, social factors, such as changing gender roles, women's education, and empowerment efforts have all contributed to the feminization of migration. On the other hand, repulsive factors such as conflict, persecution, and environmental degradation have also contributed to the growing feminization of migration. Thus, women migrants can be disproportionately affected by these issues and may have no choice but to migrate.

Addressing the needs and aspirations of women migrants requires meticulous attention towards gender-specific challenges and opportunities of migration. These include addressing issues such as access to education, health care, social protection, discrimination, violence, and exploitation (UN Women, 2013). Furthermore, policies must also recognize the diversity of female migrants and their unique needs and experiences, particularly those of marginalized and vulnerable groups such as domestic workers and refugees (García-Moreno et al., 2006). In this view, Morocco's legal framework suggests multiple guarantees for migrant women. Migrant women's rights can be supported by two main sources of legal instruments; the national laws on women's rights and national laws addressing migration. As a matter of fact, Morocco's legal and normative frameworks can be regarded as one of the sources for the protection of migrants' rights. The national laws as well as the country's international commitments are essential guarantees to leverage the condition of migrants in the country, particularly women.

As far as human rights -in general- are concerned, we can argue the Morocco's legal framework is loaded with guarantees that aim at identifying/defining the various facets of these *rights* as well as specific mentions of the *means* that aim at protecting them. Obviously, given the human nature of the human rights, they naturally apply to migrants. However, one shall not dissociate the legal debate from the position/condition of the migrant in host societies. Generally referred to as the *foreigner*, the *alien*, or the *migrant*, conditions related to citizenship generate serious threats to securing the rights of the migrant. In this line of thought, the state monopolizes the regulative prerogative, which, in turn, affects migrants' "right to have rights" (Benhabib, 1992, p.50). Thus, although migrants appear to enjoy the same guarantees, several limitations hinder their accessibility. This idea will be better illustrated while discussing migrant women's *legal vulnerability*. At this point, we suggest reviewing of the main national and international legal instruments on migrant's rights, with a specific focus on the ones particularly addressing migrant women's rights. The following figure provides a synthetic, yet holistic, review of the Morocco's main international commitments towards migrant women's rights and the state of their application in the national legal and regular frameworks.

Figure 1

International instruments for the protection of migrants' rights, including women migrants, and the state of their application in Moroccan legislation

Convention/Covenant related to Migrants' rights	State of Ratification by Morocco	State of application in the Moroccan Laws and regulations	Specific mention to migrant women's rights in the national regulations
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949)	No ratification required for the UDHR	Constitutional principle: Supremacy of the International Law on human rights over the national Law.	Human rights are applicable to foreigners (natural rights), including women.
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)	Ratified in 1979	Several reforms are made to ensure that the national Law is in harmony with the Covenant. Migrants do not participate in local elections (article 31 of the Constitution) Migrants do not have the (legal/regular) right to create associations.	Although women's political participation is supported in multiple instances, no specific mention to migrant women's political and civic rights are mentioned.
UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)	Ratified in 1979	Several reforms are made to ensure that the national Law is in harmony with the Covenant.	No specific mention to migrant women.
UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)	Ratified in 1970	There is now specific law against racial discrimination. The Penal Code provides few and unclear references to discrimination.	No specific mention to migrant women.
UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)	Ratified in 1993	Law n° 103-13 on combating violence against women.	Some protective provisions in Law 02-03 for migrant women (Article 29, for instance).
UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel,	Ratified in 1993	The definition of torture is not fully in conformity with the Convention.	The law 27-14 on combatting human trafficking

Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)		(The current amendment of the Penal Code is expected to provide a new definition of torture)	suggests numerous guarantees for the protection of women victims (and potential victims), particularly among migrants.
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	Ratified in 1993	Several guarantees for Children (minors) provided by the 2011 Constitution. The new Policy on Migration and Asylum stresses the importance of Supreme Interest of the Child with regards to migrant children (MDCMREAM, 2016)	No specific mention to migrant women (children/minors in this case)
UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)	Ratified in 1956	No text (law) regulating asylum. Bill n° 66-17 related to the right of asylum and the conditions of its granting, drafted (MDCMREAM, 2021).	No specific mention to migrant women.
UN Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1967)	Ratified in 1971		
Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954)	Not ratified	No asylum law in Morocco currently. No reference to Stateless Persons in the Nationality Code.	No Law on the procedures of asylum seeking. (Bill n°66-17). The Dahir n°1-57-271 offers general information and does not mention
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990)	Ratified in 1993	Law 02-03 related to the Entry and Residence of Foreigners in the Moroccan Kingdom and to Fight Illegal Immigration. Bill n° 72-17 related to migration “under discussion” (MDCMREAM, 2021).	Some protective provisions in Law 02-03 for migrant women (Article 29, for instance).

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) and its two protocols (1 & 2).	Ratified in 2000	<p>Law n° 27-14 related to Combatting Human Trafficking, adopted in September 2016.</p> <p>The Law introduced several protective measures for victims.</p> <p>Amendments to the Penal Code which considers smuggling of migrants (art.231-18) as an offence.</p> <p>Smuggling of migrants and facilitation of illegal entry or departure is criminalized (Law 02-03).</p>	<p>Protective measures to migrant women victims of human trafficking and smuggling crimes.</p> <p>Orientation of victims towards support mechanisms (state and NGOs).</p>
1. Additional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.	Ratified in 2011	<p>The law n° 27-14 related to Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2016) provides several protective measures for vulnerable migrants such as women and children (MDCMREAM, 2017).</p>	
2. Additional Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air	Not ratified	<p>Several bilateral agreements with Spanish government and with the E.U. to tackle irregular migration.</p> <p>Program 8 of the policy on migration and asylum is dedicated to “Managing Migratory influx and Combatting Human Trafficking” includes actions on fighting irregular migration and the dismantling of transnational smuggling networks (MDCMREAM, 2016b).</p>	

ILO Convention concerning Migrations in Abusive Conditions and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Migrant Workers No. 143 (1975)	Ratified in 2016	Some measures have been adopted to ensure migrants' access to employment (ensuring flexibility in delivering work permits by national authorities; refugees are exempted from this condition).	Protective measures included in the law 19-12 to women workers do apply to migrant women. Irregular migrant women workers might not fully benefit from these guarantees.
ILO Convention concerning Migration for Employment No. 97 (1949)	Not ratified	Foreigners do not have the right to create trade unions.	
Global Compact on Orderly, Safe and Regular Migration (GCM) (2018)	Ratified in 2018		The National Strategy on Migration and Asylum highlights the need to protect vulnerable categories of migrants, particularly women, from a 'transversal' perspective.
Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (2018)	Ratified in 2018	National Framework for the implementation of the GCM and the GCR (2019).	The exceptional regularization campaign (2014 and 2017) ensured the regularization of all migrant women applicants.

As it appears from the aforementioned, women migrants' rights are not fully considered by the legal framework and their marginalization is generally a result of the marginalization of migrants' rights in general. Few are the actions that have been

conducted with a gender-based perspective. This is particularly the case of the two phases of the regularization campaign, migrant women's applications were treated with flexibility (MDCMREAM, 2016; 2018), thus allowing "all applicants among women migrants" to systematically ensure a 'regular' status of residence in Morocco (Ait Ben Lmadani, 2016, p.21). Similarly, numbers of women among refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco represent an important share of this population. Nonetheless, few years after the regularization campaign, migrants in Morocco are coping with the quasi-impossible requirements applied by the authorities to renew their statuses of residence.

III. The experience of migrant women's activism in morocco and the quest for agency

Migration scholarship has long stressed the roles of community formation in serving the migrant community as well as the society of origin (Moya, 2005; Portes et al., 2008). From a transnational perspective, the rise of civic activism and self-organization among migrants can be interpreted as a result of the limitations imposed by the nation-state model of migration governance and the lack of spaces for political participation and representation. This is to be practically observed in new destinations in the Global South. In fact, the development of the realm of civil society has provided a larger space of activism for migrant communities (Khachani, 2010), despite the legal obstacles that prevent *foreigners* from creating associations and NGOs. In addition to that, one shall recall the immense support which Moroccan civil society provides for migrant communities, not only in terms of advocacy but also in terms of support for

proper and efficient organization (MDCMREAM, 2016). Together, these factors have contributed to the genesis of a “migrant civil society”, incorporated within the larger national civil sphere.

In Morocco, formal self-organization among migrants has primarily been established on ethnic grounds. For instance, several NGOs rely on nationality as a basis for organization. Other NGOs and associations have been organized based on ethno-regional standards, such as *Africa Culture Morocco*, *Association of Foreign Trainees and Students*, *African Cultural Center*, the *Collective of Sub-Saharan Communities in Morocco*, and the *Council of Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco* (Author’s translation). However, migrant self-organization has developed towards more ‘mature’ forms and grounds, particularly from a civic perspective.

In fact, self-organization among migrants in Morocco is not recent. Migrants managed to form associations long before the launch of a migration policy in the country. The multiplication of these forms of organization among the migrant community reaffirms the situation of Morocco as a country of “permanent settlement” and a destination (Cherti and Collyer, 2015, p.595). However, like migrants themselves, the associations were not acknowledged by the authorities and their scope of action was limited to few actions of coordination with the migrant community. In this line of logic, the two regularization campaigns created more spaces for action and pathways for civic organization, considering the freedom of action which is allowed through the regular status of residence. Thus, migrant activists managed to diversify the forms, purposes, and strategies of their organization.

In this view, results show that migrants implement genuine modes of activism and of agency claimed by migrants in Morocco. These changes evolved mainly following the adoption of the new policy on migration and asylum in 2013. More particularly, migrant women developed multiple forms of civic activism as well as of group formation. As a matter of fact, we could deduce two major modes of ‘activism’ among migrant women (and migrants in general): the group-based activism and the individual-based activism. With the first, we refer to a group of women migrants who decide to self-organize as an association. Also, these organizations can be formal or non-formal. Although foreigners -to use the legal terminology- are not allowed to create associations in Morocco, the authorities have been flexible in allowing it as a part of the new vision of the country as a setting of settlement and integration. Yet, other requests for the creation of associations can be rejected, and those organizations end up operating informally as a mere congregation of individual activists.

However, some associations are formally organized and operate with more freedom and regularity. Despite the lack of accurate data on this matter, observation in the field show a growing number of migrant associations, including ones created by migrant women. These associations perform as ‘spokespersons’ of migrant women in Morocco. Numerous examples could be highlighted, such as *Migrant Women’s Voices in Morocco*, a very active NGO in the defense of migrant women’s rights. Other examples include the *Collective of Migrant Women in Morocco*, the *Association of Migrant Women and Spouses*, and the *Association of Migrant Refugees and Migrants in Morocco*. Of course, one can argue that other women

migrants' organizations exist, yet requiring thorough fieldwork investigation in cities where migrants' presence is minor in numbers and extent.

Another mode of civic engagement includes some strategies of individual activism. Several migrant women activists developed significant activism skills as well as an awareness of the challenges facing their communities. The sum of their experiences allowed them to put it in practice within other realms of structural action, either within national associations or international organizations. The acquaintance of specific needs and interests of migrant women in Morocco allow activists among migrant women to better serve the interests of their communities, particularly the challenges facing migrant women. Furthermore, some activists rely on their roles within national NGOs and/or international organizations, and of their engagement with self-organizations within which they operate. Indeed, such a dynamic alludes to the bulk of challenges the migrant community copes with. Yet, it is, at the same time, challenged due to the limited number of women activists within the migrant community.

Let us, at this point, delve into an analysis of the roles carried out by migrant women's activism and self-organizations. Indeed, those roles do vary in nature, objectives, as well as motives of action. Yet, observation in the field suggest that patterns of civic activism can be generally rooted in the larger two-fold realms of activism: the first is the space of activism created by migrants through individual, or through formal and non-formal self-organizations. The second is more attached to the larger realm of national civil society which reinforces their claims and allows more visibility. The literature on migrants' activism suggests that

migrant associations aim at addressing four main functions in the host setting. These functions aim at: i) coping with social isolation, ii) helping community members with personal and material problems, iii) coordinating the defense of the group's interests and addressing the wider society, and iiiii) developing uniform and coordinated patterns of meaning (Rex, 1973). It can be argued that these functions apply to migrant self-organizations in general. However, their application on the case of migrant women self-organization can also highlight the multileveled agency that they gain within the migrant community *and* within the larger scope of the host society. The very act of self-organization reveals one of the hidden influences of migration, that contribute to coping with the *othering* forces as well as to altering with *victimhood* discourses which dominates political and, sometimes, academic discourses on women migrants in Morocco (Alami Merrouni & Machak, 2019).

As discussed above, migrant women's self-organizations operate, generally speaking, through the same modes of the migrant self-organizations. The main objectives can be summed up as follows: to defend the rights of the migrant community in Morocco, to bridge the gap between migrants and state's officials, to represent migrants in official instances, and to facilitate the integration of migrants. However, these objectives embrace *gendered* perspectives when migrant women organizations are involved. For instance, several activists advocate for the defense of migrant women based on their apparent vulnerability to exploitation. This is accurate as far as specific crimes and violations of rights are concerned, such as the ones associated with human trafficking. The U.S. Department of State (2022) highlights that, despite the adoption of a law on

combatting human trafficking in 2016, “the Government of Morocco does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so”. Thus, the roles of migrant women’s associations are essential in prevention, protection, as well as referral of the (potential) victims.

The increasing awareness towards migrant’s rights, in general, and women migrant’s rights, contributed to the genesis of the categorical perception on them as a vulnerable, “disadvantaged group” (Ghorashi, 2021, p.52). Yet, any attempt to alter the normalized discourse on migrant women’s victimhood shall not necessarily suggest their immunity from particular forms of gender-based violence and violations. For instance, statistics indicate that women are, indeed, the primary victims of human trafficking in the country. Among 169 victims reported in 2022, 115 were female, mainly subject to exploitation in sex trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2022). In fact, the sexualization *and* commodification of migrant women’s bodies exacerbate their vulnerability towards exploitation during the migratory trajectories and continues in territories of transit and destination. As a result, the aforementioned problems constitute an essential realm of action associated with migrant women’s activism. In Morocco, women migrants’ self-organizations and activism address these issues through direct assistance and support programs for women. Moya (2005) refers to these types of organizations as ‘mutual aid societies’ (p.842). The author highlights the roles of these organizations in addressing common goals and issues without having pre-migratory commonalities. This concept can be applied to migrant self-organization in general, but is, too, akin to the experience of self-organization of

migrant women in particular. These associations assist victims either directly, or through partnerships with national associations or international organizations.

Another realm of action is related to the field of healthcare. Considering the limited access of migrant women to health services, migrant women NGOs and activists are active in offering support to vulnerable women. These include particularly mental health, particularly during and in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis. Also, migrant women are assisted in the fields of sexual and reproductive health. Several programs are implemented by migrant-led associations, where migrant women activists operate as facilitators for the identification of the victims as well as for referral to health or support facilities. Lastly, other actions of support are related to sexual health, especially in the form of awareness raising campaigns towards sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Other actions can be viewed as general actions that target the whole migrant community, including actions related to education, vocational training, as well as employment (MDCMREAM, 2016; 2021). Obviously, little action addresses strengthening migrant women's leadership or engagement in the public sphere in general, which reinforces their limited pathways to individual agency and group empowerment. However, the shown experiences demonstrate a rising interest and a ground level experience to be supported by women's rights activists in Morocco.

Conclusion

From what precedes, we can argue that self-organization stands as a breakthrough in terms of agency claims as well as a step forward for integration in Morocco. Although the legal

framework in Morocco is not yet qualified to cover the multiple facets of women migrants' rights, civic activism among migrant women is indeed a step forward to cope with the legal, social, and cultural hegemonies imposed, not only by the host society, but also by the migrant community itself. Most migrant self-organizations are led by men, and most of the members are men. Such a reality is unrepresentative of an already underrepresented population (legally, politically, socially, and culturally). The centralization of consultative and representative abilities as male-centered competency reinforces the shadowing of women's voices and activism among the migrant community. Therefore, there is a need to reinforce the activism abilities among migrant women. Moroccan civil society working on women's rights has a major responsibility in assisting this emerging part of civil society body, without depriving them of their ability to voice their views, away from any other agendas.

All in all, one can ascertain that the feminization of migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has important implications for both sending and receiving countries. While the trend presents new opportunities for women, it also poses significant challenges, particularly in relation to gender-based discrimination, exploitation, and violence. Addressing these issues requires policies and practices that recognize the diversity among migrant women and their unique needs and experiences and considers gender-specific challenges and opportunities of migration.

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CHAPTER 2

The role of civil society in the economic empowerment of women in marrakech:

Case of el amane association

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, civil society has played a pivotal role in empowering women worldwide. From grassroots movements to international organizations, these groups have been instrumental in promoting gender equality, fighting for women's rights, and challenging oppressive societal norms. Civil society has helped create a more inclusive and equitable world for women through education, advocacy, and community-building initiatives. This empowering movement has transformed the lives of individual women and contributed to developing more just and democratic societies. Through a case study of the active NGO El Amane, Marrakech, this article explores how civil society, specifically NGOs, has empowered women in Morocco. This study adopts an impact study approach that will compare the situation of a convenience sample of 10 women before and after benefiting from the association's services using a semi-structured interview.

Keywords: economic empowerment; women; association; Marrakech

1. Introduction

Empowering women is fundamental to attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development goals adopted by the UN. Women and girls can drive transformative and positive change in every aspect of society, especially by bringing about substantial

economic gains for households and countries. When women are educated, trained, and empowered, they can make better decisions for themselves, their families, and their communities. This includes decisions about family planning, health care, and education, which helps improve their lives and those of their families. In addition, the economic gains from women's participation in the workforce are substantial, including increased productivity and innovation.

With only ten years from the set agenda, "progress on gender equality has not only failed to move forward but has begun to reverse due to the intersecting crises of COVID-19, the climate emergency, and rising economic and political insecurity" (In focus: Sustainable Development Goal 5, 2022). Thus, doubling the efforts and speed to reach this goal is urgent.

Like many countries, Morocco is active in this global dynamism by signing and ratifying various international agreements and protocols that concern women's empowerment. The Moroccan Constitution of 2011 established the country's commitment to women's empowerment. Article 19 of the Constitution comprises "Protecting Fundamental Rights and Liberties" (Moroccan Const.) and grants full citizenship rights to all citizens of Morocco without any distinction based on gender. Article 21 states, "The state shall guarantee the protection of women's rights and shall work on ensuring equitable access to economic opportunities, labor rights, and social security." (Moroccan Const.). The Moroccan Constitution also stipulated the establishment of the National Council of Women, a consultative institution whose mission is to ensure the effective implementation of the Constitution and the laws related to gender

equality. Overall, the Moroccan Constitution of 2011 set a new framework for protecting women's rights and empowerment.

Morocco does not consider women's empowerment a mission restricted to the government and its institutions but instead adopts a participatory approach that encourages other stakeholders to contribute to this endeavor. The key stakeholder is civil society, with a long history of active involvement in this struggle. Many NGOs and associations have supported women's empowerment in different regions of the country through programs that provide training and resources to empower women and help them reach their full potential.

This research aims to investigate civil society's contribution to women's economic empowerment through a case study of the experience of one of the leading associations in Marrakech, named 'El Amane'. The association is founded on the premise that women's economic empowerment is the "surest path to gender equality, poverty eradication, and inclusive economic growth" (*Accueil / Association El Amane Pour Le Développement De La Femme*, 2022). El Amane also considers that "women make an enormous contribution to the economy, whether in companies, as entrepreneurs or employees, or through unpaid housework".

2. Literature review

2.1. Economic empowerment:

Economic empowerment is a concept valid for both vulnerable men and women. It is the process of increasing the economic power and status of individuals "to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity," (OECD, 2011 p.6). and enable negotiation for a more equitable distribution of the advantages of growth

“Vulnerable groups” typically encompass those who are particularly prone to severe misfortune and necessitate significant assistance in order to overcome poverty and capitalize on lucrative chances. Furthermore, women, particularly widowed or abandoned, are classified as "vulnerable" individuals (Hoogeveen et al., 2004). In this line of argument, it is necessary to empower them through access to economic resources and opportunities like employment, financial services, property ownership, productive assets, skill enhancement, and market information. (OECD, 2011).

Women’s economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women’s rights and enabling them to control their lives and influence society. (OECD, 2011) Thus, Women’s empowerment and economic development are closely interrelated (Duflo, 2012).

2.2. Women’s economic empowerment

Empowerment "touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise control over their own lives, and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping" societies to be more democratic in terms of distribution of power and possibilities (Kabeer, 2008 p. 27). It is a dynamic process through which women acquire resources that enable them to develop their voices, articulate preferences, and make their own decisions regarding fulfilling their life aspirations (Yount, 2017). It is one of the SDGs stated in Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nations) through fighting female poverty and reducing gender inequalities and eventually achieving

socioeconomic inclusion and sustainable growth (Sadik et al., 2020) and pro-poor growth and for achieving all the MDGs. At the same time, it is a question of rights and of building fair societies OECD (2011).

Numerous factors contribute to the economic empowerment of women. These include access to vocational education and training, which is vital for enhancing income levels and is considered a cornerstone of strategies aimed at economic improvement. The attainment of Equal Rights transforms women into 'Agents of Change', thereby fostering Sustained Socioeconomic Development and ensuring global security, as noted by the (United Nations). Furthermore, financial inclusion, as highlighted by Hendriks (2019), serves as a fundamental component for the economic empowerment of women and contributes to inclusive growth. Lastly, establishing equal pay for equal work is crucial, as workplace inequality is recognized as a significant obstacle to the empowerment of women, according to Narayanan and Bakialekshmi (2017).

2.3. Education and training for women empowerment

Literature shows that education and training are crucial "principles for women's empowerment" (Mauro et al., 2019). Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs help build women's expectations of a better life and personal well-being (Hilal, 2012). "Technical & vocational education and training program help to nourish knowledge, ability and develop vocational skills of women and empowering them." (Garbuja & Pasa, 2016 P.34).

According to a study by Boahene (2021)' Vocational training increases women's empowerment and resolves gender inequality

in Ghana. It was also proven that vocational training lowers poverty among women.

