

Al Akhawayn University
Field Methods

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Is the Concept of Civil Society in Morocco Implemented to Meet the Needs of Rural Women? The Case of the Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work.

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Research Question

Starting from the mid-1990's, poverty has become more and more feminized. The report's Gender-related Development Index stated that women's economic condition every country is worse off than their countrymen. In Third World countries, women and girls' literacy rates, school enrolments and share of national income are all lower than men's (Healy, 2004). In the 24th & 25th Meetings of the United Nations Substantive Session Economic and Social Council of 2004, strategies for poverty eradication, macroeconomic development, social protection, agriculture, and rural development has been specifically addressed within the issue of gender equality. It emphasized the importance of women's empowerment and significance of women's contributions to national development. Women were recognized as competent development partners. Most United Nations system units had developed gender equality policies, but the gap between policy and implementation remained a major cause of concern (United Nations Press Release, 2004).

The research is based on the manifestation of the considerable efforts conducted by Morocco to fight women's poverty especially in rural areas. Located in the region of Tafilalet that is in the South East of Morocco, the Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work (MAECSW)¹ is a clear attempt to put into practice the concept of civil society in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of the region and especially for women. In public domains, women are still considered as second class citizens. The official political discourse, mainly targeted to the international scene and intellectuals, is to state that women are equal to men. There is another parallel discourse

¹ Jam'iat Mazguida Li Tarbiya wa Taqafa Wa Al 'Amal Al Ijtima'i

addressed to the local population, which is more theological and ambiguous that proclaim the primary role of women is to take care of the household and raise their children (Sadiqi, 2003). As Noria Allami states in her "Voilées, Dévoilées: Etre Femme dans le monde Arabe", women are the last colony of men (1988). The Tafilalt is not an exception for this state of nature. It is a poor region of Morocco where there is a gender division of space. Men have power over women's mobility, but the current state of things because of the economic crisis of the region. The MAECSW created the Women's Club that is an initiative focusing on vocational training (sewing) to make women generate income to participate to the household earnings. The purpose of the study is to find out more about this women income generation program (WIGP) and to know if this action implemented by the MAECSW is to meet the needs of the women in the Tafilalt region.

Methodology

The research project about the women income generation program (WIGP) in the MAECSW is based on qualitative data collected from informal interviews, participatory observation and published scholarly research. The first interview conducted with Mr Yamani and Mr Kamari Treasurer and Vice President of the Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work (MAECSW) was composed of fourteen open-ended questions asked in an informal manner in the Moroccan Colloquial language. The purpose of the meeting, that lasted one hour, was first to interview the board members to get factual information about the MAECSW in terms of organization, regulations, problems; and second to establish a climate of trust to get entry access to interview the women and be left alone with them; which happened lately. This helped in setting a

casual environment to get credible data and observe how the program is running. The board members of the MAECSW pointed out the WIGP was carried out by a female teacher, Ms Taghlaoui.

The second interview was conducted with Ms Taghlaoui. The questions asked were to assess the role played by the teacher in the program, to evaluate the importance of the program in the association and to get information about its organization: the number of sessions per week, the number of beneficiaries, their activities. The thirty minutes interview of this teacher was a considerable amount of data to be included in the research project. The last interviews conducted in the field were with three of the women involved in the program. During this one hour interview, the purpose was to gather information about the level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries, their needs and the attitude of the male family members toward the WIGP. The study did not use a large sample of population for the interviews of the women; these interviews have been conducted on an individual basis but the research chose to take these individual cases as representative of the majority; It is justified by the non verbal behavior (nodding) and the verbal confirmation of the non interviewed had while listening to the conversation between the study conductor and the women interviewed. The observation part was made to take notes on the state of the location of the MAECSW, the behavior of the women and the overall atmosphere of the association. Finally, the research used on academic documents dealing with gender and development to guide the research question.

