

**Moroccan Education for Girls:  
Analysis of a Moroccan NGO**

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SSC 3311

Women and Economic Development

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May 8, 2003

Moroccan Education for Girls (MEG) is a USAID funded Non Governmental Organization (NGO) project, whose primary objective is to increase educational enrollment and completion rates of Moroccan girls in eight rural provinces in Morocco. I interviewed two individuals involved with the MEG project—Khadija Ramram, the Director, and Jane Casewit, the Director of Community Advocacy and Information. This paper will provide an overview and analysis of MEG activities, including a discussion of strategic and basic needs, and the theoretical approach of the project.

The USAID sponsored project, which was initiated in 1997, is currently in its final year of funding, and will hereafter be taken over by the Ministry of Education and community associations. MEG attempts to increase female enrollment in education by increasing the overall quality of education in Morocco. In order to improve quality of education and schools the MEG project is divided into three major components: community organizing, teacher training, and management training. After spending much time in communities at the onset of the project, MEG workers concluded that parents that were generally not against female education for any moral, religious, or cultural reasons. Rather, they found that parents had adopted a "why bother" attitude in response to sending their girls to school, especially beyond primary schooling. Schools in many communities, especially poor, rural communities were dilapidated and falling apart, with a curriculum that was not relevant or helpful to the everyday realities faced by young girls. This further exacerbated the common perception in communities that "education leads to nowhere" and achieves nothing, led parents to weigh the benefits and expenses of sending their girls to school versus keeping them at home to help with work around the house, finding that it was more beneficial to stop sending their daughters to school after a

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school enclosures or walls. In most cases, communities supplied the physical labor and the grant money was used to buy necessary materials.

Teacher and management trainings have also been an essential part of MEG's attempt to reshape and enhance the learning experience for girls and boys in Morocco. MEG has developed over twenty training modules which have been distributed throughout the country. These modules are used as guides in local and regional ministries as well as teacher training colleges and schools themselves. MEG developed these training modules in response to previous findings that boring, repetitive teaching methods and the use of corporal punishment consistently led to a greater reluctance to attend school, especially on the part of Moroccan girls.<sup>2</sup> Teacher trainings focus on training teachers throughout the country to utilize more learner-centered methods in order to make learning more fun and accessible for all students, while making teacher-student relationships more egalitarian and less intimidating and authoritative. The modules also provide tools for developing local and regional curriculums that will be more engaging and relevant to students, as well as guides to achieving gender equity in the classroom. Other teaching modules help integrate new teachers into rural areas, by equipping them with tools and strategies to deal with very difficult situations in rural areas. This is especially important as it is not uncommon for new teachers from cities to be assigned to teach their first few years in rural and remote areas which they are not accustomed to living or working in. Such guides help teachers familiarize themselves and adapt to cultural changes as well as physical changes in their living environment, such as no running water or television, and living in isolation.

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Management trainings are directed at integrating administrative personnel into education systems at a more local level. According to Jane from MEG, Regional representatives of the Central Ministry have historically served as a sort of "mailbox" for the Federal Ministry, exercising little power or agency independent of the Ministry of Education. MEG management training modules attempt to delegate more power to administration within the provinces themselves, increasing participation and involvement in actual schools and the process of reform, and eventually increasing power and agency of people in the communities themselves through the formation of partnerships with teachers, administrators, and communities. The modules also focus on managing with specific objectives and utilizing performance indicators in order to eliminate useless bureaucracy, effectively addressing the concerns of community members, and measuring success and failure on a local level. - An example or two would be very informative.

As a Moroccan NGO focusing on women's issues, MEG targets one of the most complex issues of empowerment for women; education. MEG seeks to increase enrollment, retention, and eventually completion rates in education, among rural Moroccan girls, by improving the overall quality of education infrastructure and content in schools. Education is often argued to be the most basic and fundamental of all human rights. However, because access to education does not meet immediate concrete needs in the same way as access to other basic rights such as food, clean water, and health care, it should be considered a strategic need rather than a basic need. - But strategic needs work to change structures of inequality. Does education do that? How?

Although it is potentially difficult in many situations to prove that education leads to more rights and opportunities for women, it clearly has transformatory potential, or the potential to improve the situation for women. Indeed, much of MEG's work has been in

campaigning and organizing in communities to convince people of the empowering capacity that education holds for girls. MEG workers had to reshape community perceptions of the education system in order to motivate communities to become more involved and invested in their own schools. To do this, they had to battle the perception that education in Morocco leads to nowhere, specifically and especially for rural girls. When I challenged Jane on the actual results and opportunities that education actually creates for girls in Morocco, echoing the popular sentiment in many communities of “what's the point”, she acknowledged the many difficulties in studying and measuring the ambiguous effects of education on girls. According to Jane, convincing communities that education does lead to somewhere for girls, and that there is indeed, “a point”, evidenced by tangible benefits for educated females, was a difficult and arduous task in a country like Morocco with a struggling economy and bleak job market.