In the Kenyan context, Syomwene (2015) asserts that women's education is one of the initiatives that can propel Kenya to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030. The more educated women are, the more income they earn, and the healthier families become. Subsequently, this translates to improved sustainable economic development. The same goes for Morocco, as Ennaji (2008) states that education and training are crucial for women to meet new challenges and to help them safeguard their rights and interests.

However, all indications point to an increase in poverty, particularly among women, despite the growing amount of aid provided to the nation and the numerous development programs funded by international organizations (Ennaji, 2008). The same idea was expressed by Sadik et al. (2020), who state that the Third Billion Index for Morocco reveals mediocre scores for both input and output. Despite the efforts made by decision-makers, the results remain below the aspirations and objectives displayed by all actors operating in women's empowerment. The weak economic autonomy of Moroccan women compromises the efforts made in the fight against female poverty and the reduction of gender inequalities.

Kabeer (2019) states that strong evidence noted that education, particularly post-primary education, positively affects women's economic participation and job opportunities. However, it is generally observed that women have fewer training opportunities than men. Furthermore, the training they acquire "reinforces a gender-stereotyped distribution of skills." P. 43

2.4. NGOs and women's economic empowerment

NGOs are a significant part of civil society and can contribute to improving the social and economic emancipation of the underprivileged (Rahman 1999). They can create a significant impact on the empowerment and development of women. Bordat et al. (2011) illustrate how women-run grassroots-level non-governmental programs operate as tools to empower women individually and collectively to act as agents for change. Through capacity building, NGOs "develop community capacities such as ability, skill, and knowledge of mobilizing resources, planning and evaluating community initiation and solving problems to gain mastery over their lives" (Nikkhah & Bin Redzuan, 2010 p. 86). Gupta (2021) adds that women's economic empowerment is possible through venture creation and entrepreneurship through proper training and information. Because of insufficient government support, NGOs can play a significant role in this regard.

Literature shows that NGOs in the third world have a significant role in women's economic empowerment. In Rwanda, the provision of informal and formal training to beneficiaries in particular and the community in the area in general, which has assisted in creating a solid foundation for girls and women's socioeconomic empowerment and development, has been found to have significantly impacted and contributed to women's empowerment in the area (Nyataya, 2018).

In India, NGOs are perceived as sources of ideas and energies and transmitters of opinion and concern. NGOs safeguard women's rights as human rights. Their efforts are excellent, and we should support them (Hiremath, 2021).

In Bangladesh, NGOs work like a "- to empower women from a different side and to turn them into mainstream society and economy" (Hossain, 2017 p. 26). Rural women are more concerned with their self-worth, self-sufficiency, gender equality, gender mobility, voting behavior, and political participation as a result of receiving training programs (Hossain, 2017). NGOs enable women to forge their identities, create jobs, and increase women's participation in family decision-making in several areas, including economic management of the family, children's education, marriage, and autonomy in their everyday lives. (Alam et. al., 2023).

3. Morocco national human development initiative (NHDI)

Launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI on 18 May 2005, The National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) is part of an overall vision that puts women's legal and economic rights at the heart of its objectives. ("INITIATIVE NATIONALE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT HUMAIN") Through NHDI, the government worked with associations and cooperatives to select and implement development projects. After years of implementation, NHDI programs effectively reduced poverty from 36 to 21 percent, according to a 2011 survey. (GDI, 2020)

Currently, in its third phase, the NHDI seeks to strengthen aspects of human development through new programs to improve young people's incomes and economic inclusion. By collaborating with associations, NHDI is currently working on creating youth employment and entrepreneurship centers and developing future generations' human capital (GDI, 2020).

4. El amane association

Founded in 2003 in a marginal neighborhood of Marrakech, Morocco, El Amane Association aims to improve the situation of women by integrating them into economic and social development and ensuring legal, medical, and psychological support. NHDI supports the association's work on facilitating women's access to social, economic, and cultural resources and collaborating with other civil society actors with the same objectives to defend women's rights through a gender approach.

The association affords primary education and vocational training for its adherents to reach those goals. Among its programs, we mention: culinary and pastry art, modern couture, massage and kinesitherapy, hairdressing and aesthetics, computer automation, furniture making, and dentist assistant.

For this study, we retrieved the dataset of the year 2021-2022 of the vocational training programs in the association. As shown in Fig.1. The total number of beneficiaries of the vocational training was 282, divided into six sections.

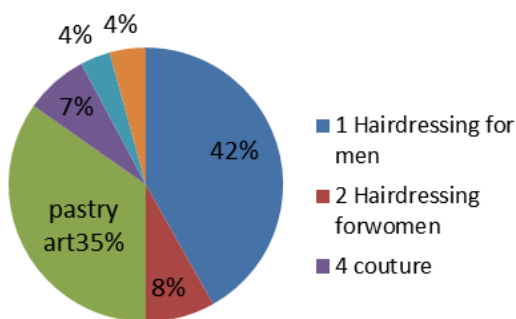


Fig.1. Distribution of beneficiaries in training

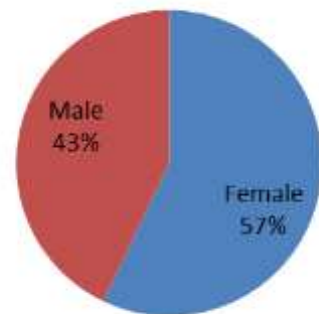


Fig2. gender distribution of beneficiaries

Because the association adopts a gender equality approach, it is also accessible for males. However, Fig.2. shows that females' percentage is more significant. The demographics of the dataset of the training beneficiaries are distributed as follows.

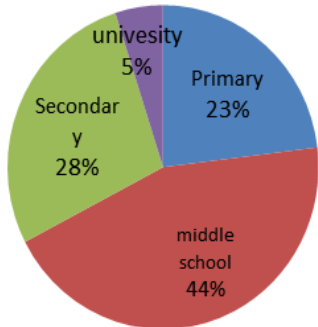


Fig.3.. Distribution of beneficiares according to

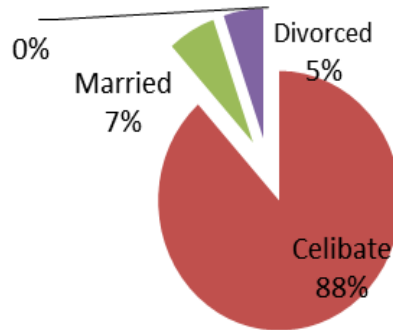


Fig 4. Distribution of beneficiaries according to

As

stated earlier, the training in El Amane association is a second chance for people, mainly youth who did not finish their studies or those who did not receive any vocational training.

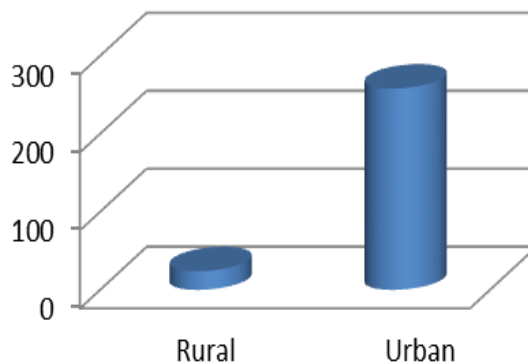
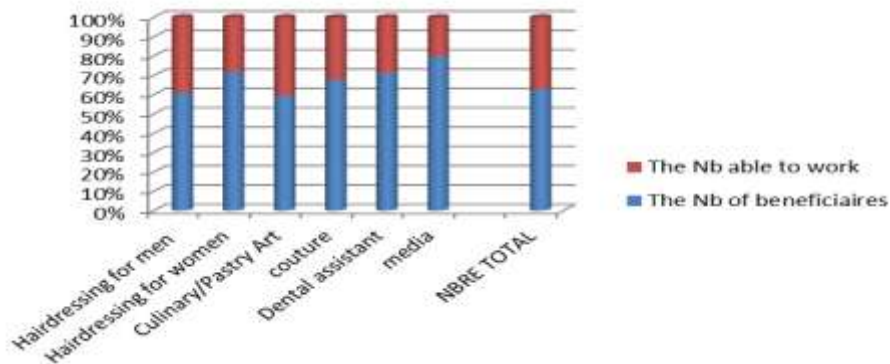


Fig.5. Distribution of beneficiaries according to social background

As fig.3. shows that most beneficiaries (67%) dropped out of school before secondary education, depriving them of joining formal vocational training. We can also notice that the vast majority are young singles (Fig.4.) from urban zones (Fig.5.).

According to the follow-up carried out by the association, the following graph shows the number of beneficiaries who managed to get a job.



Comparing the number of beneficiaries with the employment rate either in private projects or as employees, we see that each program has a different percentage of employment. However, generally speaking, the employment rate reaches 60 percent. Fig.6. illustrates that males' employability rate is relatively higher in hairdressing while females' employment rate is higher in cooking and pastry.

5. Methodology

The study explores the experiences of women who benefited from training within the Al-Amame association and how the acquired vocational skill and training contributed to their empowerment.

The paper adopted a qualitative research design for the case study. We opted for this approach because it is generally employed to support researchers in generating a deep and

nuanced understanding of a given phenomenon (Lester & Lochmiller, 2020).

Interviews' questions

The following questions emerged by analyzing these data related to the number and type of beneficiaries.

- What does economic empowerment mean to you?
- Is training and professional ability sufficient for women's economic empowerment?
- Does your access to the labor market mean your economic empowerment?

These questions will be tackled in the light of the theory of capabilities developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (1985), which emphasizes people's actual ability to live lives they value and according to what was referred to earlier in the definition of concepts.

6. Data collection

For data collection, a Semi-structured Interview was conducted based on questions sent to 20 alums of the association via WhatsApp. Due to the trust built between the alumni and us, women were willing to openly share facts about their lives.

We contacted 20 alumni, but we could only talk to 10 for reasons related to changing phone numbers, a significant percentage of them 10, or an apology due to their busyness, especially at work. Interviewees were given enough time to think and reflect on questions before they responded to voice notes. For clarity, questions were restated and explained to avoid any ambiguities.

7. Findings

To begin with, the first question asked to the women was: What is economic empowerment? The word cloud (fig.7) illustrates how do the women perceive economic empowerment. (fig.7.) (the size of the words indicates the frequency of the word in answers)



Fig.7. word cloud of women's perception of economic empowerment

The interviewees repeatedly mentioned "training" as the main word defining economic empowerment in addition to "strength and dignity". This implies the improvement of women's awareness regarding their economic rights, the first step towards economic empowerment achievement.

Our findings state that all the ten women we interviewed managed to get a job, and they were all satisfied with the training received within the association because it equipped them with the required skills to get a job and earn income to sustain their families. In more detail, two of them created small businesses employing other women. Another two of them work from home because of their marital conditions, but they get enough income

to support their families. The remaining six work at a guest house, a pastry shop, and a women's hair salon.

Through reading through the incomes of the interviewed women (Fig8), only one out of ten managed to obtain a permanent job above the minimum wage in the country (SMIG 2970,05 Dh) with social security. However, the woman expressed her dissatisfaction with her earnings as she thinks she has the potential to earn more. Thus, she keeps taking more training in cooking and pastry in addition to literacy classes to improve her skills. Due to her low income and the rate of inflation in Morocco, she is obliged to get another part time job to meet her family's needs while dreaming of establishing her



Fig.8. Monthly income of the interviewees

own business. Despite the difficulties, the interviewee recognizes her great leap in her economic and social situation by moving from 0dh income to 3.500 DH permanent incomes and up to 10.000 DH for her work in events and occasions.

This woman presents an exemplary experience at the level of economic empowerment. The ambition and appreciation of the importance of training that she received equipped her with a strong will to improve and not be satisfied with the first comfort

zone she obtained. The question was: Why this overwhelming desire for continuity and improvement? Was it due to the training you received in the association? What motivated you? Or that you've lived successful experiences or that you searched for successful experiences to benefit from. As one of the 10 women who worked after obtaining a diploma in vocational training from El Amane and moving from 0 resources to 10,000 dirhams (though not permanently as a resource) and continuing development, and passion, the answer was the ignited passion and participation in the various activities of the association apart from the vocational training, like attending sessions related to combating violence against women and leadership. She also participated in a various of exhibitions and events for sharing the association's experience, awareness-raising caravans in the rural areas, volunteered with the association in leading activities for peers. She states *"I learned about other experiences at the national and international levels. These great experiences with the association enabled me to change many ideas about the role of woman in society, and the division of resources based on gender"*.

Six of the interviewed women have relatively difficult conditions because they work with no contracts as Janitors and cooks in Guest houses in Marrakech. Their services are solicited during high seasons and dismissed during low ones. The women expressed that the training received in the association qualified them in terms of skills; however; the fact that the diploma does not hold a serial number (like in the case of diplomas delivered by official institutions) even though it is delivered by the National Mutual Aid (Entraide Nationale) -a public institution under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs - does not help to secure legal contracts within enterprises. This serial number of the diplomas is required to establish (ANAPEC)

contracts), a type of contract offered to businesses by the Moroccan State to promote employment and integration of young graduates in the job market. Thus, the issue here is mainly related to formalities imposed by the State regarding the accreditation of diplomas.

The experience of the two left interviewees seems more daring; the first woman tried to penetrate the field of enterprise by establishing her own business in the field of catering with personal resources and a little support from family. However, her ambition pushed her to expand her small business through registration in the auto-entrepreneur program launched by the government to encourage people to establish their businesses. To buy equipment for her catering activity, the woman applied for a loan from the bank but was rejected due to her age (54). Thus, she was obliged to withdraw from the program and shift back to establish a cooperative with a group of women, which helped them benefit from financial assistance afforded by an organization. The second woman established an unstructured business as a pastry shop and expects to formalize her activity once she can afford resources.

8. Discussion

The findings bring us to the initial problem. Is training and professional ability sufficient for women's economic empowerment, or is there still a long way to go for women, especially in poor, traditional, and marginalized areas?

Despite the kind of jobs that women obtained, work means financial income and resources. Will these resources change their perception of the roles they play within society? By analyzing the answers, we find that, therefore, with the difference in women's

work, the question arises: Is this difference related to the free choices of the type of work or is it related to the environment in which they live? The environment forces women to work in one way or another. Does economic empowerment as training lead us directly to self-empowerment and freedom of choices, whether working near home to be close to the family or even working from home to make it easier for them to perform social roles related to gender? The crucial question here is: Does training dialectically enable freedom of choice? Or is it important to add other skills to achieve empowerment, such as freedom?

Referring to the answers regarding the definition of empowerment, were varied. However, there was a repetition of a group of words, as previously mentioned, that empowerment was related to training, strength, and dignity, but there were other references, even if weak, to self-reliance, i.e. life skills, i.e. people's initiatives, as they are considered a type of empowerment. The ability to continue training and obtain strength and professionalism were among the basic qualifications for one of the women's experience. Her economic empowerment and the development of her financial resources were not linked only to vocational training, even if it was the first step on the path to empowerment; but it was associated with continuity, research, initiative, developing other skills, and getting out of the comfort zone and working from home, or near, but rather it was linked to her endeavor to change her role in society, and this matter brings us to the theory of capabilities. In combination, empowerment is capabilities linked to one's freedoms and choices and how to manage these choices, as well as the issue of discrimination against women. This experience revealed that she

was liberated from intellectual restrictions to search for equality by searching for resources.

As shown in the word cloud, women's perception of the meaning of empowerment highlighted three main themes: "Training," "Livelihood, Dignity, and Work," and "Self-Reliance." These themes can be linked to the concepts of "savoir" (knowledge), "savoir-faire" (skills), and "savoir-être" (behavior).

Most women focused on training as the most important aspect of economic empowerment which refers to Savoir (Knowledge). Training is the process of accumulating knowledge and acquiring new or improving skills, which is related to the concept of "savoir," knowledge or knowing. For empowerment, training provides the required knowledge that enables individuals to operate within their environment to achieve their goals.

An important portion of interviewees, mentioned Livelihood, Dignity, and Work these concepts are about having the necessary means to sustain one's life, self-respect, and being productive. These concepts align with "savoir-faire," or knowing how to do things. It is the sum of practical skills to perform tasks effectively. For these women, empowerment is developing the necessary skills to earn a living and dignity through employment.

The last group of women suggested Self-Reliance as what they understand from empowerment. It is independence and the ability to support oneself. It resonates with the concept of "savoir-être," which literally translates to knowing how to be or behave appropriately in social situations. It encompasses attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal skills that help individuals to interact effectively, especially within a professional context. *Le savoir-être se résume à l'attitude du salarié en milieu*

professionnel (Boluze, 2023). Thus, empowerment as self-reliance refers to developing adequate behavior and attitudes to live independently and confidently.

The association's training allows women to improve their social and economic status through literacy programs, vocational training, and expert assistance to integrate into the labor market. After the training, the graduates' perseverance, in addition to their conditions and constraints, is crucial to achieving full integration into the economic fabric. However, the government should provide a helping hand for these women to smoothly integrate into the job market.

There was consent among the interviewees concerning the obstacles they face in the workplace. They talked about the entrenched masculine mentality that makes most of them uncomfortable, especially married and divorced women. Another challenge that most women share is the number of responsibilities placed on their shoulders which limits their full involvement as they seek to create a balance between their jobs and their family duties (even the single women who should take part in the household and take care of their families including parents and siblings). In addition to society's view of working women, especially in traditional communities and marginal neighborhoods.

The training beneficiaries receive in the association may need to be improved and require more effort and the provision of other capabilities indicated by the women interviewed. However, their poor academic level did not help them, especially with foreign languages, given that the city of Marrakesh is a tourist city that requires skills related to the hospitality industry. It is necessary to

mention that overcrowding in some programs reduces the quality of the training offered by the association. Additionally, the weakness of the equipment available in the association directly contributes to the weakness of the training and, subsequently, the chances of some women getting a job that requires competencies and knowledge in technical fields.

These answers were not influenced by the age of interviewees although they were between 52 and 20 years old. However, their educational levels were close (primary and secondary), as well as their environments (they all live in marginal areas). The answers were not very diverse. There may be exceptions, but the majority of women who join to the association are, as previously indicated in Charts, of vulnerable groups, and this was the role of associations in general to strengthen economic capabilities to achieve empowerment.

The women's economic empowerment program attracted the attention of a large number of women and even young people, due to the lack of any center to empower young people who have dropped out of school in the Sidi Youssef Ben Ali, one of the largest and marginal neighborhoods of Marrakech. The association's slogan was: "Be at any age, at any level of education, in any situation, you have the right to participate in development through empowerment". The previous graphs show that the percentage of women benefiting from vocational training programs reaches 57 percent (most of them are from the urban areas but a small but interesting number from the rural zones) which reflects the strategy of promoting gender equality.

The fact that 67 of the beneficiaries most beneficiaries (67%) dropped out of school before secondary education and were

deprived of education at an early age (under 15 years), which consequently deprives them of benefiting from government vocational training programs that focus mostly on the secondary levels, therefore this category of teenagers finds the training offered by the association as a second chance that would equip them with a training, necessary for employment and empowerment to take part in society as a free citizen.

Therefore, the achieved results are linked to training more than empowerment, and the associations bearing the slogan of empowerment will have to reconsider the method of training to parallel it with other programs that empower life skills and move towards achieving choices.

9. Conclusion

It can be concluded that there are three main axes of interest to this research at the level of economic empowerment through working on a field model of a women's association that works with women:

1- There is general satisfaction among women concerning the association's training and programs offered to women and youth. This was confirmed through interviews and the growing number of beneficiaries in the association.

2- The employment rate reaches 60 percent of the beneficiaries.

3- The cultural barrier and the masculine mentality still control our society.

10. Recommendations

To empower women and achieve equality, it is recommended to take measures in three dimensions: educational, economic, and

social. For the educational measures, a positive discrimination policy workplace should be adopted for, mainly for women with household duties. It is also necessary to recognize the diplomas delivered in collaboration with NGOs. On the economic level, it is recommended to facilitate the financing of women's projects by designing programs that consider their specificities. The women also need constant accompaniment and support so that women can run their businesses professionally. Finally, on the social level, we also recommend empowering local associations with the means and resources capable of improving beneficiaries' capabilities.

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CHAPTER 3

Local cooperation empowering muslim Rural women in morocco

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Abstract

Local cooperation can create crucial environments for the social and economic development of Muslim rural women. Females in Arab countries might get more economic resources when they are working together to achieve a common goal that goes beyond democracy and gender equality.

This article tries to investigate the impacts of cooperation on rural women's empowerment and participation in economics. It can provide factors that help Muslim women living in oases to become active agents in the development of society through controlling economic resources. To this end, this paper adopts both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The questionnaire and non-participant observation were used as data collection procedures. Probability and non-probability sampling were used to choose participants for the study. The respondents were chosen randomly and through snowball sampling as well.

The findings of the study draw the positive impacts of cooperation on women's economic empowerment. Poor women and non-educated are more likely to engage in rural cooperative activities. The quantitative results prove that more than 60% of

respondents agreed that poor women are more likely to be active members of cooperatives, whereas 30% believe that educated women have major roles within cooperatives' economic activities. Few respondents 10% believe that women should be independent economically from men, and 23% think it is not appropriate for women to have their own businesses. While 50% of respondents believe that there is no problem if women have their own enterprises.

Keywords: Cooperation – Gender Equality – Women's Empowerment – Rural Morocco- Economy-Cooperatives

Introduction

The empowerment of women in the East is different from that emancipation of women in the West. Girls and women in Arab countries or in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region lag behind equality and empowerment, not only in economy and employment but also in education and politics. However, there are some Arab and African countries that have achieved remarkable development in women's rights, democracy, and social justice. Muslim women live in a context that is not encouraging independent girls or women because of the **collective social life the people adapt**. Women can get power through their participation in social, economic, and political activities while respecting the standard cultural limitations. Economic resources and workplace advancement can be among the contexts where Arab women enjoy empowerment.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women are included in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2010, p. 120). They are categorized within the third goal that should be achieved; they are the driving force that

can facilitate all other MDGs. They are aims that can alter traditional societies and redefine the new Arab world. Like gender equality, women's empowerment requires the collaboration of youth, women, and men. The world shifted from asking for equal opportunities or gender egalitarianism and democracy to calling for empowerment. Ordinary women in Tafilalet oases take part in an invisible struggle against the global economic crisis caused by Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the Russian-Ukrainian war. Muslim women engaged in the fight against the cultural, economic, and political inequalities of both the national and the international context.