Timeframe, Place and Population

The research project started on October the 6 and finished on October the 22, 2004. The data has been collected on Saturday October 9, 2004 in the Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work (MAECSW) located at 25 kilometers of the city of Arfoud in the Tafilalet region. I managed to call Mr Kaci Moha² who is the head of the MAECSW on Thursday October the 7 to get an appointment with him because he is a key person to interview in the research project. We both agreed that Saturday morning was an appropriate time to meet. Once in the association, I met Mr Ali Yamani and Mr Brahim Kamari, respectively Treasurer and Vice President of the MAECSW. I called Mr Kaci Moha to figure out where he was, he responded by saying that he was waiting for the "group"; whereas I already specified that I was a single female AUI student, in the Baladia³; he said he was coming in twenty minutes to the association which he never did. I had to rephrase an interview that was directed to one person with a given position in the association to make it a group interview to other people occupying different roles. The women income generation program is the focus of the study; therefore the targeted population to study is women involved in this program. A series of questions has been prepared for the women, who were present. I was informed lately by Mr. Kamari that the women were exceptionally there on Saturday Morning because the sessions were never done on mornings due to housework. During the one time I went to the Mazguida Association, I managed to conduct interviews with Mr Yamani and Mr Kamari and some women, to make observation and to take pictures.

Presentation of data

² My supervisor Dr. Shoup gave me his cell phone number

³ Local Town Council

Mr Yamani and Mr Kamari Interview

The Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work (MAECSW) is an association created by the inhabitants of the Qasr of Mazguida on December 27, 1996. The educated people of Qasr several years ago, the "proud people" as Mr Yamani calls them, felt the need to create the association in order to improve the challenging socio-economic conditions of the region. The Mazguida association is run by an elected board of members. The election procedure is biannual and usually takes place during El Aid Al Kebbir⁴ period for the reason that all the inhabitants of the Qasr⁵ are available during that period of time. The MAECSW counts twenty people in its board and it is composed as follows: there is an honorary president to the association and an executive president who is followed by three vice presidents. There is a secretary with three assistants to him. There is a treasurer with two assistants to him. Finally, a group of eight members serve as counselors to the board of executives⁶. The reason why there are so many assistants is justified by the fact if someone decides to leave before the elections; there would be always another qualified person to replace him. This year's elections of 2004 were the first time where two females have joined the team of executives. The association is also composed of volunteers of the various profiles existing in Mazguida.

The MAECSW depends on the Rural Commune and funds from spontaneous donators for its financial support. The Rural Commune gives an annual amount of 2500dhs that has to be preceded by a detailed report explaining how does the association intent to use the funding for the year. The Rural Commune gives the opportunity to ask for extra funding if necessary. In this case, the association is asked to come up with

⁴ Islamic holidays

⁵ Literally meaning castle or palace, used here to refer to local inhabitation

⁶ refer to Chart in the Index section

justificatory pieces to that particular project. This extra grant does not come in, but rather in the form of assistance such as equipment.

The goals of the MAECSW are to be found in its brochure: develop the region (in which case is the Tafilalt region), preserve the cultural heritage of the Qasrs, establish solidarity and social work, create better health conditions, protect the environment, develop skills for young people, put into practice the integration of rural women in social development and coordinate their work with other associations. One of the major actions of the MAECSW is the integration of rural women in the social development of the region. The Tafilalt is counted among the poorest regions of Morocco. It encounters problems of poverty, dryness, and high rate of illiteracy. One of the ideas of the association to reduce poverty is to make women of the Qasr participate in the income of the household. The Women's Club has been created for the females of the Qasr to teach them sewing skills. Over the three hundred females inhabitants in the Qasr, there are sixty women enrolled in the Women's Club and fifteen of them seriously attend the sewing lessons. The participation fee of the club is a symbolic twenty dirhams per month which is the teacher's salary. The association often organizes extra-curriculum days where members of the Women's Club are invited to show their products to the public and sell them. Mr Yamani and Mr Karami claim there is no such thing as gender division of space and gender control in the association, they say they over passed these constraints.