The reality faced by Moroccans and MEG workers alike is that a miniscule percentage of girls from such rural areas actually continue onto the university level, and even those who graduate with a degree, usually cannot find jobs. “The reality,” said Jane, “is that students at Moroccan universities must now compete with Al Akhawayn graduates who are proficient in computer processing and speak at least four of five languages, for the few well paying management or government jobs. The odds are not in their favor.” Given such a reality, MEG has taken the approach that everyone *deserves* to be educated, and education has the potential to empower and benefit everyone, if not through providing people with a definite job, than through other tangible benefits. Many women desire literacy and education because they see it as improving their day-to-day lives in ways that some “outsiders” might not necessarily consider empowering.

For many women, education enables them to read and better understand the Quran, not only bringing them closer to their own spiritual beliefs and practice, but also enabling them to interpret their own meanings from religious texts. Educated women can also enjoy a greater awareness of what is going on in their own local communities, as well as the wider community, and potentially vote in elections. It should also be noted that even in the situation of a struggling economy, although increased education and literacy may not *guarantee* jobs for women or men, it definitely increases a woman's chances of securing a job and increasing her family's income. In rural Berber areas, education provides access to the national language of Arabic, enabling women to communicate in the marketplace, take public transportation, and count money. Most importantly, for many women, education can help them become more aware and capable mothers, by enabling them to read warnings on labels, prescriptions for their children, street signs, and help their children with their homework.

Whether projects such as MEG are motivated by WID, WAD, or GAD theories of development depends upon the agency's preconceived notions about the effects of education on women's empowerment, as evidenced by both the objectives and the approach of the project. Many consider education to be a primarily WID-focused issue, because it is often seen as connected to increasing women's presence in the public sector through increased employment or political and civil participation. However, as Jane pointed out in our interview, education is not always so clearly linked to jobs for women, and the benefits come in a wide variety of forms and sectors. Projects such as MEG that seek to increase education rates for women often do so with the explicit knowledge that success is limited in its reach. Oftentimes then, in projects such as MEG, education is not

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seen as a way to plunge women into the male dominated "public sphere" as WID proponents would have it. Nor is it seen as a way to transform or reverse deeply embedded notions of gender and the roles that they produce. Rather, it is seen as a possible way to increase the life opportunities and choices available to women, making them more aware of the world in which they live, and at the same time make their everyday lives less burdensome. This is one example of the clashing of Western perceptions of education in the development field with the reality that actually exists for women in the developing world.

Oftentimes when people discuss increasing educational opportunities for women, images of economically independent working women are conjured up to replace the "oppressed Muslim woman trapped in her home like a prison". In reality, many women enjoy the benefits of education by being able to read signs, count money, read labels, warnings, the Qura'n, and help their children with homework. It is very important for development agencies and projects to recognize as MEG has, that it is entirely possible to profoundly change women's lives through education without profoundly changing cultural or societal gender roles. In this respect, The MEG project does not fit under the WID or WAD model. It surpasses shallow expectations of women to suddenly "join the public sphere", at the same time surpassing dangerously narrow "public/ private", "male/female" dichotomies, by accounting for the involvement and effects on both genders without obsessing over the reversal of gendered roles. *Handwritten note: = instead of WAD then EAD*

Teacher trainings led by MEG possess a gender equity component that recognizes how notions of gender suppress girl's and women's voices, hindering their ability to flourish in school, and it further trains teachers to use tolerance and encouragement,

enriching the educational experience for both genders. Along with GAD theory, it considers effects of the project on both genders, striving to improve education for all children in Morocco, both boys and girls. For these reasons, MEG seems to be most heavily influenced by the holistic approach of GAD theory, redefining traditional notions about both gender and empowerment.

Although education for Moroccan women may not lead as clearly as many Westerners would prefer to think, to empowerment in a Western-defined sense, it obviously expands opportunities for women, decreasing the likelihood that they will be forced to entirely rely on the men in their lives for dependence or security. While very few rural women in Morocco realistically continue beyond the ninth grade, increased education, even at the secondary level, clearly empowers women in Morocco in a variety of ways. This is best supported by the simple fact that so many women *desire* and *seek* opportunities for education and literacy, recognizing that it will provide them with greater awareness, opportunities, and the power to take advantage of new opportunities and shape the choices in their own lives.

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All of the information in this paper was obtained from lectures with Dr. Susan Schaeffer Davis and interviews with Khadija Ramram and Jane Casewit, of MEG. All quotations are from Jane Casewit.

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You describe the project goals + activities well. You don't describe how they measure their success, or mention constraints that they face. In some ways the project uses the GAD approach, as you argue, but in others it is more like WAD, eg. addressing the problems of both sexes rather than trying to focus on girls' situation.