Cooperation could challenge gender inequalities within their local environment; they could invest in programs that would transform local people to be believers of modern international norms and principles. Arab and Muslim women and men have adopted specific attitudes and principles that are associated with the political and cultural history of the MENA region. Moroccan people adopt many changes because of their closeness to Europe, post-colonial transformations, and internal activism. Globalization, democratization, and liberalism found a fresh atmosphere in such developing countries as Valentine M. Moghadam suggests in her book *Modernizing Women: Gender in North Africa and the Middle East* (Moghada, 1993). Cooperation and the collective work of women could encourage transforming social and cultural beliefs; active women in cooperatives challenge the psychological, economic, cultural, and political barriers that hinder women's mobilization towards economic independence from men.

Cooperation could help in the process of reshaping social identities by reconstructing women's cultural function. They could reflect the national and international policies and ambitions through their own training and programs. The main objectives of this article are to investigate the motivations that local cooperatives can use to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within the Moroccan rural context, the economic resources for women, cooperation's influence on social transformation, and cooperation's impacts on women's participation in business. The study tries to describe rural cooperatives efforts and their effects on women's and men's cultural identities. It aims at suggesting different activities or programs that can help in promoting gender equality and empowering women in the Moroccan countryside. The study can include other objectives such as identifying factors that hinder women's participation in cooperative economic programs or activities, to understanding how the patriarchal attitude and expectations in rural Morocco affect women's present and future.

In this article, it is believed that cooperation can promote gender equality, facilitate women's economic empowerment, provide women with economic resources and opportunities for business growth, and increase women's participation in economic development. Therefore, this study tries to resolve the questions:

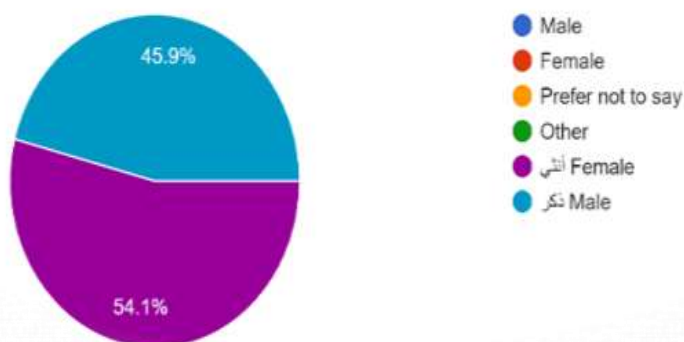
- 1.How can cooperation motivate women and men to promote gender equality and empower women?
- 2.What are economic resources and opportunities that cooperatives can use to empower women?
- 3.Does cooperation influence sustainable development and social justice for women?

4. What is the role of cooperatives in increasing women's participation in economic activities?

Methodology

This article adopts the mixed approach by using quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixing both approaches increases the legitimacy and consistency of the collected data along with enhancing the quality of the findings. The quantitative approach was used to determine the profile of women engaged in cooperatives activities and the profile of the participants. The qualitative approach was used to analyze and explain the reasons that hinder women's economic empowerment in Tafilalet region. Non-probability sampling method helps in distributing questionnaires to local females or women, while probability sampling is used for males or men. The chosen sample is from Darra-Tafilalet region. This sample was chosen since it represents people from rural Morocco. It is chosen because of its feasibility and ease-access.

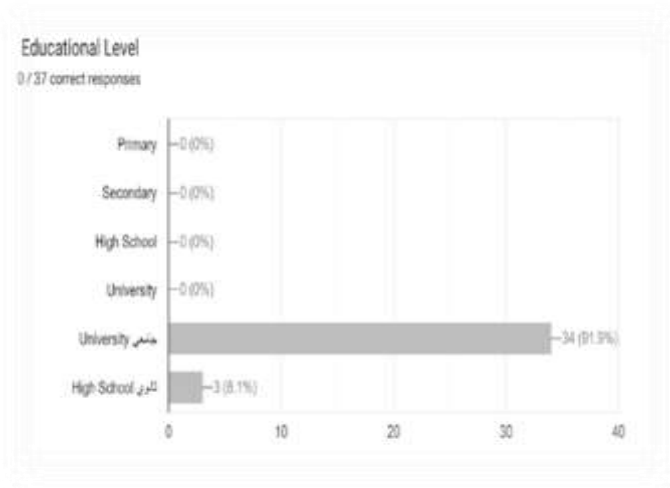
Figure 1: Participants Gender



Rural People from Morocco participate in this study. All people from Darra-Tafilalet region have equal chances to participate by fulfilling the

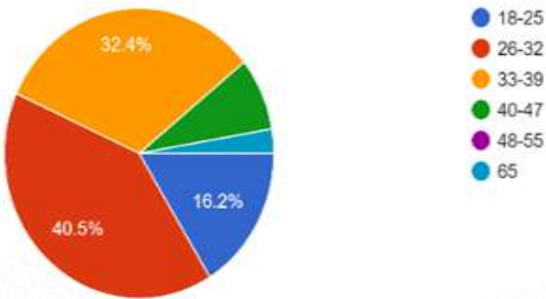
questionnaire or being part of non-participant observation. The study adopts both random and snowball sampling techniques.

Figure 3: Respondents Educational Level



one chooses not to be under the category of another gendered identity as presented in figure 1. The majority of the research respondents were youth as figure 2 illustrates; 40.5% of them are

Figure 2: Participants Age



Men were randomly chosen while snowball sampling was used mainly for women. 54.1% of respondents identified themselves as females whereas 45.9% choose to be described as men, while no

between the age of 26 and 32 years old, 32.4% were aged between 33 and 39 years old, and 16.2% were aged between 18 and 25 years. 91.9% of the respondents were educated people that have at least a university educational level, while 8.1% have a high school educational level.

The questionnaire is used as an instrument to identify and classify the main reasons in association with women's economic empowerment. It helps to better understand the impacts of cooperatives on women's lives. However, due to the weaknesses and limitations encountered with the use of the questionnaire, the non-participant observation confirms the identification and classification of the motives behind women's engagement in economic activities. Using the mixed approach increases the validity, the reliability of the data, and the quality of the findings.

Ichrakat Alkhayer Cooperative for Traditional and Modern Tailoring is the subject of the non-participant observation of this study. It is the first and unique cooperative in *Jorf* and *Erfoud* oasis in which women work together to produce Moroccan traditional clothes and local carpets. This cooperative was established in 2020 by Mr. Ahmed Boutahri, who aimed at gathering local women to work together for a common cause.

Figure 4: Women Training within Ichrakat ALKhayer



Results and discussion

Studies of gender, women's empowerment, and modernity can be vehicles for social, economic, and political advancement. More importance is given to social institutions that help in constructing cultural ideas related to gender in developing countries. Indeed, there is a need to make more research on gender and cooperation in rural areas, including the efforts of cooperatives alongside with gender inequalities, women's disempowerment, social oppression, and economic resources. Such research can create a new apparatus that provides greater opportunities for women's voices to be heard and reduces girls' fear of public spaces, increases gender equality, and balances male dominant spaces.

When women come together to achieve real economic empowerment, they can challenge the social and the political stereotypes that control societies in most countries. The mainstream beliefs or perceptions reproduce women's oppression, subordination, and discrimination. Women in North Africa and the Middle East reconstruct the same cultural norms because of some traditional perceptions of women and men, religious interpretations, and cultural structure. Women's rights and freedom can be challenged by mainstream cultural practices and social expectations of both women and men.

This part introduces, analyzes and discusses the quantitative and qualitative data collected. It is divided into four sections. The first section describes cooperatives' economic resources and opportunities to empower women. The second section presents cooperatives' promotion of gender equality and the

empowerment of women. the third section demonstrates cooperatives' influence on sustainable development and social justice. the last section discusses cooperatives increasing women's economic participation.

Women's economic disempowerment

Women in Morocco like other women in the MENA region face daily actions, politics, and discourses that hinder their development. Every day Arab and Muslim women could face challenges that give men priority over women; various mainstream ideas are perpetuated to reduce girls' and women's participation in decision-making, politics, and economics. Women's disempowerment stands for the process of constructing obstacles to prevent women's economic, political, and social development. Along the same line, Baines K. Erin (2001) presents disempowerment as any "action, policy development and/or relief program or process through which women's and men's priorities, needs and interests are further ignored, reducing their participation in decision-making and representing an obstacle to their economic, political and social improvement" (Erin, 2001, P.3).

Participants of the study assume that there are many reasons that contribute to forming obstacles in front of women's empowerment process. The collected data presented in figure 3 illustrate that 17% of respondents believe that the lack of education is one of the main reasons that hinder women's activism in the rural economy. For example, women in rural areas do not have the skills and competencies to challenge the social and cultural history of Morocco. The social system in rural

Morocco reproduces cultural practices that disempower women; people have stronger links with the old traditions that govern the tribal system and the mainstream culture. They are not aware of fighting for women’s cause. The social and cultural perceptions reshape the same social classes because of the lack of education among girls and women that encourage the same old distributions of social power.

18% of the respondents that figure 5 shows choose housework as one of the elements that disempower women. Ordinary women and men are affected by gender stereotypes that are originated from politics and social institutions gendered discourse. Poverty, lack of mechanisms, materials, and logistics valorising the external products are among the reasons that the participants of the study think cause women’s economic disempowerment. A male participant believes that the main constraint is the traditional ‘mentality, especially for married women where they are told that being a housewife is best for them and for everyone in their social group.

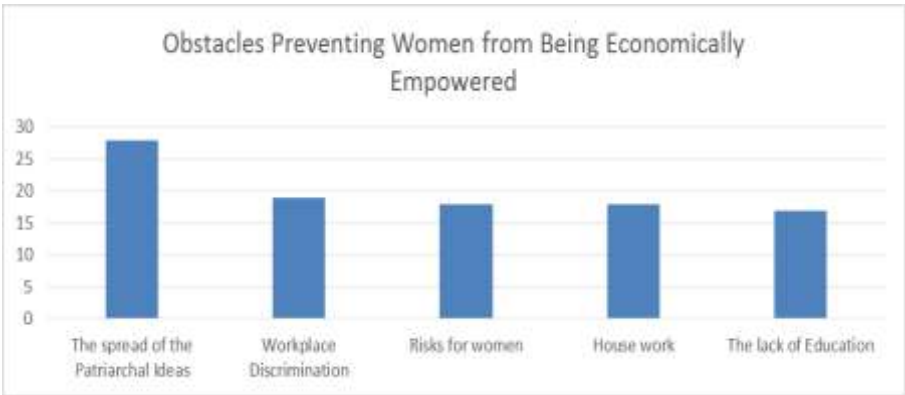


Figure 5: Obstacles Preventing Women from Being Economically

Figure 5 confirms that 28% of respondents believe that the spread of patriarchal ideas is an element that challenges women's empowerment and 18% of the respondents choose to consider avoiding putting women at risk as one of the main reasons that discourage gender inequalities in rural Morocco. Women in Tafilalet do not have access to work on their lands or farms. They may do some activities that are associated with taking care of the male workers as preparing food and drink. The man is considered the breadwinner even though there are many women who take responsibility for their families. Those culturally biased judgments lead to the spread of ideas that disempower women. Patriarchy, socialization, and men's discourse lead to the creation of imaginary boundaries that decrease women's work outside the house within the tribal system in Tafilalet.

Workplace discrimination was chosen to be among the reasons that hinder women's development by 19% of the participants. The lack of work opportunities for women is also considered among the reasons that lead women in rural Morocco to perpetuate the patriarchal discourse. Several respondents agree that women and men in rural Morocco do not trust or support women outside the private sphere. Rural social groups do not let women get good economic resources. The traditional illusion that associates women with less important status than men hinder women's life condition improvement. In fact, the social and cultural stereotypes in rural Morocco portray women as weak and not powerful enough to control decision-making or business.

Cooperation promoting gender equality and empowering women

Over the last few decades, great advancements have been made in empowering women and gender equality all over the world. Different nations improved the level of ordinary people's awareness on gender equality and realized massive support for social justice. In some countries, there are experienced women enjoying total freedom from all old cultural conventions and no longer feel that they need to call for gender equality in the private or public sphere. Yet, women and girls still need empowerment in many parts of the world. Girls' and women's empowerment "is an important component to facilitate gender equality mainstream" (Erin, 2001, p. 26). It is an essential variable in the process of normalizing gender equality in developing countries.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women are included in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2010, p. 120). They are categorised within the third goal that should be achieved; they are the driving force that can facilitate all other MDGs. They are aims that can alter traditional societies and redefine the new world. Like gender equality, women's empowerment requires the collaboration of youth, women, and men. The world shifted from asking for equal opportunities or gender egalitarianism and democracy to calling for empowerment.

Ironically some females are obliged to perpetuate gender inequalities because of the spread of patriarchal norms in their social group. Women in rural Morocco have many inside responsibilities and outside ones that are mainly related to

children's upbringing and without any economic rewards. Entrepreneurship, cooperatives, or social enterprises can help women to challenge cultural realities through educating, training, and guiding them toward overcoming cultural and social chains. The economically independent woman can invest in her own business and help other women to overcome poverty, culture, and social group restrictions. Women members of cooperatives adopt ways of life that are beyond the traditional ones; they develop their own strategies to challenge women's disempowerment and to enlarge their local economic networks.

Tribalism impacts spread among women in Tafilalet region where the male is responsible for all decisions even if they are related to a woman's own property. Tribalism norms make women's participation in economic activities impossible particularly in those places where there are people, who are captives of traditions and culture. Few women fight seclusion



Figure 6: Local Women Training within Ichrakat AlKahir Cooperative

and start working together within cooperatives to produce local couscous to get some income that might help them and their poor families. Those women try to build their own businesses from

nothing as a form of self-empowerment or collective action toward new economic activities. Local cooperatives can be organizations that help women in their resistance to the mainstream culture within tribes. Women's mentalities are changed towards new gendered identities consciously or unconsciously.

During the few last years, rural women become active agents in developing local economic activities mainly within cooperatives; however, they do not get the right economic reward or salary. Women work hard to fulfill their financial needs; for instance, in Tilwin's village women working within cooperatives get a very low wage for their great work within saffron fields while this product has an expensive financial value, according to a male respondent. Along the same line, a female respondent assumes that women get a lower salary than men because of the local traditions and the lack of job opportunities for women in the region. Women's participation in economic activities change local perceptions of working women in Errachidia region.

Women's work within cooperatives modifies social images of women within local workplaces; cooperatives provide women with more economic opportunities due to the national reforms in politics. Women get new public space where they can become agents of change and where their voice could be associated with more power in the public sphere according to a young female participant. When rural women get the needed capital, they do business that can lead them to get some profit and overcome the local cultural norms, gender responsibilities, or poverty restrictions. Sometimes they create their international networks through the migrants from local villages and send some samples

of their product to European countries but not within an exportation process.

Local cooperatives in Tafilalet region help rural women in supporting gender equality leading them to behave within human rights and women's rights frame. They are social institutions that try to make connections with international communities to learn from their experiences and to get financial resources or credits. Local cooperatives progress can create inside motivations for both women and girls; women become active agents in sharing women's and human's rights with all members of their social group. These women can become agents of development or social change for a safe and peaceful community for their girls. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls are "essential preconditions for development, peace, and security" (Olivius, 2017, p. 60) .

Women's economic empowerment provides space for girls' economic independence. Local cooperatives have positive



Figure 7: Girls and Women Training in Ichrakat AlKhayer Cooperative

impacts on social justice and gender equality perceptions within rural Morocco. Women start sending their illiterate girls to learn sewing within the cooperative, as is the case with Ichrakat

Alkhayerr cooperative which engaged in providing training for women and girls who want to learn how to produce carpets, and local and modern clothes in Jorf oasis. Jorfean females found a space where they come together to break down social and cultural barriers that oblige them to cover their bodies totally the black piece of clothes called “Izar”. The fact that these women accept to take a picture where they appear is a great development because of the main cultural perceptions in Jorf. They create some space where they could produce modern clothes that they can sell to young and old women.

Cooperatives promote gender equality and empower women by helping them in their way to get out of the marginalization social zone. The girls and women in figure 7 started the process of promoting gender equality by empowering themselves; they started the training within the Ichrakat Alkhayer cooperative even though they could not accept taking a picture with an uncovered face. There is a great change in women’s behavior in Jorf because it was rare to see women who are willing to work outside their homes. Yet, it is not a major transformation because of the great restrictions that govern the social behavior within these local oases.

Ichrakat AlKhayer cooperative received some encouragement from different figures as is the case of the visit of the director of the traditional chamber according to Mr. Ahmed Boutahri the president of the cooperation. He said they got some pieces of equipment including sewing machines, tables, and chairs. They used those materials to help women learn more about producing traditional and modern clothes, producing products that are related to Olive, and marketing women’s manufactured goods.

Ichrakat Alkhayer faced some financial problems because of the speedy spread of the Coronavirus. Like the Moroccan economy, the engaged women in the cooperation's activities suffered for two years from the lack of financial opportunities.



Figure 8: Ichrakat ALKhayer Cooperative Training Announcement

However, local women got the chance of learning and developing their skills in sewing traditional carpets and local clothes, but they paid a small price to help the cooperative in facing the financial crisis. Figure 8 presents a sample of the training that local cooperatives can provide in rural Morocco.

In the beginning, there were only nine women, but now there are twenty women that are learning how to produce good local carpets and clothes. Mr. Ahmed BOUTAHRI hired a female trainer who specialized in sewing to train the women and to help them in improving their skills. He said that they aim at changing women's ways of thinking and local people's minds sets toward women's work and projects.

He continues by saying that they want to help local women in establishing their own businesses or social enterprise by bringing some models; young successful women from the region who are working in tourism and producers of local products. Women learn new fashion designs within the cooperative and develop their social and economic path.



Figure 9: Local Women and Girls Developing their Skills within Ichrakat Alkhayer Cooperative

Rural women and men need to be motivated to shift from looking for fairness to taking advantage of empowerment opportunities and being active agents in distributing democracy over all members of society. However, for Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin (2007), people use the term empowerment as an alternative for “the more ambitious and clearer concepts of participation and democracy” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 28).

Cooperation economic resources and opportunities to empower women

Women in Jorf and Tafilalet got some access to a few factual resources such as education and training; however, rural women’s access to economic resources is not at an appropriate level that

might help them get power. There is no choice for financial aid. The governmental programs are very limited and are not open to those illiterate women who cannot leave their social group to get training or to educate themselves. For example, the “Forsa program” that was launched by the government to help young people who have their own projects requires training outside the village and a certain level of education. Forsa provides the chosen youth with 100000.00 Dhs as a credit to help them start their project. Unfortunately, women from the Tafilalet region could not get financial help because the program does not take into consideration the cultural restrictions that face local women.

The president of Ichrakt AlKhayer Mr. Ahmed BOUTAHRI got financial aid for the cooperative because he was responsible for participation in the Forsa program. Women in Ichrakat Alkhayer could get some benefits from the financial credit that their cooperative got but even the male representative had no choice; there is only one program that provides some facilitations by returning the 90% of the provided credit. Women need to have a lot of choices to get real empowerment from economic resources. Women in rural oases in the Errachidia region engage in collaborative work that is related to agricultural activities, local products, traditional handicrafts, and educational institutions. In fact, there are many emerging cooperatives that need more financial help because they are active in domains related to foodstuffs, cosmetics, couscous, barley, medicinal herbs, aromatic, medicinal and cosmetic oils, olive oil, honey, eggs, etc.

These women can be active in some local forms of trade that may facilitate their economic empowerment. They do their best

seeking to accumulate some assets and overcome poverty. Trade help women overcome gender inequalities in local markets, but they feel that they need more familial support and legal protection. They need to get the appropriate education in economic legislation and more explanations of credit project explanations of credit projects. They do great efforts to produce and expose local carpets as figure 10 exposes.



**Figure 10: Local Carpet produced
by women within Ichrakat Alkhayer Cooperative**

Women in this region face crucial inequalities in access to resources and the labor market. Gender divisions between females and males increase women's responsibilities and reduce male ones. However, working women provide more help to their families than men. The main goal for local working women is to participate in saving the family and in providing help to their male counterparts as well through small trade or agricultural activities within cooperatives.

Local cooperatives look for financial support from the local council or community council, the regional council, and the traditional chamber. They ask for loans from 'IntilaK' program that support youth entrepreneurs and business. They wait very long to get credits that are supported by the government.

However, women hope to get new resources and opportunities to get a regular income. They can create some space that is free from gender inequalities through their participation in the production and construction of huge social networks.

The quantitative results prove that 80% of local women working within cooperatives engage in activities to get an income and to help their families financially. The spread of poverty and the economic crisis have negative impacts on local families' income. Therefore, local women's work within cooperatives promotes gender equality and empowers women. The collected data confirm that more than 60% of respondents agreed that poor women are more likely to be active members of cooperatives. Highly educated girls and women in oases try to get leading positions; 30% of respondents believe that educated women have major roles within cooperatives' economic activities.

Women working within cooperatives work hard to help in the production of good products and in looking for financial help. They try to share ideas that can empower other girls and women, but they don't try to be financially independent of their males. Few respondents (10%) believe that women in rural Morocco should be independent economically from men, and 23% think it is not appropriate for women to have their own businesses. While 50% of respondents believe that there is no problem if women have their own enterprises. As a result, cooperatives in rural Morocco help women to exploit the possible economic resources and empower the whole social group by providing families with empowered women as models.

Cooperatives influence sustainable development and social justice

Investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency, and sustained economic growth. Increasing women's economic empowerment is central to the achievement of the MDGs and to the eradication of poverty. Adequate resources need to be allocated at all levels, mechanisms and capacities need to be strengthened and gender-responsive policies need to be enhanced to fully utilize the multiplier effect (United Nations, 2010, p. 82).

Women in cooperatives share talks and ideas that are related to their businesses and families. They have a free space from gender inequalities. They develop new strategies to overcome present and future problems related to their cooperatives and families. They become active agents in social and economic change by calling for increasing women's access to more economic opportunities. Women develop their knowledge about how to get more financial help, property, and marketplace and share economic ideas with their female and male relatives in rural Morocco. They lead the members of their families toward being part of the process of social development.

Economic resources and opportunities that cooperatives can use to empower women have positive effects on families and have vital impacts on the whole social group. Cooperatives provide space for women to develop their marketing skills through training courses and special exhibitions. Women's participation in economic exhibitions helps them to enlarge their networks and to be closer to public support or international

nongovernmental organization. When people are exposed to women who are taking risks in economic activities, they think of being part of future investments and start looking for capital and funds. Individuals try to follow successful women in their path of developing marketable skills and management techniques. Strong women in rural Morocco challenge stereotypes and the problems that are in oases' infrastructure or access to economic resources.

Carpet and cake marketing are the main fields where local cooperatives are active. Women are working inside the cooperative or at their homes to increase the family's income, earn additional financial opportunities, and improve their social position. Specialized crafts pave the way to women to challenge household work and child-rearing restrictions; women's domestic responsibilities prevent them from expressing their abilities in increasing their profits. However, working within cooperatives helps women to get more social power and to empower other women. Female can get fair access to economic resources and financial opportunities that help them change their lives and their families or surrounding.

Real empowerment means that women are well-paid and can help other women in the process of getting more self-trust and a powerful social position. Moroccan women enjoy economic rights and opportunities or respect due to the reforms in the *Mudawana* "the Moroccan family code". Rural women empower other women, not only within cooperatives, by fighting sexual harassment in the workplace and negative stereotypes within families by being good models for other generations.

Cooperatives increasing women's participation

Women's technical training, organization, awareness, and networks help them to promote their capacity building and financial support. Women in villages participate in increasing other women's awareness about the importance of their economic empowerment. They work together to increase their own income, improve their health, develop new strategies, and expand their savings and credit. Local women try to participate in local councils' decision-making to get more economic resources and to promote their social impacts.

In rural Morocco, women try to engage in economic activities to help their children in their learning process, and to provide their family with a good income mainly when their male counterparts cannot find a job. Cooperatives help women gain training and access to local markets. They are organizations that facilitate women's integration in some forms of the economy; cooperatives create different opportunities by using social media and exposing women to new technologies to get out of their comfort zone.

Cooperatives generate social power, create a working frame, help to build an economic career, participate in the construction of independent women, and transform women to be producers or entrepreneurs. They become active in politics due to cooperatives sensitizing women, their families, and social group. They get better development by challenging the traditional cultural norms that govern oases in Tafilalet. Women in cooperatives become active agents in the mobilizing women's process. They find space where they can discuss common problems within their

organization or cooperative networks. When the women meet each other, they can discuss gender inequalities that they face or that they need to challenge.

Conclusion

The current study aims at discussing the impacts of cooperatives on women's economic empowerment. It aims at investigating the inspirations that local cooperatives can use to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within the Moroccan rural context. The data were collected through observation where the researcher used a specific grid to record the collected data. A questionnaire was used to gather data randomly from ordinary people living in Tafilalet. There was an analysis of women's participation in cooperative activities to improve their social and cultural status.

The study was conducted in Jorf oasis within Errachidia region where the researchers had access to cooperatives activities, local credit programs, and local markets. The study suggests that cooperatives promote gender equality, facilitate women's economic empowerment, provide women with more economic resources and development opportunities, and increase women's involvement in social transformation.

The findings of the study confirm that there is a positive effect of cooperatives on women's economic empowerment. The collected data shows that cooperatives challenge gender discrimination within rural Morocco. They help women in gaining training, access to local markets, and good income. The article confirms that cooperatives transform local people's beliefs

and norms by facilitating women's engagement in economic programs.

Women's work in rural Morocco does not always lead to their empowerment; sometimes, women are exploited by males mainly when they get a very low salary. The informal economy portrays women in a less valuable status where they are poorly paid. Very limited working opportunities exist in rural Morocco. Women's self-employment empowers them and their families if they become active agents in social empowerment.

Moroccan rural women depend on cooperatives to improve their social status and professional careers. Women's emancipation through economic activities leads to help them to become producers and to open new job opportunities for other women. Girls can get education opportunities because their mothers provide them with free space that they could not get for themselves. Women try to help their girls in their way to get a better status, not intimacy. They recognize the importance of supporting their daughters to become economically independent from males.

Women in rural Morocco need to overcome illiteracy. They need more training to master using technology to enlarge their networks. Instructors need to learn about the new high-powered technological devices. Cooperatives need more economic resources and facilitations in the process of getting credits. Members of cooperatives need to develop their knowledge about how to fight gender inequalities in the workplace and within society. Economic empowerment of women can help them in constructing new perspectives and in sharing modern social norms or women's rights.

Cooperatives have a great impact on women's life and economic empowerment; they motivate women and men to promote gender equality and to increase women's emancipation. Therefore, it is recommended for Moroccan women to adopt collective work within cooperatives and create opportunities to empower other women. The study shows that these organizations or institutions influence sustainable development and social justice for women.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

This study aims at investigating the impacts of cooperation on rural women's empowerment and participation in economics. The data will expose factors that help Muslim women living in oases to become active agents in the development of society through controlling economic resources. You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire as honestly as possible, and I assure you that your identity and information provided will be anonymous.

Thank you for your time and collaboration.

Please, put a tick in the box corresponding to your answer.

1. What is your sex?

(1) Male

(2) Female

(3) Prefer not to say

(4) Other

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

2. How old are you?

(1) 18-25 ☐ (2) 26-32 ☐ (3) 33-39 ☐ (4) 40-47 ☐ (5) 48-55 ☐

Other:

<input type="text"/>

3. What is your level of education?

(1) High School ☐ (2) Primary ☐ (3) University ☐

(4) Secondary ☐

4. What are the reasons behind women's economic disempowerment?

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5.What are the reasons that prevent women from engaging in cooperative activities?

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6. What are the names and the fields of rural Morocco cooperations?

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7. Why do women engage in cooperatives?

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8. What do Cooperatives provide to women?

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9.In your opinion, what are the main obstacles that prevent women from being economically empowered?

- a. The burden of obligations and household chores
- b. Forms of discrimination in the professional field (in hiring, wages, promotion to positions of responsibility, etc.)
- c. The continued dominance of male mentalities in dealing with women
- d. Existence of risks that threaten the safety of women in places of work and training and on the way to them
- e. Difficulties in obtaining education and training
- f. Other obstacles (please specify)

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10.How do cooperatives promote gender equality and empower women?

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11. What are economic resources and opportunities that cooperatives can use to empower women?

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12. Do cooperatives influence sustainable development and social justice for women?

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13. What is the role of cooperatives in increasing women's participation in economic activities?

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Please state any other comments that are relevant to the issue under discussion.

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Thank you again for your collaboration!

CHAPTER 4

Gender and inequalities in access to finance

Bouchra Benyacoub, Mohamed V University, Rabat

Abstract

Financial inclusion is the use of, and equitable access to, affordable and appropriate financial products and services that meet people's needs. It is considered a key element of most of the Sustainable Development Goals. Financial inclusion enables poor people to finance their activities, save and provide for their families. Several studies by Cull et al (2014) have demonstrated the significant impact of access to and use of financial services on the lives of individuals and businesses, which in turn leads to growth in savings, increased productive investment, consumption, poverty reduction and women's empowerment.

According to the Global Financial Inclusion Index, the proportion of adults worldwide who have access to formal financial services rose from 51% in 2011 to 69% in 2017. Despite this overall progress, more than a billion women are still excluded from formal financial services, and the gender gap has remained stable since 2011.

To overcome the obstacles to accessing formal financial services and encourage responsible and regular use of these services for the benefit of the population without discrimination, Bank Al-Maghrib adopted a national strategy in 2007 to promote financial inclusion.

The aim of this article is to explain and analyse gender disparities in terms of access to and use of financial services, and

to propose appropriate solutions to overcome obstacles to women's access to finance.

Keywords: Financial Inclusion, Gender disparities, Financial Education.

Introduction

The importance of accessing financial services has become increasingly prominent and a pressing matter for many countries. It is a crucial issue in the struggle against poverty, exclusion, and inequality among their populations. Indeed, many people require assistance to access or use appropriate financial services on the conventional market.

According to the World Bank (2014), 2.5 billion people, or 38% of adults, do not use "formal" financial services. This exclusion peaks among the poorest: more than one out of every two households in this social group needs a bank account due to the expenses involved, the distance to branches, or the administrative procedures required. In developing countries, only 37% of women, compared to 46% of men, have a bank account.

In Morocco, only 34% of women have access to a bank account, compared to 66% of men. This disparity, which is more marked at the base of the socio-economic pyramid, creates a vicious circle: Without access to financial services, women cannot seize the market's opportunities, which amplifies gender inequalities.

Several initiatives have been undertaken by different institutions over the last decade to widen access to financial services for different segments of the population, both individuals and businesses. Despite the progress made, access to

formal financial services remains limited and uneven. To overcome the obstacles to accessing formal financial services and encourage responsible and regular use of these services for the benefit of the population without discrimination, Bank Al-Maghrib adopted a national strategy in 2007 to promote financial inclusion.

The aim of this article is to analyse and explain gender disparities in terms of access to finance, based on Bank Al Maghrib reports. We will then try to propose solutions to help and facilitate women's access to financial services and products. Our problem thus revolves around the following question: what are the obstacles to women's financial inclusion, and how can they be overcome? The article is structured along three main lines. First, we define the concept of financial inclusion. Secondly, we present the current state of gender disparities in terms of access to finance. Finally, we will propose solutions to improve women's financial inclusion.

I. Definition of financial inclusion

Based on international practices, the recommendations of international organizations, and the analysis of the current Moroccan situation, financial inclusion is defined as follows : “Equitable access for all people and companies to formal financial products and services (transactions, payments, savings, financing, and insurance) according to their needs and resources to promote economic and social inclusion while preserving their rights and dignity”. This definition covers all dimensions of financial inclusion (access, use, quality, and well-being) and covers all segments of the population:

- “All people and companies”: Financial inclusion should benefit all, especially those segments that have been excluded or underserved so far: women, rural people, youth, and Very small enterprises (VSEs). Indeed, financial inclusion is not limited to people but also concerns companies, which should have access to appropriate financial products regardless of their size and sector of activity.

- Access" and "Use": Financial inclusion must not be limited to "equipment" but must also aim to develop the use of traditional financial products. Only use can ensure that formal financial products are integrated into the daily lives of households and companies, producing consequently financial inclusion benefits (transaction security, savings, investment capacity, access to project financing, etc.).

- Adaptation to the needs and means of users": Financial inclusion targets the development of products and services that consider the specificities of Moroccans, particularly the most disadvantaged segments (small amounts, irregularity of income, geographical isolation, poor financial education, etc.).

- The benefit regarding economic and social inclusion": Financial inclusion must aim more broadly at individuals' and companies' development and economic and social inclusion. In this respect, the actions should prioritize complementarity and additionality about other public policies that pursue the same objectives.

Financial inclusion enables individuals and businesses to access financial services (savings, payments, credit, money transfers, etc.) at a lower cost and transparently and efficiently.

The concept thus covers three main dimensions: access, use, and quality.

- Access: which represents the ability to use the financial services and products offered by formal institutions;
- Use corresponds to the direct and indirect negative consequences of financial product and service use difficulties. These difficulties may be due to a loss of knowledge on the part of the individual, whether cognitive (lack of basic banking knowledge) or cultural (mistrust of banking products or budgeting practices that are difficult to reconcile with their operating rules), or to a situation that disrupts decision-making. But they can also result from the products' unsuitability for the person's condition (their characteristics prove inappropriate, etc.)
- Quality refers to the ability of the financial service or product to meet the needs of consumers. It reflects the consumer's experience as demonstrated by their attitudes and opinions towards the products and services currently available.

It is essential to distinguish between the access and use of financial services. Some people and businesses may have access to certain financial products but choose not to use them. Some may have indirect access, such as using someone else's bank account or already using a close substitute. Others may not use financial services because they do not need them or for cultural or religious reasons.

Financial inclusion aims to reduce financial exclusion barriers and make finance accessible to a population excluded from the conventional financial system.

Several studies show that access to and use of appropriate financial products and services leads to a better quality of life for individuals and a better development of enterprises (IMF, 2019). Specifically, promoting household access to deposit accounts leads to growth in savings, productive investment, consumption, poverty reduction (Beck, Demirguc-Kunt, and Levine, 2004; Honohan, 2004), and women's empowerment (AFI 2020).

Financial inclusion policies aim to make available formal financial services adapted to their needs available to different segments of the population to improve their living conditions. This objective is spread over three main stages.

II. Disparities in terms of accessibility and use of financial services persist in morocco

For almost a decade, the public authorities have included financial inclusion among their priority actions to fight social and economic inequalities in Morocco. Several actors, including the Ministry of Economy and Finance and Bank Al-Maghrib (DEPF Etudes (2018), have undertaken several actions to reduce the factors of financial exclusion through targeted policies for the benefit of individuals and businesses.

Since 2007, the promotion of financial inclusion has been considered among the strategic orientations of Bank Al-Maghrib's efforts to overcome the obstacles related to access to formal financial services and make financial inclusion a real vector of socio-economic development.

With one-third of Moroccans still unbanked, financial inclusion has become an opportunity and a necessity but is nevertheless hampered by several obstacles.

This strategy sets several objectives, including the reduction of the gender gap in terms of access to accounts, to 41% in 2023 and 16% in 2030, compared to 59% currently. The strategy also aims to develop the field of microfinance to strengthen its role in the financial inclusion of disadvantaged social categories excluded from the formal network.

Concerning the key indicators of access and utilization, it is worth mentioning that there was a notable increase in the number of access points to financial services in 2019. Specifically, the total rose by 15% to reach 15,860, compared to 13,768 in 2018. This signifies a significant growth of nearly 78% compared to 2013, where access points stood at 8,913, ultimately reaching 15,860 in 2019.

Figure 1: Evolution of access points by category

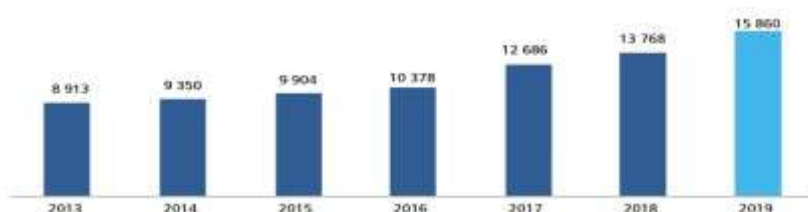


Table 1: Distribution of access points by region

Region	Adult population	Number of access points	Banking density
EDDAKHLA - OUED EDDAHAB	119 700	94	1 273
LAAYOUNE - SAKIA EL HAMRA	288 465	258	1 118
GUELIMIM - OUED NOUN	330 908	179	1 849
DRAA - TAFILALET	1 252 221	536	2 336
L'ORIENTAL	1 790 003	1 359	1 317
BENI MELLAL - KHENIFRA	1 931 265	1 138	1 697
SOUSS-MASSA	2 091 826	1 226	1 706
TANGER - TETOUAN - AL HOCEIMA	2 770 610	1 573	1 761
FES - MEKNES	3 250 768	1 747	1 861
MARRAKECH - SAFI	3 495 251	1 645	2 125
RABAT - SALE - KENITRA	3 552 775	2 150	1 652
GRAND-CASABLANCA SETTAT	5 362 028	3 955	1 356
Total général	26 236 319	15 860	1 654

Bank density at national level has improved significantly, from one access point per 1,877 adults in 2018 to one access point per 1,654 adults in 2019.

Despite the trend at the national level, the banking density in rural areas is only one access point for every 9,245 adults, compared to one access point for every 1,023 adults in urban areas.

The evolution of retail deposit accounts has seen significant progress in volume and value. Indeed, the number of deposit accounts increased by 4.2% in 2019, reaching 24.36 million accounts with an outstanding balance up by 3.3% to reach MAD 678.7 billion.

The number of bank loans to individuals rose by 5.4% in 2019, reaching 12.6 million contracts with an outstanding amount of 288.1 billion dirhams, up 3.2% compared to 2018.

According to the latest results of the World Bank's Findex survey conducted in 2019, the gender gap is wider in Morocco compared to similar countries. Nearly 34% of adult women have access to a bank account compared to 66% of men.

This disparity, which is more pronounced at the base of the socio-economic pyramid, creates a vicious circle: without access to financial services, women cannot seize the opportunities the market offers, which amplifies gender inequalities.

Regarding the distribution of accounts and credits by gender, women represent almost one-third of the users of banking services.

Figure 2: Distribution of accounts by gender

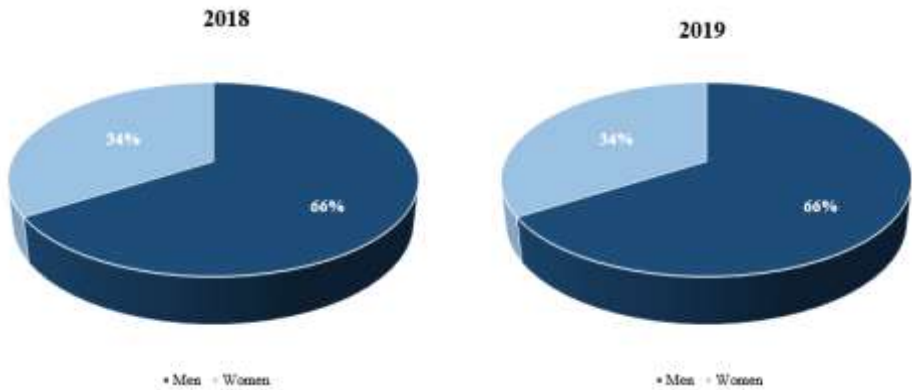
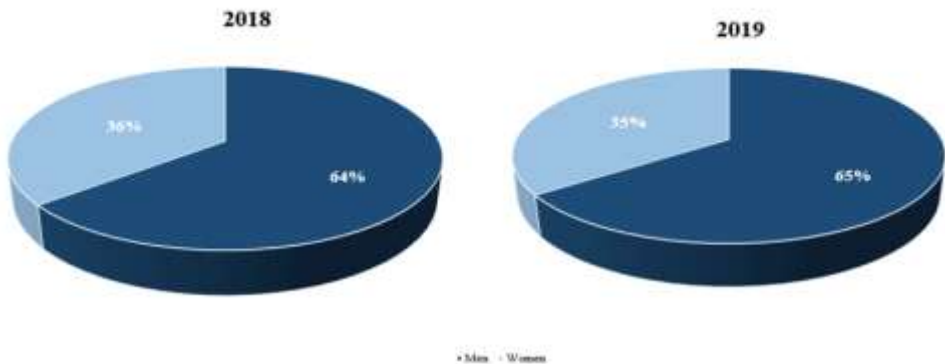


Figure 3: Distribution of credits by gender



Women's financial exclusion can be attributed to a combination of economic, social, and cultural factors. Recent studies have revealed that employed women experience a similar level of financial inclusion compared to employed men. However, disparities arise when considering the self-employed and unemployed women, where the gender gap widens significantly. The economic literature has identified several barriers to financial inclusion, which are as follows:

-Social disparities in access to finance: Ziadi (2013) points out that in middle-income countries, financial exclusion mainly

affects women, low-income people, the less educated, and those in rural areas.

- Gender disparities in account ownership, formal savings, and formal credit. Being female increases the chance of being financially excluded (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2013).

- The mismatch between financial services and products and the needs of poor consumers Claessens, 2006; Kempson et al., 2000.

- High bank fees are a barrier to financial inclusion. Indeed, Terpstra and Verbeet (2014) show that among people with lower incomes, there is a negative relationship between the cost of the financial service provided to the customer and their satisfaction.

- The collateral required by banks prevents low-income households and small and medium-sized enterprises in the Community of Central African States from accessing credit (Avom and Bobo, 2014).

- Household socioeconomic characteristics like age, gender, education, and income level - influence financial inclusion in Peru (Clamara et al., 2014)

- The distance of the bank from the customer's place of residence, information asymmetry, and banking costs are among the main barriers to financial inclusion in Ethiopia (Baza & Sambasiva, 2017). In sub-Saharan Africa, individuals with low-income face challenges in accessing bank accounts, as highlighted by Lwodi and Muriu (2017). The World Bank (2009) also emphasizes that a person's income level plays a pivotal role in determining their access to financial services. This implies that individuals with higher income levels are more likely to have

better access to financial services, including borrowing, as Claessens (2006) emphasized.

-Lack of financial education, lack of documentation required for lending and lack of trust in local banks are among the factors that exclude people from the formal banking system Vikas and Bhawna (2017).

III. How to improve women's financial inclusion?

Strengthening women's financial inclusion requires the design of financial services and products that meet the needs of all segments of society, which is considered one of the essential pillars for achieving financial inclusion and Financial Access, (2012).

A differentiated approach to women is needed because they are among the most disadvantaged social categories (low amounts, irregular income, geographical isolation, low financial education, etc.), (Pinos, 2015). Indeed, financial service providers are less inclined to address female clients because their margins are lower in this population segment, and it requires higher investments at the outset.

It is indeed more challenging to reduce transaction costs for small accounts. In addition, women often prefer informal products, notably savings. 21% of the population uses savings solutions, but more than 2/3 of this population uses informal solutions (tontine, family, etc.).

Banks need to invest more in familiarizing women with formal products through financial education. The main objective of financial education is to provide financial education on products and services offered by financial and banking institutions to raise

awareness among all social categories of society, which helps them make financial decisions (savings, borrowing, investment, etc.) with less risk.

In order to enhance the appeal of specific financial products for women entrepreneurs, it is necessary to focus on designing and developing tailored products and services that align with the sectors where they are predominantly engaged. This can be achieved by offering personalized banking solutions and customized financial products.

Taking advantage of mobile banking which is considered to be one of the alternative financing tools that has developed the most, especially in Africa. The spread of mobile phones makes it possible to offer banking services without a bank account. It reduces geographical constraints and transaction costs, which makes it possible to increase the spread of a remote banking model without incurring distribution costs that would be prohibitive for a massive spread. In Kenya, for example, 1/5 of the population has a mobile phone, and 68% of adults use it to pay bills or manage money transfers.

Conclusion

Financial inclusion has attracted significant interest from public authorities wishing to achieve economic and social prosperity for their populations and reduce poverty, which is highest among the most disadvantaged social classes, mainly young people and women. It has become an essential factor in economic and social equity, and women's financial inclusion has become a crucial priority for all countries and international institutions, as it contributes to improving women's well-being

and self-empowerment and enables the proper management of their income and savings.

Bank Al Maghrib adopts National Financial Inclusion Strategy which aims at improving access to finance for all segments of society, particularly disadvantaged social groups. This initiative aligns with the practices of comparable countries that have successfully enhanced their financial inclusion indicators. The strategy sets several targets, including reducing the gender gap in access to the account to 41% in 2023 and 16% in 2030, from 59% currently. The strategy also aims to develop the field of microfinance to strengthen its role in financial inclusion of disadvantaged and excluded social group's formal network.

Financial inclusion is not just about access to financial services but also their use in the daily lives of households and businesses. It helps them to make financial decisions (savings, project financing, and others). An inclusive financial sector is vital to reducing the vulnerability of low-income households and encouraging the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises through better capital allocation. These two dynamics help promote economic growth by helping to reduce unemployment.

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CHAPTER 5

Unveiling the political dimensions of discrimination: exploring career challenges and inequalities faced by female sub-saharan migrant students in agadir, morocco

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Abstract

This qualitative study employs an intersectional lens to investigate the experiences of female sub-Saharan migrant students in Agadir, Morocco, with a particular focus on the challenges they face in securing internships and professional opportunities. Drawing on data from focus group discussions, our research seeks to unravel the complex barriers affecting this demographic cohort. Central to the analysis is an exploration of how intersecting factors such as gender, race and immigrant status coalesce to shape the lived realities and professional trajectories of these students. The theoretical framework underpinning this research is based on an integrative approach that synthesizes the tenets of intersectionality theory, feminist thought and critical race theory.

Keywords: Female, Sub-Saharan, Migrant students, Intersectionality, Feminist theory, Critical race theory, public policy.

Résumé

Cette étude qualitative emploie une perspective intersectionnelle pour examiner les expériences des étudiantes migrantes subsahariennes à Agadir, au Maroc, en mettant l'accent sur les défis auxquels elles sont confrontées durant leurs recherche de stages et des opportunités professionnelles. En nous appuyant sur des données issues de groupes de discussion, notre travail de recherche vise à démêler les barrières complexes qui affectent cette minorité démographique. Au cœur de l'analyse nous explorons de la manière dont des facteurs croisés tels que le sexe, la race et le statut d'immigré s'allient pour façonner les réalités vécues et les trajectoires professionnelles de ces étudiantes. Le cadre théorique qui sous-tend cette recherche est basé sur une approche intégrative qui synthétise les principes de la théorie de l'intersectionnalité, de la pensée féministe et de la théorie critique de la race.

Mots clés: Femmes subsahariennes, étudiantes migrantes, intersectionnalité, théorie féministe, théorie critique de la race, politique publique.

Background and significance of the study

Morocco has emerged as an attractive destination for Sub-Saharan African migrant students, establishing itself as a significant academic hub in Africa (Berriane 147). The Souss-Massa region, with its diverse array of educational institutions, has witnessed a substantial influx of Sub-Saharan students (Charef et al. 174-175). This region has experienced a growing trend in foreign student enrolments, predominantly from French-speaking African nations. For instance, Ibn Zohr University reported a notable increase rising from 225 in 2015 to nearly 450

in 2021 (174-175). While the cohort of female students is numerically smaller, they exhibit a higher propensity for pursuing overseas education in comparison to their male counterparts (178). However, female students encounter distinct challenges, such as potential parental opposition and limited access to information about the destination country (179).

Despite Morocco's reputation as a host country for international students, Sub-Saharan students encounter substantial barriers in securing employment opportunities (Laouali 30). Research conducted in 2011 revealed that while graduation rates among migrant students were high, only a minority managed to obtain regular employment in Morocco (30). Moreover, the "national preference" policy exacerbates these challenges (31). This policy requires employers to provide evidence of the unavailability of domestic job seekers before considering applications from foreign students, as stipulated in Dahir No. 1-58-008 dated February 24, 1958, which establishes the general status of the civil service, as published in the Official Gazette on April 11, 1958.

A subsequent study in 2017, focused on Fes and Meknes, shed light on the employment hurdles faced by qualified Sub-Saharan migrants (Polistena 43). These obstacles span legal and cultural barriers, as well as social isolation (43). Although certain sectors may favor international candidates, the limited scope of such industries often results in "brain waste" (43).

Given this context, a holistic approach is imperative to uphold Morocco's position as a welcoming host nation and to deepen our understanding of the challenges faced by these students, particularly the female demographic. To foster inclusive

societies, it is essential to address the distinct obstacles encountered by minority groups. This study aims to enrich this dialogue by examining the political dimensions of these students' journeys. By selecting Agadir as our case study locale, we aspire to provide specific insights with broader implications.

Research objectives and research questions

Through this research endeavor, we aim to provide valuable insights into the experiences of female Sub-Saharan migrant students in Agadir. The study pursues three core objectives:

1. Pinpoint the specific challenges and disparities encountered by these students in pursuing career opportunities and professional advancement within the local labor market.
2. Investigate the socio-political backdrop and structural impediments that limit access to professional avenues and internship opportunities, revealing the systems that sustain marginalization.
3. Capture lived experiences to gain an understanding of the student perspectives by inspecting their firsthand experiences engaging with political processes and frameworks that impact their opportunities and challenges.

Two key research questions guide the study:

1. How do professional and internship challenges manifest for female Sub-Saharan students in Agadir? This question aims to identify the difficulties faced in pursuing careers, providing a comprehensive view of the challenges present within the local labor market.
2. Which political elements exert the most significant impact on the experiences of these students? This line of inquiry

explores the societal and institutional dynamics that amplify inequalities within the job market.

Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing focus group discussions as the main data collection method, to explore the political dimensions and structural obstacles affecting labor force accessibility for Sub-Saharan female migrant students. Guided by an intersectionality framework, the analysis aims to understand their experiences. The Focus group method was chosen for their interactive, dynamic nature that encourages open sharing of experiences and meaningful discussion, revealing the social dynamics and power structures shaping participants' lived realities.

On May 14, 2023, we conducted a focus group session with 18 female students from Sub-Saharan Africa. Most respondents were currently enrolled in higher educational institutions in Agadir, while the remaining respondents were recent university graduates.

In selecting participants, the aim was to ensure representation from a diverse range of Sub-Saharan nations, inclusive of students from both public and private institutions. The focus group discussions were facilitated using a semi-structured interview format. Our chosen design provided a coherent framework for discussions, allowing participants to voice their opinions and experiences without constraint, which facilitated conversations based on preset topics and questions while also welcoming unplanned insights and perspectives from participants.

Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was rigorously upheld through the anonymization of identifiers in order to protect privacy and avoid potential diplomatic issues. The analysis focused on overarching themes rather than biases related to nationalities or institutions. Data underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns. It is also necessary to acknowledge the study's inherent limitations. Notably, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Further research could expand geographically and explore policies to facilitate workforce integration for this population.

Review of the Literature

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a pioneering scholar in Black feminist legal studies, initially formulated the concept of intersectionality in the late 1980s to address the nuanced and multi-dimensional aspects of Black female identity (Carbado et al. 303, Stephens 165). Intersectionality serves as both a rigorous theoretical paradigm and an incisive analytical tool, revealing the complex dynamics through which individuals navigate the intersections of multiple social identities such as race, gender, class, and disability (303,165).

According to A.E. Kings, the conceptual foundations of intersectionality can be located within the broader intellectual traditions of feminist and critical race theory, where it has garnered increasing scholarly attention (62). Crenshaw's seminal contribution aimed to remedy the inadequacies present in feminism and race discourses, which often failed to fully capture the unique intersectional forms of discrimination encountered by Black women (63).

Her metaphor of a traffic intersection serves as an illustrative analogy, vividly encapsulating the diversified forms of oppression experienced by Black women at the intersection of racism and sexism (Kings 64): The dominance of white perspectives within traditional feminist theories and activism has inadvertently marginalized the experiences of women from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds (Atrey 32). Likewise, many anti-racist movements have given insufficient attention to gender-specific issues, resulting in gaps that highlight the imperative for adopting intersectional frameworks (32-33).

As an analytical tool, intersectionality has transcended disciplinary boundaries, offering nuanced methodologies for probing complex social and political inequities (Cassese 4). It rejects monolithic conceptualizations of identity in favor of an integrated understanding that accounts for the compounding and interlocking effects of race, gender, class, disability, and other identity markers (Kings 64, Atrey 32). This intersectional lens decodes the complex interplay between the variables that shape an individual's lived experiences, access to opportunities, and societal positioning in nuanced ways (64,32). Importantly, the adoption of intersectionality as a paradigm serves to decenter the hegemony of white, middle-class perspectives within feminist and gender studies, thereby enriching the discourse with more comprehensive and context-specific analyses (Atrey 32-33).

The strength of intersectionality lies in its ability to provide a more expansive and inclusive analytical framework for social critique (Atrey 32). It eschews reductionist explanations of oppression and discrimination, instead offering a holistic understanding that considers the multiplicity of factors impacting

individuals' diverse experiences (32-33). Such a comprehensive framework informs the design of targeted interventions, policies, and strategies to effectively address the unique needs of those facing intersecting marginalization (33).

Scholars like Suzanne B. Goldberg and Iris Marion Young have further explored the nuances of group differences and their implications for politics and justice: Goldberg delves into how organizations navigate identity-related issues (Goldberg 127), while Young elucidates distinct political approaches, such as the politics of positional difference and the politics of cultural difference (Young 274-275). Their respective works highlight the importance of recognizing and addressing entrenched inequalities while celebrating diverse cultural identities and perspectives (Goldberg 127, Young 283-288).

Tiffany Manuel, another scholar, examined the potential for integrating intersectionality theory into public policy, critically addressing the tendency of the latter to oversimplify complex issues and overlook the multifaceted influences of identity on individual experiences (182,196). She advocates for the incorporation of intersectional frameworks in policy research to amplify the quality of evaluation models and foster policies that promote social justice and equality (Manuel 182, 196).

Within intersectional racial justice organizing, Ashlee Christoffersen delineates the notion of generic intersectionality which emphasizes several equality dimensions sans a specific group focus and explored how this approach can inadvertently diminish the role of race in addressing inequalities (414). She further contends that generic intersectionality is, at times, employed to undermine endeavors centered on race, perpetuating

the isolation of race from other dimensions of equality (Christoffersen 417-418).

Laura Cleton and Petra Meier articulated the indispensability of intersectionality as an analytical framework for dissecting the complex processes of categorization inherent in migration and integration studies (Cleton & Meier, 12). They argued that an intersectional perspective brings into focus the significance of historical contexts and critically examines the role of policy actors in perpetuating or challenging existing inequalities (12-13). Moving beyond a simplistic conception of power as merely a form of domination, they advocate for an expansive inquiry into agency, emphasizing the potential for transformative change within governance systems (Cleton & Meier 15,18).

O'Cinneide, on the other hand, presented an alternative viewpoint that rigorously interrogated the prevailing assumptions and tenets central to intersectionality (O'Cinneide, 75). He critiqued the limitations of intersectional analyses that predominantly focus on race and gender discrimination while neglecting pressing issues such as poverty and material inequality, advocating instead for a more balanced approach that recognizes both universal minimum standards and the specific challenges faced by marginalized groups at various intersections of identity (79-80).

Jamaine M. Abidogun introduced a tripartite analytical framework with the aim of advancing the theoretical rigor of intersectionality studies (16). This framework problematized conventional understandings and offered insights into the multifarious manifestations of intersectionality across a range of group affiliations, employing tools such as "Intercategorical

Analysis," "Intersectional Discrimination," and "Socio-political Context & Social Constructions" (Abidogun, 16-18).

The transition from academia to professional life presents a myriad of challenges that are disproportionately magnified for women entering the workforce: Empirical studies have substantiated the systemic gender biases and racial prejudices that women, particularly Black women, face during the recruitment process and throughout their professional life's employment (Moss-Racusin et al. 51). These barriers manifest as discrimination in hiring, scarcity of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, and the perpetuation of entrenched biases, despite women's qualifications being commensurate with those of their male counterparts (McDonald & Westphal 20, Pogrebna G et al. 13).

When examining the professional trajectories of Sub-Saharan female migrant students, the "Intercategorical Analysis" proves to be the most apt analytical lens for our study as it enables an inclusive synthesis of disparate identity markers organized around a central, often dominant, attribute—providing a focal point for studying the cascading effects of intersectionality on vocational pathways (Abidogun, 16-18). Specifically, the interlocking identities of being a female, a Sub-Saharan African, and a migrant converge to present unique challenges in navigating the labor market, with gender operating as the primary axis around which other identity markers intersect and exacerbate existing gender-based disparities (16-18).

Methodology

Our study employed focus group discussions as the primary data collection method to explore the challenges faced by Sub-Saharan female migrant students in securing internship opportunities in Agadir. The focus group questions were designed to assess various aspects of their experiences, including past internship search attempts, perceived barriers, instances of discrimination, awareness of relevant policies, and their recommendations for interventions.

The questioning route commenced by evaluating participants' familiarity with the internship application landscape and their success rates in securing these opportunities. This approach aimed to reveal obstacles previously encountered and the scope of available opportunities for this demographic. Subsequently, the focus shifted to investigating specific barriers and biases they faced, incorporating their firsthand experiences of discrimination. This line of inquiry illuminated the emotional toll on their well-being and aspirations. Additionally, their awareness of current empowerment policies was probed, along with their perspectives on potential political interventions and stakeholder support. Finally, their visions for the future guided the research's advocacy trajectory.

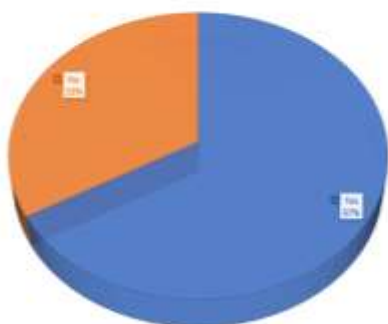
Results

The data from the survey provides insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants regarding access to internships and career opportunities: 83% of respondents were currently enrolled in higher education institutions in Agadir, while 17% were graduates.

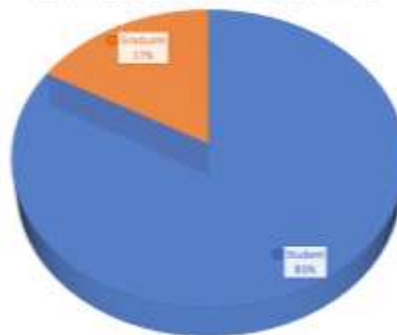
Participants' Profile and Internship Search Experience:

The survey captured responses from both currently enrolled students (83%) and recent graduates (17%) in higher education institutions in Agadir. Their experiences in securing internships aligned with their fields of study varied, with 67% reporting success and 33% were unable to obtain such placements.

EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS IN SEARCHING FOR INTERNSHIPS IN THEIR FIELD OF STUDY



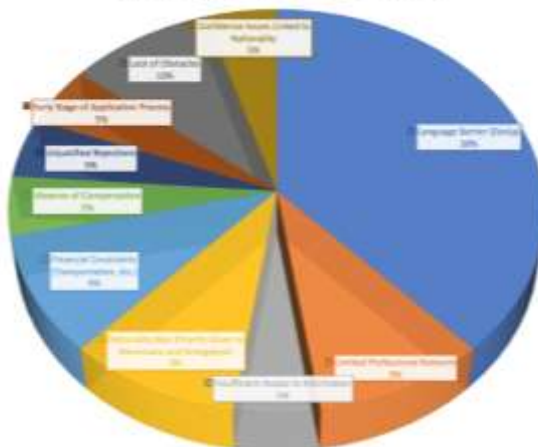
PERCENTAGE OF INTERROGATED FEMALE STUDENTS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AGADIR.



Perceived Barriers and Challenges:

The predominant barrier cited was linguistic, with 38% of participants highlighting their difficulties with *Darija*, the local Moroccan dialect. This linguistic divide is a significant barrier to workplace integration, self-advocacy and career advancement. In addition, limited professional networks (9%), insufficient access to information (5%) and perceived bias in favor of Moroccan and Senegalese nationals

TOP BARRIERS CITED BY SUB-SAHARAN FEMALE STUDENTS IN SECURING INTERNSHIPS



(9%) exacerbated their marginalization. Financial barriers which count (9%) and the prevalence of unpaid internships compounded these challenges.

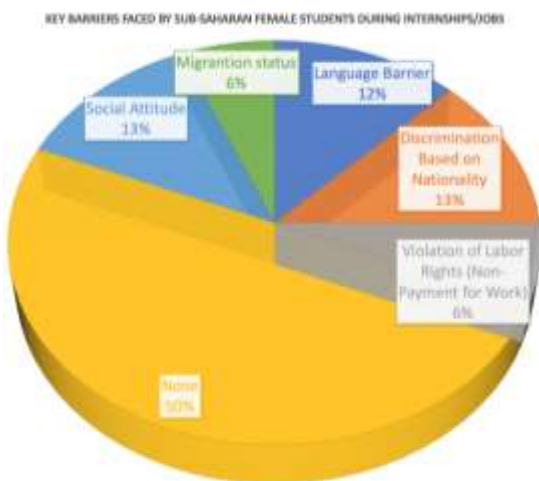
Key Barriers during internship/job

While 50% did not encounter any barriers, the remaining participants faced various challenges: Discrimination based on nationality (13%) and social attitudes (13%) were significant obstacles, reflecting deep-rooted prejudices and societal perceptions. As one respondent noted,

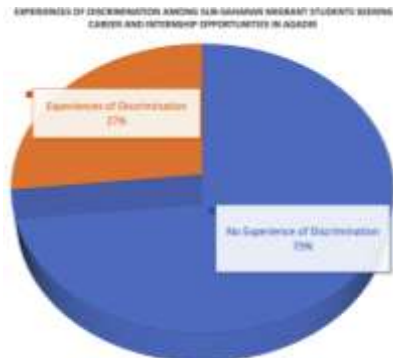
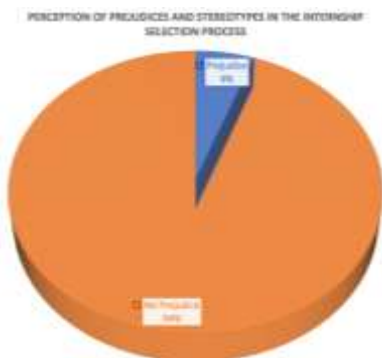
"Nationality, it's very difficult for sub-Saharan to get a job, especially those who are not Senegalese."

Another participant stated, *"I was told I was not a permanent*

resident on the territory." Language barriers (12%), migration status (6%), and labor rights violations, specifically non-payment for work as one participant shared, *"I didn't experience discrimination on my work placement, but I did experience discrimination on the job, as I did in a call center where I worked and didn't receive my pay: the "final settlement" (6%), further exacerbated their struggles. One participant stated, "The language barrier: in many services, the workers don't speak French well. Only the managers do and we get to deal with workers more than managers, so it's hard to communicate".*



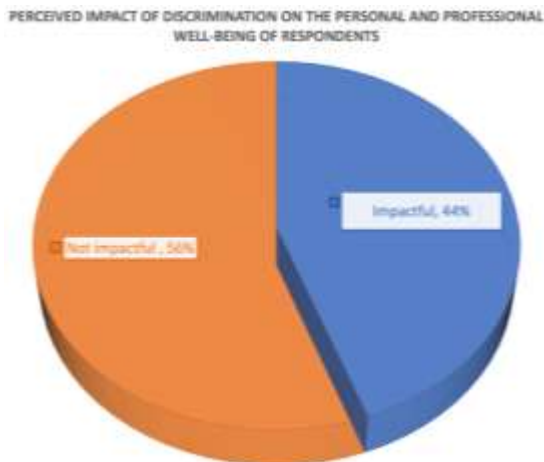
Experiences of discrimination:



Despite 94% not reporting overt prejudices or stereotyping during the internship selection process, 22% disclosed experiencing discrimination as one participant shared, "*Having worked as an animator in a school a year ago, we were mistreated and paid late compared to Moroccans.*"

Impact on personal and professional well-being:

44% perceived discrimination as detrimental to their personal and professional well-being, engendering feelings of demoralization, insecurity, and a desire to leave the country. One respondent stated, "*It affects us already to get a work contract. You need a lot of paperwork, a lot of time, and a lot of effort.*"



Another participant shared, "*Discrimination always impacts you. In one way or another. You tell yourself you have to go home, so you don't want to do or undertake anything here.*"

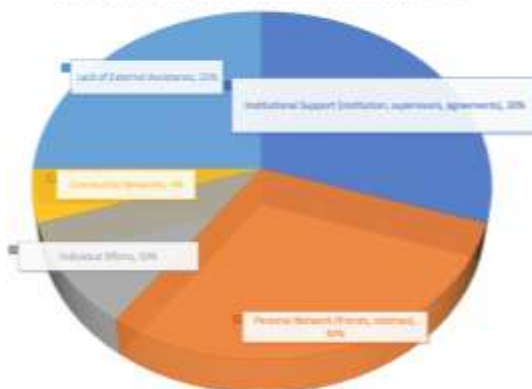
Support systems and stakeholder efforts:

Institutional support systems, such as universities, internship coordinators, and peer networks, emerged as crucial lifelines for 30% of respondents respectively in accessing professional opportunities. However, 25% reported a lack of external assistance, relying primarily on their own efforts, as stated by a participant:

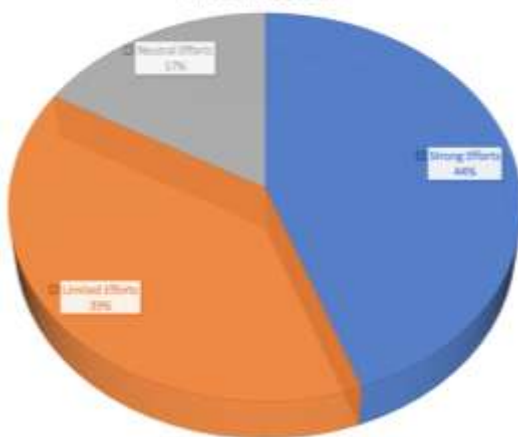
"None, solo. I went door to door, asking from one enterprise to another." This underlines the role of educational institutions, supervisors, agreements, as well as friends and relatives, in facilitating access to professional opportunities for this demographic. However, it is noteworthy that a significant portion (25%) of respondents reported a lack of external assistance, suggesting that many students relied primarily on their own efforts to

navigate the process of securing internships and job placements. Conversely, community networks played a relatively minor role (5%) as a source of assistance.

SOURCE OF ASSISTANCE IN FINDING INTERNSHIPS OR JOBS IN AGADIR



PERCEPTION OF STAKEHOLDERS' EFFORTS IN ASSISTING IN THEIR INTERNSHIP/JOB SEARCH

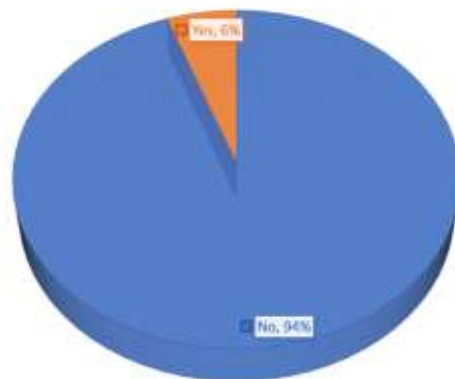


However, perceptions of stakeholder efforts were divided, with 44% acknowledging strong initiatives, 39% citing limited support, and 17% maintaining a neutral stance.

Awareness of policies and initiatives:

Strikingly, an overwhelming 94% of participants were unaware of existing policies promoting gender equality and economic empowerment for minorities in Morocco. Similarly, 94% had not engaged with public awareness campaigns focused on advancing career prospects for this minority.

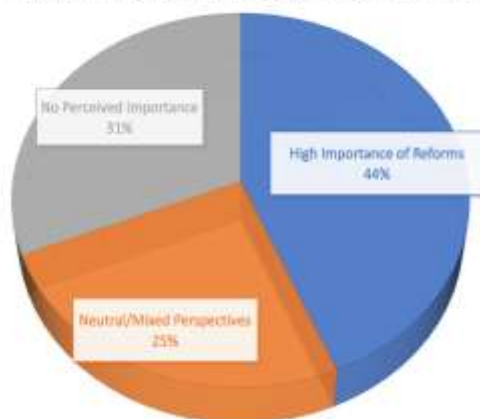
AWARENESS OF POLICIES PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF MIGRANT STUDENTS IN MOROCCO



Importance of political reforms:

While 44% recognized the pivotal role of political reforms in combating discrimination and fostering equal opportunities, with one participant stating, "*It will allow better integration and cohabitation within the Moroccan environment,*" 31% did not perceive such interventions as instrumental reflecting divergent perspectives on the path forward.

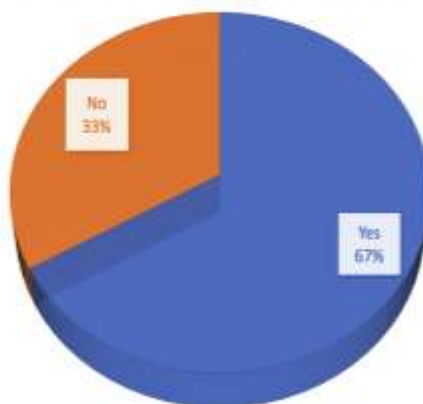
PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL REFORMS IN COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUB-SAHARAN MIGRANT FEMALE STUDENTS



Role of authorities:

Nonetheless, 67% acknowledged the responsibility of authorities, including government entities, NGOs, and educational institutions, in cultivating inclusive environments and ensuring equitable access to professional avenues. One participant remarked, *"Yes, it gives us our chances too."*

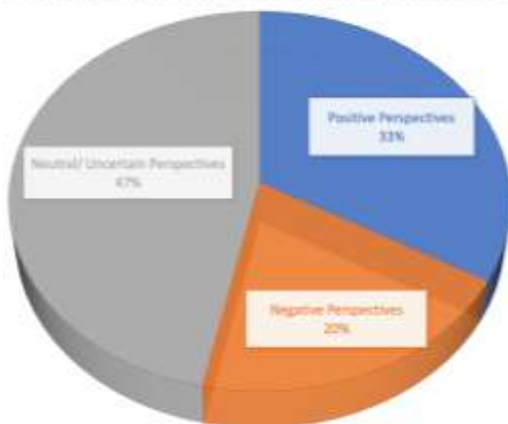
OPINION ON THE ROLE OF AUTHORITIES IN CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO CAREER AND INTERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR MIGRANT FEMALE STUDENTS IN AGADIR



Future outlook:

As participants envisioned their future trajectories, 33% expressed optimism rooted in the prospect of progressive reforms and societal evolution, one instance reported *"with Darija, in addition to the diploma, there are thousands of opportunities in Agadir"*

PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF SUB-SAHARAN MIGRANT FEMALE STUDENTS IN AGADIR

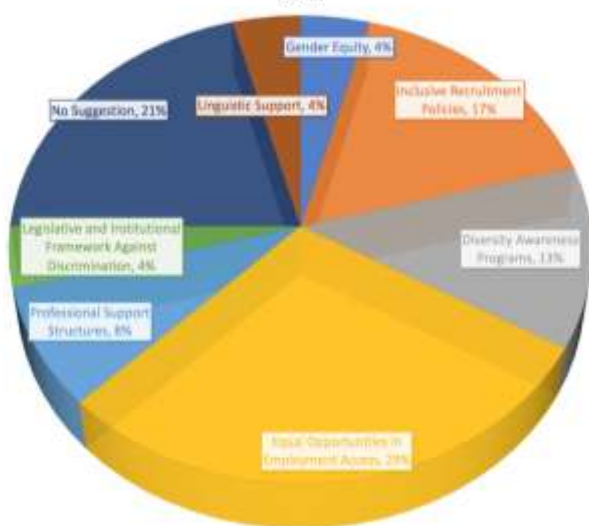


another adds *"I think that with the involvement of the country's competent authorities, everything will eventually improve"*. However, 20% harbored negative outlooks, and a substantial 47% remained uncertain. A respondent stated, *"Personally, it's scary!"* while another said, *"I hope for a change, but I don't think it will happen soon."*

Proposed measures:

Respondents proposed measures to address systemic inequities, including ensuring equal employment opportunities (29%) and implementing inclusive recruitment policies (17%). One participant expressed, "Personally, I'd like to see improvements in

POLITICAL MEASURES SUGGESTED BY INTERVIEWEES TO REDUCE DISCRIMINATION IN ACCESS TO INTERNSHIPS FOR SUB-SAHARAN FEMALE STUDENTS



the area of inclusive employment because if you're not employed somewhere or you don't have an internship, you can't train professionally and think about building a career here." Other participants added, "Provide a certain number of positions exclusively for sub-Saharan women" and "Give a percentage of sub-Saharan recruitment." Another respondent highlighted the importance of raising awareness about diversity (13%) through "Raising awareness among recruiters." Additionally, suggestions included providing professional support structures (8%) as one participant stated, "that our schools closely monitor our professional integration," and establishing a robust legal and institutional framework to combat discrimination (4%). One participant advocated for fair treatment, stating, "Simply allowing us to have a job on the same basis as Moroccans, considering us as normal students." Another participant emphasized the need to access internships based on merit rather than preferential

treatment, stating, "*that they make it easier for us to access the internship, not by giving us preferential treatment, but by letting us show what we knew how to do best.*"

Discussion

The findings reveal entrenched systemic barriers and inequalities deeply embedded in societal perceptions, institutional frameworks, and policy lacunae. Firstly, the linguistic barriers stemming from difficulties with Darija, the local dialect, shed light on the political ramifications of language policies and integration strategies. The prevalence of *Darija* in professional environments perpetuates marginalization, obstructing effective communication, self-advocacy, and career progression for these students. This linguistic divide underlines the need for inclusive language policies and educational reforms that foster multilingualism and ensure equitable access to language learning opportunities.

Moreover, the limited professional networks, inadequate information access, and perceived biases favoring Moroccan and Senegalese nationals reflect underlying issues concerning social cohesion, community integration. These difficulties indicate a deficiency in comprehensive policies aimed at fostering inclusive environments and facilitating the successful integration of minority communities into the workforce. Moreover, discrimination based on nationality highlights the constraints faced by recruiters due to hiring policies, while societal attitudes underline the existence of deeply entrenched societal biases and prejudices.

The legal and migration status barriers, in conjunction with instances of labor rights violations, demonstrate the implications

of migration policies, labor protections, and enforcement mechanisms. The aforementioned findings stress the necessity for comprehensive reforms that ensure fair treatment, safeguard labor rights, and establish legal pathways for professional integration, irrespective of migration status. The detrimental effects of discrimination on personal and professional well-being, including feelings of demoralization, insecurity, and a desire to emigrate, underscore the necessity for political intervention to address these systemic inequalities. Failure to address these issues not only perpetuates marginalization, but also hinders the realization of human potential and socio-economic progress.

There exists a discrepancy between the formulation of policies that promote gender equality and economic empowerment for minorities and the implementation thereof. This discrepancy can be attributed to a lack of awareness regarding existing policies, coupled with a dearth of engagement with public awareness campaigns. In order to bridge this divide, it is imperative that enhanced dissemination strategies, inclusive of stakeholders, and targeted outreach initiatives be implemented. Such strategies would ensure that these policies reach and resonate with their intended beneficiaries.

Furthermore, the divergent perspectives regarding the efficacy of political reforms in combating discrimination and fostering equal opportunities underscore the intricate and dynamic political landscape surrounding these issues. While some recognize the pivotal role of reforms, others may view them as inadequate or ineffective, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, inclusive, and holistic policymaking processes that address the multifaceted nature of these challenges in an integrated manner.

Notwithstanding the obstacles that remain, a notable proportion of respondents have identified a need for collective action by a range of actors, including governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. This highlights the need for a unified approach to fostering inclusive environments and guaranteeing equitable access to professional pathways.

By using an intercategorical approach we can gain insight into the challenges faced by these individuals belonging to multiple marginalized identity groups. In this case, sub-Saharan migrant women. Intersecting identities can lead to distinct barriers and systemic disadvantages. When gender is combined with factors such as race, migrant status, language proficiency and social capital, it creates considerable constraints on access to professional opportunities.

This analysis is predicated upon the centrality of gender as an identity marker, which intersects with a number of other key attributes, such as nationality, migrant status, language skills and social capital. The data reveals a number of pronounced gaps and systemic disadvantages that arise as a consequence of the interplay of these different facets of identity. Of particular note is the double marginalization of being both female and migrant. The data indicates that there are discernible biases based on nationality, which, when combined with gender, have the consequence of disproportionately disadvantaging migrant women. Furthermore, legal barriers, including residency requirements, serve to illustrate the multifaceted challenges posed by the intersection of migration status and gender.

Language skills emerge as a key determinant. A lack of *Darija* language skills, when combined with gender and migration background, limits employment prospects and hinders regular interactions in the workplace. This emphasizes the compounding disadvantages that result from the convergence of gender, race and migrant status. In addition, participants indicated that a lack of professional connections and a heavy reliance on social capital within their academic fields posed significant challenges. This confluence of gender, nationality and migrant status appears to deprive these students of vital cultural capital and indigenous networks that are essential for securing internships and navigating professional landscapes.

Conclusion

This study provides an overview of the experiences, challenges and perspectives of sub-Saharan female students in the city of Agadir. Despite some progress, persistent barriers and discriminatory practices continue to impede equitable access to internship and career opportunities.

The intersections of gender, race, migrant status, language proficiency and social capital create complex systemic barriers that result in multiple forms of discrimination, institutional barriers and limited access to key networks and support systems. Our analysis indicates that the cumulative effects of these intersecting identities have a profound impact, creating significant disadvantages for individuals. Legal barriers, such as residency requirements, further exacerbate the challenges posed by the combination of migration status and gender, and are further complicated by language and cultural barriers.

By addressing the systemic disadvantages that arise from the interplay of gender, race, migrant status, language proficiency, and social capital, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards the creation of inclusive societies that embrace diversity and ensure fair access to employment opportunities for all. Collaborative efforts involving policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and community organizations are crucial to the addressing of systemic inequalities, the promotion of inclusivity, and the creation of an environment that fosters the personal and professional development of minorities.

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Appendix A

Study on the experience of sub-Saharan female students in their search for internships and jobs in Agadir

Date:.....14/05/2023.....
 Nombre d'étudiantes :.....18.....
 Localité :.....AGADIR.....
 Région :SOUSS-MASSA:.....
 Nom et prénom de l'enquêteur.trice : RACHAK ASSIA

Participants Information

Are you currently a student at a higher education institution in Agadir or a graduate?	
Internship Search <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you already looked for internships in your field of study? • Have you obtained an internship? • Barriers/challenges encountered • Prejudices/stereotypes faced 	
Experiences of Discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discriminatory obstacles/behaviors experienced • Discriminatory comments received (gender/origin) • Personal experiences of discrimination • Impacts on well-being 	
Policies/Initiatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of equality/empowerment policies • Suggestions for anti-discrimination measures • Participation in awareness initiatives • Perceived importance of reforms 	
Role of Authorities/Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating inclusive environments • Assistance received for internships/jobs • Perceived efforts of stakeholders 	
Future of Sub-Saharan Female Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspectives on opportunities • Expected changes/improvements 	

Appendix B

Study on the experience of sub-Saharan female students in their search for internships and jobs in Agadir

Focus group grid for interviewing participants

The aim of this focus group is to draw up a study of the experiences of sub-Saharan female students in their search for internships and jobs in Agadir. This interview request proposes an approach that aims to give visibility to the reality experienced by sub-Saharan migrant female students in their search for professional opportunities.

Your responses will help to raise awareness and inform policy makers and stakeholders about the specific barriers you face, while highlighting the needs and aspirations of migrant women students.

We are researchers at the Mohammedia Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences - FSJESM (Hassan II University, Casablanca). This focus group is a qualitative research tool to find out more about the experiences of sub-Saharan women students in Agadir. This is a free exchange, and you are free not to answer a question if it seems irrelevant or embarrassing. Please feel free express yourself as you wish. We are here to understand your situation and your difficulties.

We guarantee your anonymity during this discussion and when we submit our final reports.

Thank you very much for your participation. Together, we can make your voice heard and work towards a fairer and more equitable society for all sub-Saharan migrant women students.

This focus group will last between 1 and 2 hours. This focus group does not commit you to anything.

1. Student status/ Academic situation

- Are you currently a student at a higher education institution in Agadir or a graduate?

2. Experience in looking for internship/ work

- Have you ever looked for an internship in your field of study?

- Were you successful in obtaining an internship in your field of study?

- In your opinion, what are the main barriers or challenges you face as a sub-Saharan student when looking for an internship?
- Have you noticed any specific prejudices or stereotypes towards you in the selection process for internships?

3. Experienced discrimination

- What are the main obstacles or discriminatory behaviour you have encountered in your search for a job and/or work placement in Agadir?
- Have you ever been confronted with discriminatory or offensive comments related to your gender and/or sub-Saharan origin when looking for internships? If so, please give examples.
- Can you describe your personal experiences of discrimination as a sub-Saharan migrant student looking for career opportunities and/or internships in Agadir?
- Do you think that the discrimination you face has an impact on your personal and professional well-being? Can you explain how this affects you?

4. Existing policies/initiatives

- Are you aware of any existing policies that seek to promote gender equality and the economic empowerment of sub-saharan female students in Morocco? If so, could you briefly explain them?
- In your opinion, what policy measures or initiatives could be put in place to reduce discrimination in access to internships for sub-Saharan female students?
- Have you participated in or attended any public awareness initiatives or campaigns to promote gender equality and career opportunities for migrant women students in Agadir?
- In your opinion, how important are policy reforms in combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for sub-Saharan female migrant students?

5. Role of the authorities and stakeholders

- Do you think that the authorities (government, NGOs, educational institutions, etc.) play a role in creating inclusive environments and equitable access to career and internship opportunities for migrant women students in Agadir?
- If you have already succeeded in doing an internship or finding a job in Agadir, which people or entities helped you to find these jobs or internships?

- Do you think that stakeholders are making an effort to help you in your internship/ job search?

6. Future prospects

- How do you see the future for sub-Saharan migrant female students in Agadir in terms of access to career opportunities and internships? Are there any positive changes or improvements that you hope to see?

Date:14/05/2023

Number of female students interviewed: 18

Region : SOUSS-MASSA

Name and surname of the interviewer : RACHAK ASSIA

1. Student status/ Academic situation

- Are you currently a student at a higher education institution in Agadir or a graduate?

2. Experience in looking for internship/ work

- Have you ever looked for an internship in your field of study?

- Were you successful in obtaining an internship in your field of study?

- In your opinion, what are the main barriers or challenges you face as a sub-Saharan student when looking for an internship?

- Have you noticed any specific prejudices or stereotypes towards you in the selection process for internships?

3. Experienced discrimination

- What are the main obstacles or discriminatory behaviour you have encountered in your search for a job and/or work placement in Agadir?

- Have you ever been confronted with discriminatory or offensive comments related to your gender and/or sub-Saharan origin when looking for internships? If so, please give examples.

- Can you describe your personal experiences of discrimination as a sub-Saharan migrant student looking for career opportunities and/or internships in Agadir?

- Do you think that the discrimination you face has an impact on your personal and professional well-being? Can you explain how this affects you?

4. Existing policies/initiatives

- Are you aware of any existing policies that seek to promote gender equality and the economic empowerment of sub-saharan female students in Morocco? If so, could you briefly explain them?

- In your opinion, what policy measures or initiatives could be put in place to reduce discrimination in access to internships for sub-Saharan female students?

- Have you participated in or attended any public awareness initiatives or campaigns to promote gender equality and career opportunities for migrant women students in Agadir?

- In your opinion, how important are policy reforms in combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for sub-Saharan female migrant students?

5. Role of the authorities and stakeholders

- Do you think that the authorities (government, NGOs, educational institutions, etc.) play a role in creating inclusive environments and equitable access to career and internship opportunities for migrant women students in Agadir?

- If you have already succeeded in doing an internship or finding a job in Agadir, which people or entities helped you to find these jobs or internships?

- Do you think that stakeholders are making an effort to help you in your internship/ job search?

6. Future prospects

- How do you see the future for sub-Saharan migrant female students in Agadir in terms of access to career opportunities and internships? Are there any positive changes or improvements that you hope to see?

CHAPTER 6

Women's rights and the environment: Ecofeminist agendas in morocco

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders women's rights from an ecofeminist lens by raising the issue of environmental justice for women of the Global South. It builds on existing affinities between both environmental justice, environmental ethics, and women's rights. In this context, Val Plumwood explains that the patriarchal domination of women as inferior and the environment as background for human stories have a common epistemological paradigm. It could be argued that the oppression of 'Moroccan Women in Strawberry Fields' in Spain is an instance of a violation of both human and environmental rights. The women who travel to Spain as workers are in a fragile situation. As a consequence, they emerge not only as displaced migrants but also as ecological migrants in the sense that they face exploitation, gender discrimination, poor living conditions, limited freedom, illegal working hours, underpayment, and oppression.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, environmental justice, ecological migrants, women's rights.

I. Introduction

This essay examines the nexus between environmental justice and women's rights arguing that the oppression of women workers in the south of Spain is also an instance of environmental injustice. From its inception in the 1970s,

ecofeminism tries to debunk the oppressive discourses that despise both women and nature. Ecocritics such as Val Plumwood, Stacey Alaimo and others critique the patriarchal logic which dominates both women as inferior and the environment as background for human stories. In a different context, Edouard Glissant talks about the need to reconsider humanity's relationship with the land as a source of its identity, well-being, and survival. It should never be confined to the role of background to human simplistic and realist representations of social misery. He contends that "Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process. Its deepest meanings need to be understood" (Glissant 105-106). This idea of landscape as a character opens new vistas for theorizing women's agency in dominant narratives.

Though environmental virtue ethics might seem in conflict with human rights for understandable reasons, it enters in dialogue with the agendas of women's rights. Building on these intersections, this essay looks at the case of what is known as 'Moroccan Women in Spanish Strawberry Fields'. Each year, the Spanish government recruits seasonal female workforce from Morocco to work in strawberry fields. These women travel as displaced migrants who endure exploitation in strawberry greenhouses in the south of Spain. This form of movement has evolved into what is known as 'circular migration' – a situation in which migrants frequently move from the country of origin to the country of destination. Circular migration occurs when a person repeatedly migrates from two or more countries such as the case of Moroccan women who move from the country of

origin to the destination country. In the argument of Anna Triandafyllidou, “circular migration has mainly been defined as a new mode of migration management that can provide triple-win solutions – for countries of origin, for countries of destination and for migrants themselves and their families – to the challenges that international migration brings with it” (3). Yet, it seems perhaps that circular migration has been adopted to serve the interests of destination countries who benefit from cheap workforce from neighbouring countries.

Despite warnings from commentators about the prevailing exploitation and the dominance of gender discrimination, the migrant workers are still unable to voice their dilemma. It might possibly become a jeopardy that recalls Gayatri Spivak’s plea ‘can the subaltern speak’—a plea that aims to speak truth to power. As Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva have noticed, this power dynamic is “a Western, male-oriented and patriarchal projection which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women” (22). So, being deprived of a heard voice is as painful as the ongoing discrimination. As a result, the migrant workers continue to suffer from economic, financial, legal, ecological, and social segregation. In this context, it seems important to analyse these forms of dominance and subordination from the lens of environmental criticism as well. The contribution of environmental virtue ethics is noticeable as an area of research that critiques all forms of discrimination. Accordingly, the common ground is that the idea of discrimination and being disposed as inferior or as background for women and the environment have the same epistemological origins.

II. Brief history of ecofeminism

Since its inception in the 1970s, ecofeminism has pointed to how patriarchal society's beliefs result in the oppression of both women and nature. That is to say, patriarchy ignores women's work and knowledge and renders nature as background to human stories. Ecofeminism cultivates awareness of the interplay between environmental activism and feminist concerns. In recent years, ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood and Vandana Shiva have researched the relations between gender and nature with a focus on the context of the Global South. They have also looked at how binaries of man/woman, Western/Non-western have the same epistemological origins in culture/nature. Ecofeminists oppose those binaries because they alienate humans from nature based on the premise that human beings are not only rational, but they are also superior beings if compared to other creatures on Earth. The so-called rationality—inherited from the discourse of the Enlightenment—easily categorizes nonhumans into a position of the 'other'. Apparently, this new conceptualization of 'other' as inferior and fragile includes all marginalized beings, both human and nonhuman.

In this respect, it becomes necessary to give a short explanation of how ecofeminism looks at these conflicts. Take for instance, the use of expressions such as 'mother nature' as a straightforward manifestation of patriarchy's influence on human consciousness. According to Kate Soper, the implications of this phrase move in two distinct directions: to feminize nature and naturalize woman. Soper raises seminal questions about the meaning of this "coding of nature as feminine – which is deeply entrenched in Western thought, but has also been said by

anthropologists to be cross-cultural and well-nigh universal – then the answer, it would seem, lies in the double association of women with reproductive activities and of these in turn with nature” (139). Put differently, patriarchy tacitly enforces the idea of reproduction, shelter, nurture as well as exploitation of woman/nature by man/culture. It seems that these binary oppositions are altogether problematic in the sense that they nurture a double-sided discourse of exclusion and stigmatization. Soper further explains that “to feminize nature viewed simply as landscape—trees, woodland, hills, rivers, streams, etc. are frequently personified as female or figure in similes comparing them to parts of the female body” (141). Insofar as the Moroccan women workers in Spanish strawberry fields are concerned, Soper’s statement somehow explains the shift in the Spanish government’s strategy to employ women instead of men in strawberry fields. Though some media platforms link this shift to the misconception of the African woman as submissive (*Progressive, Aljazeera*), this idea of feminization of nature and naturalization of woman as landscape provides a possible explanation for such a shift in migrant policies.

The renowned ecofeminist Stacey Alaimo argues in her book *Bodily Natures* that ecofeminism is a necessary school of thought if one desires to both understand and combat injustice. In this regard, she writes:

While there is much controversy over the term ‘ecofeminism’ and ecofeminist insights are expressed in a myriad of diverse ways, there is general agreement that the basis of ecological feminism is a recognition that the oppression of women and the domination of Nature in patriarchal society is

interconnected and mutually reinforcing. In addition, ecofeminists argue that human beings are only one constituent of a much larger community; a community that includes all life and living systems. (259)

The bulk of Alaimo's argument, it seems, is that the fates of both women and nature are intertwined. Any form of violence towards the one is a violence towards the other. Also, the idea of thinking in accordance with the needs of the larger community is congruent with the environmental virtue ethics and its philosophy of care and compassion.

Importantly, Mies and Shiva also highlight how ecofeminism links the ill-treatment of women and marginalized communities to the deterioration of our relationship with planet Earth (10). Both outcomes, they argue, are interrelated because humans and the environment are enmeshed. In a similar way, ecolinguistic researcher Tzeporah Berman goes deeper in her analysis of everyday discourse to unveil how language is affected by the dominant social structure, namely white patriarchy. Accordingly, "human reality is a social construct, and our language is therefore not an objective system of categorization but a reflection of how reality is named" (Berman 258). This is an open call to pay close attention to the metaphors used in language especially when those metaphors are deployed to describe women or nature. Consequently, both discourses of patriarchy and anthropocentrism have a common ground of despising women and nonhuman others. It is important to note that ecolinguistics, a relatively recent branch of linguistics, is defined by Einar Haugen "as the study of interactions between any given language and its

environment” (57). In many ways, ecolinguistics has debunked many anthropocentric instances in human language.

Sardonically, anthropocentrism being a form of language used by humans (whether consciously or unconsciously) to despise nonhuman others could be a hindrance towards environmental serenity. In virtue of this understanding, ecocritic Timothy Clark defines anthropocentrism as a concept that refers to “any stance, perception or conception that takes the human as centre or norm. An ‘anthropocentric’ view of the natural world thus sees it entirely in relation to the human, for instance as a resource for economic use, or as the expression of certain social or cultural values” (3). What is interesting about this conception is that language should never be taken for granted.

Writing from this compelling ecolinguistic perspective, Berman explains that

[O]ur language is representative of the predominant anthropocentric world view in Western society—a fundamentally human centered view which sees animals, plants and natural systems as objects for human use. This anthropocentrism is illustrated through the use of terms such as ‘timber’ instead of trees, and phrases such as ‘harvesting of natural resources’ and ‘wildlife management’ to describe and justify the exploitation of Nature and natural systems by humans. (260)

It is unfortunate that most of these expressions are taken for granted and go unnoticed; nevertheless, once closely inspected, they reveal that human thinking is affected by anthropocentric ideologies of separation, dominance, and superiority. One way to combat injustice is to dismantle

the discourse of oppositions and its persistent dyadic dichotomies. Ecolinguistics has heavily contributed to the ongoing discussion about language, discourse, and the environment.

III. Environmental justice and women's rights

The issue of human rights is generally viewed as problematic for ecological critics because it departs from anthropocentric arguments of putting humanity's interests first. As the term suggests, anthropocentrism means giving priority to human needs even if that means the elimination of nonhuman beings. Perhaps, this is the reason why ecofeminist Val Plumwood views the concept of human rights with caution. Put differently, the affinity between human rights and anthropocentrism is a potential source of conflict because the latter undermines the rights of nonhuman beings. Anthropocentrism excludes non-human interests and despises the rights of the other-than-human world without batting an eye.

On the one hand, the environmental justice movement combats inequalities especially between the underprivileged from the Global South and the affluent from the North. Joni Adamson et al. define this burgeoning discipline in their seminal reader, *The Environmental Justice Reader*, in the following terms:

We define environmental justice as the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment. We define the environment, in turn, as the places in which we live, work, play, and worship. Environmental justice initiatives specifically attempt to redress the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor and/or communities of color, to

secure for those affected the right to live unthreatened by the risks posed by environmental degradation and contamination, and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture. (4)

In this respect, women immigrant workers are also victims of environmental injustice. That is to say, the absence of a healthy environment in the south of Spain is reminiscent of slavery, discrimination, and neo-colonialism. Accordingly, pollinating environmental justice and women's rights is a necessary step towards a deeper understanding of women immigrants' dilemma. The abuse of basic human rights chimes in with neo-colonialist discourses that oppress equal access to resources, sustained life, dignity, and survival.

On the other hand, Val Plumwood argues that women's rights agendas should be aligned with what Aldo Leopold calls 'the land ethic' as a concept that stretches to include the rights of land and nonhuman species into a biodiverse planet. Consequently, Plumwood suggests that it seems necessary "to remove rights from the centre of the moral stage and pay more attention to some other less universalistic moral concepts such as respect, sympathy, care, concern, compassion, gratitude, friendship, and responsibility" (173). Accordingly, Plumwood supports moral concepts that unify both human and nonhuman beings on Earth as a way to transcend those historically-constructed forms of inequality, and calls for "a virtue-based ethics" centred on friendship, care and responsibility (173).

As such, the question of rights can be problematic since it evokes the issue of binary oppositions. That is to say, it is predicated on separation and continuous conflict between 'our

rights' versus 'their rights'. Yet, environmental justice builds on the questions raised by rights activists who have charted some salient methods of protest and resistance. In a report released in 2024 by the global community *Concern Worldwide*, five reasons are given to explain that the environmental crisis is not gender-neutral and that women are trapped by climate change everywhere:

(1) Women are largely responsible for natural resources, but don't enjoy equitable access to them. [Unfortunately,] (2) Women are less likely to survive a natural disaster. (3) Women who do survive a natural disaster have a harder time recovering, [and that] (4) climate-related health issues pose a greater risk to women. [Finally,] (5) Women are often ignored when designing solutions to climate change. (*Concern*)

More precisely, poor women of the Global South are affected by the environmental crisis if compared to women living in the North. Hence, arguments such as the one from Ulrich Beck that "smog is democratic" is refuted by the reality of the poor and marginalized women of the Global South (36). Yet, Beck has a point when he remarks that "Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks" (35). It seems true that women labourers in strawberry fields in the South of Spain are abundantly at the mercy of risks.

IV. Moroccan women and strawberry's ecological/economic influence

Linking these ideas to the situation of the Moroccan women can yield a fruitful dialogue especially at the level rights and economic safety. The main focus is on the situation of the Moroccan seasonal workers who migrate to the south of Spain

each year to work in strawberry fields. There have been many investigations about their situation, living conditions, working hours, environmental concerns, violations of rights and possible forms of violence as circular migrants. In a report published by *Progressive International*, women express resentment at the work conditions inside greenhouses as well as many sexual harassments they have endured.

In a nutshell, the reporter explains the dilemma of around 13,000 women who arrive to the south-western part of Spain, for many months, to pick the strawberries “we love to see on our tables. ‘They are strawberries without rights,’ is what the women day labourers told the feminist observation brigade which spent three days touring the strawberry agribusiness” (*Progressive*). Sardonicly, the women circular migrants are referred to as victims of strawberries. Although strawberries suggest integrity and dignity, these are absent values in the Spanish farms. In other words, strawberries, for the women of the Global South, have become a symbol of tyranny, abuse, dehumanization, exploitation, and misery. The values of serenity, integrity and dignity are no longer possible in an era of capitalist subjugation of poor women by a force that Bell Hooks has called ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’.

The women circular migrants are displaced, exploited and forced to spend many days in strawberry greenhouses without legal protection. A lot of controversies have been associated with this topic for many years especially for human rights activists, trade union leaders, migration researchers, civic community enthusiasts, and environmental justice thinkers. One researcher has celebrated Spain’s incorporation of circular migration

arguing that it “has gained experience after several mistakes, and has finally achieved some success” (Enríquez 122). Nevertheless, it seems, this celebrated success is one-sided and favours the interests of the country of destination. The author dismisses criticism towards the enforced contracts and discrimination as of less importance stating that:

Criticisms in the media suggest that women are in a weak position, and that this can give rise to labour and even sexual abuse. The concentration of tens of thousands of young women in villages and in the countryside, and the predominance of men among employers and foremen, create the conditions for sexual harassment to exist and go unpunished. Nonetheless, associations, trade unions, and NGOs working in Huelva underline the broad picture of respect towards immigrants' rights, both as workers and individuals, although they report on some cases of abuse from employers (less than 5 per cent fail to comply with labour agreements, according to the trade unions). (Enríquez 129)

More generally, it must be stated that the author does not support the aforementioned percentage with evidence from a reliable study. Furthermore, the author claims the insignificance of sexual abuse cases stating that it is only 5%, as if it is natural. Another issue in line with these arguments is that no voice is given to the women migrants themselves to talk about their needs, aspirations, dreams, issues, benefits, rights, and concerns.

Furthermore, reports from activist organisms such *Progressive International* unveil injustice and exploitation of women circular migrants. For instance, *Progressive* reports that the work conditions of Moroccan women in Spanish strawberry fields are

not only manipulative but also abusive. In this context, many women have reported attempts of sexual violation, violence, discrimination and abuse. Even if this work empowers some of these women and their families who manage to secure a fair income, it seems that the way the contracts are signed are dehumanizing. Contracts are ready-made and there is no room for negotiating a collective agreement:

We need to talk about this new 21st century slavery ... The women day labourers arriving in Huelva on contracts at origin in Morocco, where they are obliged to return at the end of the picking season, do so under a specific job offer that fails to comply with collective bargaining agreement conditions and violates basic human rights. (*Progressive*)

At the heart of the contracts is a philosophy of subordination and consumerist striving for profits. The use of the term 'slavery' in the report corroborates how capitalist ideology commodifies the non-European working force as disposable people. Apparently, Moroccan women labourers' condition evokes the condition of slaves in the past centuries.

The report concludes with a statement on how women are being economically abused by the capitalist system. Being concerned about profit, the capitalist enterprise denigrates the women labourers as disposable people. Put differently, the way the contracts are signed is reminiscent of a new form of slavery that despises the socio-economic rights of women. It could be called slow-slavery in the sense that it is difficult to spot and locate, yet it exists. In other words, forcing the women to work under harsh conditions, detaining them in farms for three months, depriving them of free movement, and obliging them to return to

their country of origin is slavery in disguise. As a result, what happens in strawberry fields has implications for what happens in other sectors across Europe.

Furthermore, the essentialist discourses from the far right continue to demonize immigrants as a source of violence, drugs and extremism. More generally, essentialism chimes in with this growing slow-slavery in the south of Spain. Many ecocritics including Timothy Clark argue that “the most challenging scenarios of environmental justice lie in the neocolonialism that still structures relations of North and South” (91). In this context, the Spanish exploitation of women from the Global South could be analysed in the frame of neo-colonialist agendas of exclusion and hegemony. To pursue this idea further is to question current ways of anthropocentric and capitalist modes of thinking.

Finally, it is also important to note that the ‘eco’ in ecological is dissimilar to the ‘eco’ in economic as Arthur Dahl explains. Regardless of the common Greek root of *oikos*, both disciplines have separate concerns, different languages and conflicting paradigms (Dahl). Yet, it seems that the capitalist exploitation of women is not separate from the destruction of land, water, air, and other resources. In a similar way, there is an attack on the figure of the ‘mother’ throughout the practices of the Spanish government’s policy. For example, consider the question of why do policy makers focus on the figure of the Moroccan mother in their contracts. The Spanish government provides seasonal contracts solely for mothers in order to ensure that they would take the journey back to their country of origin.

As such, the image of the mother is referred to in a controversial way in some Western media texts. Houda Charhi, a

young Moroccan feminist writing in a different context, unveils some of those voices who;

[U]nderscore how mainstream feminism often ends up silencing the very people it claims to represent. For so long, Moroccan women have had others supposedly speaking for them. As a Moroccan woman, a daughter, and a feminist, I believe it is essential that we—the women and mothers of my country—speak our truth and reclaim it. (*Aljazeera*)

Charhi underlines the need for a feminism that gives voice to the voiceless women in the Moroccan society to speak truth to power. She is calling for a feminism that embraces the concerns of the underprivileged women workers.

V. Conclusion

As a conclusion, it seems that economic inequalities have a strong attachment to culture as well as environment in the sense that culture, after all, is not separate from the environment. More generally, binaries of culture/nature are incongruent with the current modes of thought imposed by the environmental crisis on humanity in the 21st century. Regardless of socio-economic variables and hierarchies, those oppositions as well as borders between the South and the North are eclipsed by the growing risks of the environmental crisis. Yet, some groups are said to be more vulnerable than others in the sense that technological, historical, and economic developments have affected human responses to disasters and their chances for survival. Phenomena such as famine, drought, floods, earthquakes, sea water rising, deadly chemicals, toxicity, depletion of resources and so on undermine the interests of the poor inhabitants of the Global South.

This essay has analysed the nexus between environmental justice and women's rights arguing that the struggle for equality necessitates ecological stability, ecological awareness and full realization of entanglement. While women labourers struggle for basic rights in places such as strawberry fields in the south of Spain, arguments that tap on environmental justice open new horizons for understanding the roots of injustice and oppression. In this context, these women circular migrants experience a strategic slavery and institutional discrimination that has a strong historical nest in Western thought. As a consequence, these discriminatory practices are neither superficial nor isolated. There is no denying that the inherited modes of thought from the Enlightenment have forced humans to view not only hostility in nonhumans but also inferiority in other human groups. Anthropocentrism, patriarchy, and imperial capitalism are only some of the examples of these discourses of separation and exclusion. Therefore, the work of ecofeminists such as Plumwood, Alaimo, Shiva, and Soper is seminal in critiquing the patriarchal domination of both women and the environment.

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CHAPTER 7

The malaysian women's involvement in politics and agricultural sector: a means of protecting the economic rights

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Abstract

This research delves into the contemporary status of women's engagement within Malaysia's political and agricultural domains and its implications for upholding their economic rights. The findings reveal that despite certain advancements, Malaysian women still encounter notable obstacles in attaining parity in rights and opportunities. Within both the political realm and the agricultural sector, women are conspicuously underrepresented in leadership roles and encounter hurdles in participating in decision-making processes. This shortfall has repercussions on their economic rights, as evidenced by gender pay gaps and disproportionate representation in lower-paying occupations. Furthermore, Malaysian women contend with substantial societal pressures, including discrimination and violence. In sum, the study underscores that while strides have been taken, substantial efforts are still required to ensure that women in Malaysia enjoy equitable access to political, economic, and social rights.

Introduction

Malaysia, a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nation located in Southeast Asia, has experienced remarkable economic growth and social development over recent decades. From an economic standpoint, Malaysia has transitioned from an agrarian-based economy to a dynamic, export-oriented one, with a strong focus on manufacturing, services, and technology. The country has successfully attracted foreign investments and developed robust infrastructure, contributing to its emergence as a key player in the global economy. However, Malaysia faces challenges such as income inequality, labour market disparities, and environmental sustainability concerns. Malaysia comprises a diverse nation that includes Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous groups, each with its cultural heritage and traditions has a populace totaling 34,219,975 individuals. (The World Fact Book, 2023). Out of this population, 16,653,532 individuals identify as females (Worldometer, 2023). In total, there are 110 males for every 100 females in the population, whereas among citizens, the gender ratio is 103 males for every 100 females (The News Straits Times, 2023). Over recent years, women in Malaysia have witnessed notable advancements, including enhanced access to education and employment opportunities. Nonetheless, despite these strides, women continue to encounter formidable obstacles in attaining equitable representation within the political arena and the agricultural sector. This lack of representation has negative effects on their economic and social rights (Ummu Atiyah, 2019). Particularly concerning political rights, women in Malaysia remain significantly underrepresented in elected roles.

In the 15th Malaysian Parliament, there are twenty eight female representatives, or 13.5% of the body, which is well below the global average of 25%. However, women remain underrepresented with only five women ministers in the 28-strong Cabinet. Historically, there have never been more than five women serving in the Cabinet at any given time (Bernama News, 2022). Out of the 127 candidates who contested for parliamentary seats in the 15th General Election (GE15) in 2022, only 31 female candidates managed to secure the electorate's mandate. Meanwhile, a total of 15 out of 60 candidates contesting the state seats in Perlis, Perak, Pahang, and Sabah managed to win their respective seats (The Star, 2022).

Women often face barriers to participate in decision-making processes, with cultural and social norms that prioritize men's voices over women. In Malaysia, women encounter notable economic hurdles, such as receiving lower wages compared to men and being overrepresented in low-paying occupations (Ummu Atiyah, 2019; Juanita, 2020). Moreover, they are more inclined to engage in informal employment, where legal safeguards and benefits are often absent. Additionally, Malaysian women contend with considerable social pressures, including instances of discrimination and violence. Nonetheless, despite these challenges, there have been certain encouraging advancements in recent times. The government has also taken steps to address issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, and there has been increased attention to gender equality in education and employment. The commitment of the Malaysian government to recognising contributions to Malaysia's development can be traced back to 1976 when the 4th Malaysian

Plan, encouraged the organising of programs with more participation from youth, women, and parent-teachers (Nik Mohamed Masdek, 2015). The empowerment of women is outlined as one of the strategies in the 12th Malaysia Plan, including increasing economic participation and enhancing the role of women in decision-making; reviewing laws to identify gender gaps and address them for better protection of women; introducing a gender mainstreaming framework and gender analysis for a gender perspective in formulating policies; and to enhance legal mechanisms for women's safety and security (UNDP, 2023). In the Global Gender Gap Index 2022, Malaysia holds 103 positions out of 146 countries, scoring 0.681. Despite commendable performance in the Educational Attainment sub-index, where women's achievement is nearly on a par with men's (scoring 0.995), political empowerment indicates the lowest score of 0.102. This signifies that women still significantly trail behind men in the realm of politics. Following this, the landscape of policies reflected decisions that are more incorporative of all segments of society.

Methodology

This study was designed using a doctrinal approach, incorporating both primary and secondary data, to examine the development of Malaysian women's involvement in decision-making, with a special focus on the agricultural sector. The analysis centered on three key themes: the historical development of Malaysian women in politics and elections, the current status of women's political involvement and appointments at high decision-making levels (with an emphasis on the agricultural sector), barriers to women's participation in decision-making, the

gender imbalance in decision-making representation, and the implications for the formulation of sustainable development goals and policies. Data from literature reviews and doctrinal studies were analyzed using thematic and content analysis. The findings from these themes were then coded to provide consolidated analytical results aimed at facilitating reformation.

Women in politics and decision making

Women's rights include and are inseparably linked to their political, social, and economic rights. Given that Malaysia is a democratic country, she has to uphold democracy as an inclusive process. This means any decision-making process in a functioning democracy must take into account the viewpoints of various interest groups. Men, women, and minorities' interests and perspectives must be taken into consideration during this decision-making process (International IDEA, 2002). At the international level, Malaysia has pledged its dedication to gender equality through various commitments. In 1995, it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, it has yet to ratify the optional protocol to CEDAW, which permits a communications (complaints) procedure and an inquiry procedure concerning violations of rights safeguarded under CEDAW (UNDP, 2023). Malaysia has endorsed the Beijing Declaration, but progress has often been slow and incomplete. In September 2015, UN Women launched the "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality" initiative. As part of this initiative, Malaysia committed to improving female labour force participation and increasing support for single mothers. Additionally, Malaysia participated in the ASEAN Regional Action Plan for the Elimination of Violence

against Women, 2016-2025, in alignment with the ASEAN Community Blueprint.

In Malaysia's labour force, women contribute significantly to the nation's economic and general development (Nik Mohamed Masdek, 2015). Previously seasonal, part-time, and unpaid family workers are not included in official demographic and economic data, thus the total number of women working has been undercounted. However, now the preparation of labour force data in Malaysia includes unpaid and own account workers. Despite adding two more categories in the report on labour force in Malaysia, the total of unrecognised contributions from women remains low. Labour force participation Rate (LFPR) for women in Malaysia was still low at 55.3% in 2020 as compared to other South-East Asian countries such as Singapore (69.7%) and Thailand (66.8%) (Department of Statistics, 2021). For example, in the agricultural sector, women's contribution is substantial but not recognized in absolute. This could lead to their exclusion as agricultural project beneficiaries, as well as deny them access to appropriate technology, extension services, and training, thus depriving them of the chance to achieve their full potential within the agricultural sector (Ahmad,1998). Women's empowerment is also essential in addressing issues of food insecurity, an important branch under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda (Amran, 2020). In the agriculture sector, women actively engaged in a wide variety of tasks related to cultivation). They produced more than 50 percent of the world's food and contributed to approximately 43% of the world's agricultural labour force (Ahmad,1998). As in other parts of Asian countries, women were vital in the production of essential food and

engaged in various tasks related to cultivation. Nevertheless, their essential role in farming and improving the quality of rural areas often remains hidden due to insufficient empowerment for women. Women in the Malaysian agriculture sector statistically recorded negative growth, and they face barriers to accessing resources and productivity in the agriculture sector.

Malaysian women are absent from many leadership positions, the economic market, politics, and/or decision-making (Ummu Atiyah, 2019; Banqutayan, 2022). In democratic societies, the quantity and quality of women's active participation in public life are essential. In examining the cause of gender differences from a psychological perspective, found that the general perception of gender differences in a society reflects the process of stereotyping among people, in which members of each gender group adopt certain stereotypical characteristics. This means that Malaysian women's lack of participation in politics and decision-making is a result of the cultural stereotyping of women as child bearers and homemakers. The human rights perspective emphasizes that women, who make up more than half of the world's population, deserve equal participation and representation. The latter points out that women's political participation is essential because men and women have different ideas and concepts of politics due to their gender and gender roles. In Malaysia as of 2020, revealed that despite 48% of women enrolling in institutions of higher learning above the men (the World Bank, 2022), despite their total representation in the parliament amongst other senior government offices remains at 24.7%. Table 1 shows the greater number of enrolments of Malaysian women in higher learning institutions from 2017 to

2021. This was despite their achievement in education and credibility, it simply shows that women are still facing a lot of challenges concerning fair inclusion in political and democratic processes and it cannot consolidate democratic ethos (Okpe, 2021).

Table 1: Enrolments to the higher learning institution in Malaysia by gender

YEAR	MEN	WOMEN
2017	272.29	399.99
2018	282.19	406.76
2019	291.53	415.02
2020	234.08	358.06
2021	230.16	359.72

Source: Statista, 2022

It is also important to understand that in a democratic system, the equal representation and involvement of all citizens including women amongst other bodies in the political processes of their societies remain key to democratic consolidation. This is because they have the right to contribute to making decisions that affect their lives and well-being in society and economic growth. (Okpe, 2021) Their participation and representation in public sectors at both local and national levels could ensure positive changes in legislation and policies that affect women, their children, and families in Malaysia. In line with this, therefore, political participation in a democratic system involves the encompassment and participation of ordinary people in the processes of decision-making and governance that affect their everyday lives and existence (Andrea & Claudia, 2008). It involves playing active roles in influencing government policies and decisions and participating in electing or selecting public leaders of their own choice. It is all about good governance

which is the performance outcome of government policies. (Okpe, 2021)

Women's role in the agricultural sector

For generations, women have held significant sway in Malaysia's agricultural realm. Traditionally, their duties encompassed a wide array of tasks, including planting, weeding, and harvesting crops, as well as caring for livestock and poultry. (Amran & Abdul Fatah, 2020; The World Bank, 2009). Nevertheless, despite their invaluable contributions, women in Malaysia's agricultural sector frequently encounter obstacles. These challenges encompass limited access to land and credit, restricted opportunities for training and education, and meager wages. In recent times, however, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the vital role women play in the agricultural sector in Malaysia. (Nik Mohamed Masdek, 2015). The government has implemented various policies and programs aimed at supporting women farmers and increasing their participation in the sector. For example, the National Agro-food Policy includes a specific focus on gender mainstreaming and promoting women's participation in the sector. The government has also established programs to provide training and support to women farmers, such as the Women in Agriculture Program. (National Agro-Food Policy 2021-2030).

In addition to government initiatives, there are also non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to support women farmers in Malaysia. For example, the National Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Malaysia (NAWEM) provides training and support to women farmers, including in areas such as marketing and financial management (Women of Will

Programme,2016). Under NAWEM programme such as the “Women of Will” helps in reducing poverty which is targeted to the single mother community. It assists them to start and venture into entrepreneurial activities to help them in supporting the families. Another organization, the Women's Development Collective, works to empower women in rural areas and promote their participation in the agricultural sector. Despite these efforts, there are still challenges to be addressed. Women in the agricultural sector in Malaysia continue to face discrimination and limited access to resources and opportunities. However, there is increasing recognition of the importance of addressing these issues and supporting women's participation in the sector, both for the benefit of individual women and for the overall development of Malaysia's agricultural sector.

Studies conducted on the challenges of women in the agriculture sector agree that most female farmers were not interested in the rice cultivation's planning process and were less involved in the community, which hindered them from being exposed to new knowledge, advancement, and decision-making on rice cultivation (Flavia et al, 2015; The World Bank, 2009). Females also had less access to financing because of their limited education and high transaction costs. Most female farmers had fewer opportunities or access to finance and savings (The World Bank, 2009). The lack of training and extension services was also one of the challenges that influenced women's empowerment. Female farmers typically possessed less information and experience on fertiliser spraying (time and fertiliser used), pesticide application (time and types of pesticides used), common pests and diseases, weeding, variety of seed used, and

irrigation and harvesting schedule. They only followed the leader (who were male farmers) or the farmer's group community to manage their rice cultivation. Education has long been cited as a predictor of political attitudes and behaviours. In a study, education level was found to have the greatest influence on a person's level of civic culture. Less educated and economically passive women in the workforce would lead them to acquire less decision-making power related to agriculture and household decisions compared to educated women. It cannot be denied that education is a landmark for women's empowerment as it enables them to respond to challenges, face their traditional position, and change their lives.

Many dimensions of the status of women include control of resources by women, independence, decision-making capacity, self-esteem, and mental health, which can be collectively defined as the aspects of empowerment by women. (Holland and Rammohan, 2019, Juanita, 2020). Being able to actively participate in and exert influence over decisions that impact their households and farming activities was regarded as a fundamental aspect of empowerment. Agricultural empowerment is commonly defined as an individual's capability to make decisions regarding agricultural matters and their access to the necessary material and social resources to facilitate those decisions. The issue of misconception and non-recognition of the role of women in agricultural development has been gaining momentum since the early 1970s. It is gradually being recognized that the role of women in agriculture is important and that the neglect of women in development interventions is a major reason why many programs fail to reach targeted goals (Flavia et al, 2015). There is

also increasing recognition of the need to integrate women into mainstream agricultural development. From a global perspective, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations developed a plan of action for strengthening the role of women in agricultural development. An improved balance between male and female extension staff, including administrators, can enhance the information flow between women farmers and extension staff. Hence, any form of technology and mechanization introduced in agriculture would be directed to both men and women so that women have an equal share of the benefits of technology and mechanization, and are not displaced from farming (The World Bank, 2009).

A study by Ahmad (2020) uncovers that the role of women in policy-making within agricultural activities is still low. Their role is very much confined to operational tasks. The largest contributions of decision-making by male-headed households included land preparation, pesticide application, and fertiliser spraying. Most female farmers hired workers to perform labour-intensive tasks in rice farming, such as pesticide application and fertiliser spraying, albeit some female farmers performed similar tasks independently. Land preparation was primarily conducted by males, such as land clearing, weeding, reirrigation, ploughing, and harrowing and levelling (Flavia et al, 2015). In contrast, female farmers mentioned that they were only involved in clearing the paddy bund and small weeds. Table 2 demonstrates that since Malaysian independence the key person to political decisions on agriculture is monopolised by males. Following this, the National Women Policy aims to prepare a conducive environment for women that is more women-friendly to elevate

their status in all aspects including politics. However, despite the statement, women are still lagging in the political sector in Malaysia. Indeed, Malaysian women have been shown to outperform men in the academic and even professional job market. (Banqutayan, 2022).

Table 2 : List of Ministers for Agriculture in Malaysia Since independent

NO	YEAR	MINISTRY	MINISTER	GENDER
1.	1955-1962	Minister of Agriculture Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives	Abdul Aziz Ishak	Male
2.	1963-1965	Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives	Khair Johari	Male
3.	1966-1974	Minister of Agriculture and Land & Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries	Mohamed Ghazali Jawi	Male
4.	1974-1976	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Abdul Ghafar Baba	Male
5.	1976-1977	Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	Ali Ahmad	Male
6.	1978-1980	Minister of Agriculture	Sharif Ahmad	Male
7.	1980-1984	Minister of Agriculture	Abdul Manan Othman	Male
8.	1984-1986	Minister of Agriculture	Anwar Ibrahim	Male
9.	1986-1995	Minister of Agriculture	Sanusi Junid	Male
10.	1995-1999	Minister of Agriculture	Sulaiman Daud	Male
11.	1999-2004	Minister of Agriculture	Mohd Effendi Norwawi	Male
12.	2004-2008	Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry	Muhyiddin Yassin	Male

13.	2008-2009	Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry	Mustapa Mohamed	Male
14.	2009-2013	Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry	Noh Omar	Male
15.	2013-2015	Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry	Ismail Sabri Yaakob	Male
16.	2015-2018	Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry	Ahmad Shabery Cheek	Male
17.	2018-2020	Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries	Salahuddin Ayub	Male
18.	2020-2022	Minister of Agriculture and Food Security	Ronald Kiandee	Male
19.	2022 incumbent		Mohamad Sabu	Male

The participation of women in the agriculture sector in Malaysia holds significant importance for various reasons. Firstly, women have historically played crucial roles in agricultural activities, contributing to food production and the overall economy. Their involvement helps ensure food security and sustainable agricultural practices. Secondly, women's participation in agriculture enhances household income and economic stability. By actively engaging in farming activities, women contribute to their families' financial well-being and can potentially lift households out of poverty. Additionally, empowering women in the agriculture sector can lead to social and economic benefits. When women have access to resources, training, and decision-making opportunities in agriculture, they can improve productivity and efficiency, leading to economic growth at the community and national levels.

Women's empowerment through political involvement

In 2021, at the federal parliament, women's political empowerment remained low at only 10%(Department of Statistics Malaysia,2021). The statistics showed that Malaysian women's contributions to high political posts and government decision-making processes are still low(Zainal Abidin, 2022). The rate of women's representation in the federal parliament is very poor as it reflects a huge underrepresentation of women in public life despite their population and participation during voting in elections. However, the trend of women's political participation in Malaysia since her independence in 1957, shows that women are slowly waking up and playing critical roles as party candidates, workers, and voters as well as ensuring the success of their political parties during elections. Some of them serve as public figures and speak out on problems that concern them. Some of them include legislators, cabinet ministers and deputy ministers, parliament secretaries, state assembly members, councillor's, corporate boards of directors, and registered members of the community and security council. Zainal Abidin(2022) argued that, in contrast to men, their percentage is still incredibly low. The percentage of women in Malaysian public leadership positions and decision-making is below average when compared to the 1995 Beijing Conference Declaration for 30% women inclusion in public lives, even though democratic governance involves a gradual process and consolidation. (Okpe, 2021)

In Malaysia, among the women who have been given a senior ministerial post is Rafidah Aziz who was appointed as the Minister of Public Enterprises from 1980 to 1987 and Minister of

Finance from 1977 to 1980, Sharizat Jalil who served in the Cabinet of Malaysia as Minister of Women, Family and Community Development from 2009 to 2012 and Wan Azizah Wan Ismail who was appointed as the Deputy Prime Minister in 2018. Even now, the proportion of women ministers or deputies, compared to men, is very small, and still far behind the developed world. There is no quota system in Malaysia to increase women's political representation. We may observe how women have continued to support efforts to create a society that is more inclusive, just, and equitable during the previous three years. A new agenda that will enable women to fully contribute to both their well-being and the growth of society must be developed in order to succeed in this attempt. It's imperative to create an alternative platform that goes beyond token gestures and does not only use women as a voting accessory in the political system. If given the chance to reach their full potential, women can contribute to the empowerment of society's citizens(Juanita, 2020). This is feasible without diminishing a woman's commitment to uphold her social, cultural, and religious duties. While women's positions in politics are one aspect contributing to development, it is important to remember the role women play in other sectors of society. Malaysia's experience has shown that any discussion on the role of women in politics cannot be confined to only representation in formal institutions. A great number of women, after having pursued their education to tertiary levels, choose to become homemakers. In addition to helping society advance by raising their families in a more enlightened atmosphere, they may not be in formal jobs that are commensurate with their education. Commonly understood

notions of democracy and politics often do not support a woman-friendly strategy. (IDEA, 2002)

In Malaysia, women were comparatively much more honoured. Although there has never been a right-to-vote campaign in Malaysia, however, before independence (Malayan independence was proclaimed on August 31, 1957) during the first general election (G.E.) that was held in 1955, voting right was available to both sexes. To persuade the British that Malaya was prepared for independence, it was important to appeal to all ethnic groups, not just women (Shamsul 2015). Moreover, this first election in Malaya was held before independence. The colony was still colonizing the country where the absence of a middle-class community was noticeable, the rate of illiteracy was at its peak, and the state was without a national identity due to excessive immigrants brought in by the colony; in other words, the election was conducted without democracy.

The stereotyping of women's roles and attitudes by the culture of great power distance is reflected in the Malaysian political structure, which is dominated by men, while women play only a complementary role. In her book, Ummu Atiyah (2019) cites Frank Swettenham, who characterizes Malay women as being impoverished in terms of familial care. During that era in Malaya, the lives of Malay women were predominantly confined to household duties within their homes. For example, in the Malay Muslim culture, the cultural and religious construct embraces that a mother is a door to heaven or heaven is underneath a mother's feet, exhibiting the conjuring respect to women. The perception of hands that rock the cradle gives value to appreciate women as mothers, sisters, and wives or wives

cultivated in society through Islamic tenets and practice. Malaysia generally practices several customs (*Adat*) known as *Adat Perpatih*, *Adat Temenggung*, and various *Adat* in West Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). Comparatively, *Adat perpatih* elevates the status of a woman, especially in matters of succession.

Although women make up about 50 percent of the Malaysian electorate, the role they are given in decision-making processes does not reflect this numerical strength (Banqutayan,2022; Andrea & Claudia, 2008)). Figures by the All-Women's Action Society (Awam) and PantauPRU15 show that in the 15th general election, 7.3 million women made up 50.4 per cent of registered voters but only 251 out of 2,333 candidates were women and only 10.76 per cent of ministerial positions were held by females(Refer Table 3). Although many efforts have been and are still being made to improve the status of women around the world, the situation of women in the political sphere is still backward in most countries around the world. In Malaysia, although 48.6% of the population is female (The World Bank, 2019), only 11.5% of the representatives are in state legislative assemblies, 14.4% in the House of Representatives, and 19.4% in the Senate. This ranks the country 140th out of 192 countries (Inter-Parliament Union, 2019). According to Ipsos (2020), Malaysians believe that it is very important for women to be represented in government and politics to promote women's empowerment. These data are alarming because Malaysia should seize the opportunity to tap into this human resource to politically empower women in Malaysia.

Following this continuous underrepresented scenario, the National Women's Policy aims to create an enabling environment for women; this includes implementing pro-women policies and creating laws to improve the status and welfare of women in all areas, including politics, but women are still underrepresented in the political sector in Malaysia. Among the 67 seats in the Senate, only 13 are women, while of the 222 seats in the Lower House, only 32 are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). The number of female cabinet ministers has never exceeded 3 since 1957) and only in 2021, the 8th Malaysian Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin added two more women to the cabinet, bringing the total to 5 women out of 32 ministers (Zainal Abidin,2022). Although Malaysia has made efforts to improve the status of women, the low number of women who have the opportunity to contribute to national development is at odds with these efforts. It seems that men have always dominated Malaysian politics. It is important for the political system of any democratic country that both women and men have sufficient opportunities to participate and be represented in political affairs and institutions.

Article 8(2) also guaranteed gender equality and avoidance of discrimination or marginalization of citizens including women in their pursuit of political life. Results also showed an upward movement or increase in the number of Malaysian women who occupy prominent political offices like the Deputy Prime Minister, Parliamentarians, Members of the Cabinet, Ministers, and Deputy Ministers after the 2018 general elections. Notwithstanding the above upward movement in representation,

results also showed that Malaysian women still face a lot of challenges in pursuing their political interests. (Okpe, 2021)

Aboo Talib (2021) argues that though the number of female political representatives is low, their visibility should also be gauged from their behind-the-scenes contribution as party members. Consequently, free-market outcomes such as price, profit, or market efficiency did not recognize gender as pivotal to profit-making. The vision to pursue justice in gender relations, particularly in economic development, appeared to challenge the neo-liberal perspective. The neoliberal view is concerned with improving market efficiency through limited government interventions, trade liberalization, and unregulated competition. On the contrary, the feminist perspective is concerned with social justice, right and wrong, equality in employment, and wages. These approaches rely on state intervention to assign value to women's work. Therefore, intervention in a free-market economy distorts the market, or in other words, a distortion to democracy in the *laissez-faire* economy.

However, the debates on capitalism and gender are anchored by the key ingredients of economic freedom, including personal choice, voluntary exchange, competition, human rights and protection, and property ownership that liberate individuals and families to take charge of their economic being. Thus, in gender, such liberation allows women to overcome traditions, customs, superstitions, and prejudices to contribute to the country. Women in the employment sectors in China showed tremendous improvement. They were responsible for 25 percent of the business companies since 1978. In Mexico, for the last five years, 32 percent of women are business owners. In Hungary,

approximately more than 40 percent of women started their companies in 1990 (Business Women Network, 2000). Alas, the positive and negative impacts of capitalism are framed within globalization arguments, yet women's issues due to inequality of payment, education, health care, and disenfranchisement of the poor are still prevailing. Meanwhile, a society without gender equality is structured by a patriarchal system, a hierarchy of order, vertical power distribution, religious values, and cultural rigidity that limit women's advancement. There is a glass ceiling that needs to be broken everywhere women go. To be challenged – women have to go against the odds.

In summary, Malaysian women's lack of participation in politics and decision-making is a result of the cultural stereotyping of women as child bearers and homemakers. This is because society's function is based on certain norms that legitimize power differentials (Brockner et al., 2001). Consequently, society is structured in such a way that social comparisons between men and women are rarely made. As a result, one would be hard-pressed to find evidence that compares women's achievements with those of their male counterparts, especially when it comes to political participation and decision-making. The challenges in pursuing a political career as disclosed include male dominance emanating from cultural and religious beliefs, lack of family and spouse support, poor financial support, absence of political training, and marginalization from political parties (Okpe, 2021). Among them are lack of party support, family support, and the "masculine model" of political life. Many feel that Malaysian society is still male-dominated, and men are threatened by the idea of women holding senior posts. (IDEA,

2002). Dual Burden-Women themselves are less assertive and often have to shoulder additional burdens, juggling domestic responsibilities and career concerns thereby making it hard for any but the most determined to succeed. However, a more relaxed attitude is discernible among the younger generation and men now appear to be more willing to see women as partners in both the domestic and professional spheres. Since political leaders tend to be middle-aged, it will perhaps be some years before this change is reflected at the highest levels of politics.

Table 3: Number of Women Parliamentary seats in the Malaysian House of Representatives

NO	Election Year	Parliament	Total Parliamentary seats (Dewan Rakyat)	Number of Women Parliamentary seats	Percentage (%)
1.	1955	Before independence	52	1	2.00
2.	1959	1 st	104	3	2.88
3.	1964	2 nd	159	3	2.08
4.	1969	3 rd	144	2	2.08
5.	1974	4 th	154	5	3.90
6.	1978	5 th	154	7	4.55
7.	1982	6 th	154	8	5.19
8.	1986	7 th	177	7	5.08
9.	1990	8 th	180	11	6.11
10.	1995	9 th	192	15	7.81
11.	1999	10 th	193	20	10.36
12.	2004	11 th	219	23	10.50
13.	2008	12 th	222	24-25	11.26
14.	2013	13 th	222	23-24	10.81
15.	2018	14 th	222	32-33	14.41
16.	2022	15 th	222	30	13.51

Table 3 above demonstrates an increase in the number of percentage women's representatives in the Malaysian parliament. Although there have been consistent increases, it was a small volume number and there were multiple years that it was static

for example between 1964 to 1969 and between 1982 to 1986. There was also a slight fall in 2013 from 11.26% in 2008 to 10.81% in 2013. However, the percentage made a leap in 2018 from 10.81% to 14.41%.

Some Malaysian women may not be at the decision-making level as their visibilities and influences spread across ministries through their multiple roles of contributions to ensure political pressure for gender empowerment is progressing continuously. The roles can be seen in association and society for women and children such as All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) and National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) to name a few. Furthermore, women's leadership and decision-making perceptions have to move beyond counting female representatives at the parliamentary level. Women are making substantive impacts even though their representatives are not at the decision-making level.

Conclusions

The evaluation of women's political accomplishments should go beyond simply counting the number of female MPs in positions of power. Women's movements' work, problems, and effects must be evaluated and acknowledged on a variety of levels. Despite the uneven distribution of female and male representatives in the parliament and decision-making levels, changes and modifications to the law, access to education, hiring on the job market, and institutional positions were accomplished. Women's visibility at various levels of position and context in society should be taken into account in a discussion on women and political participation. The establishment of the Ministry for

Women, Children, and Community (1966), the formulation of the National Policy for Women (1989), the implementation of the gender mainstreaming and empowerment agenda in the majority of public and private services, and the acknowledgment of the roles played by NGOs in promoting the agenda for women are just a few of the extraordinary accomplishments made by women in Malaysia. To keep the institution, society, and family together and allow the country to advance sustainably, women have assumed the backbone role. In conclusion, more efforts should be geared towards promoting the involvement of women in the decision-making process to ensure equal rights and contributions of women are more valued. The prospect of transformation out of these efforts may contribute to the progressive economic growth of a country and reduce issues of discrimination against women. To make party politics more inclusive, officials should embrace strategies for enlisting equal numbers of women and men. Second, it is important to create methods for tracking gender in politics. Third, training should be implemented in the areas of leadership, decision-making, capacity building, and emotional intelligence. Last but not least, funding ought to be set aside for more analysis of the application and results of gender equality, women's political engagement, and decision-making.

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