Teacher Interview: Ms Fatima Taghlaoui

Ms Fatima Taghlaoui⁷ is aware of the cultural background of the women since she is from the region and knows many of the women on a personal basis. She says the

⁷ refer to picture A in the Index section

idea of the Women's Club started four years ago when the literacy program male teachers suggested to the women in the Qasr to acquire skills to get some income for the household. The idea was warmly welcomed and the project of learning sewing skills started to be popular among the women. The MAECSW made an arrangement with a female teacher from Rissani which is located at nearly three kilometers of Mazguida. The arrangement stated the teacher had to come three times a week to give her sewing lessons. The agreement lasted for almost two years but the teacher started to frequently cancel classes because of transportation problems. The former teacher suggested that she could train the best students to take on her job. She noticed that Ms Taghlaoui had a great aptitude in sewing so she decided to recommend her to the board of executives of the association. This is how Ms Fatima moved from a status of student to teacher. The duties of Ms Fatima Taghlaoui in the Women's Club of the MAECSW are to teach sewing skills to the women and supervise their evolution in this program. She does not keep any written record of the activities of the beneficiaries and does not have a planner to organize the lessons. The sewing classes are organized into three sessions per week; women usually prefer to gather in afternoons because they would do most of the housework during mornings. Classes start at 2.00 p.m and finish at nearly 6.00p.m to allow the women to get home before it is too dark. Ms Taghlaoui says the number of learners coming regularly to the lessons is between ten and fifteen women. The Women's Club has seven sewing machines bought by the association and the first come first served concept is applied there. When asked about the provenance of the material used in class, the teacher replied the association would bring every year or every year and a half a certain amount of material and she would divide it according to the students needs .The

capability of sewing differs from one woman to another; therefore Ms Taghlaoui prefers to teach the students individually and follow every one's evolution. Ms Fatima Taghlaoui thinks that the females' benefiting from the program are improving their sewing skills. She feels that the income generation program has a positive impact on the women on viewing themselves as an important member economically active in the household. Regarding the cultural and religious context of the region, women feel pressured when they go into a public space. They can leave their houses only for a specific purpose and the Women's Club of the MAECSW is a valuable one since it has a good reputation. In order to strengthen this good reputation, the association executives decided to build an extension of their locals in order to allocate a private room for the Women's Club activities.

Beneficiaries Interview

The three interviewed are Ms Ahmid Khadija who 21 years old and single, Ms Samri Souad who is 25 years old and single and Mrs. Khafiri Aziza who is 32 years old; she is married and has three children. All of them live with her family in Mazguida and work in the household. They have little education since Ms Ahmid and Ms Khafiri dropped out early from school or never attended as it is the case for Ms Samri. The three women think that men's issues are different from women's issues. They say duties are to be divided in the household: men have the responsibility to financially support their wives and children whereas women have to do the housework and to take care of the children. They believe women at this time have much more responsibilities than in the past because now males struggle to get money but it is often insufficient. Women have to

add the concern of finding a way to get some income all her obligations at home. Ms Ahmid and Ms Samri said they had no skills before enrolling the program whereas Ms Khafiri claimed she already had some capacities in sewing. They heard of the Women's Club through word of mouth and were told it would help their economic conditions. They all agree that they were interested in acquiring skills to do something worthwhile of their time and generate income instead of staying home and watching TV after the housework. Fatima Sediqi says that because it is not paid, housework is devalued on the social level: a housewife is called as 'galssa f dar' (literally meaning sitting in the house and not working). Consequently, non working women in Morocco are defined in passive terms (just sitting) because culture does not see their unpaid labor as valuable (2003). The adult male members of the family have a positive opinion of the association because of its good reputation. Males say it is a constructive and productive initiative and they encourage women to attend regularly classes. The women interviewed feel proud to bring a financial contribution to their husbands or fathers, even if it is not done on a regular basis. An additional comment of the women was as follows: women are asking to increase the numbers of sewing machines and also to invest in a machine for to sew wool because they say this product is very demanded in the market; but this one is very expensive ("one hundred fifty alf riyals) comparing to a regular sewing machine that cost "twenty alf riyals" (one half riyal equals fifty dhs)⁸.

Observation

In the way to the MAECSW, it is noticeable there were not many women walking in the streets and they were fully covered with the traditional black veil of the region. Wearing the veil legitimates the presence of women in the public sphere; it states their

⁸ One alf riyal equals fifty dirhams

obedience to the traditional framework and rules. These women appear in the public space as concealed persons, hidden by a same uniform. As a result, they are present on a physical level but unapparent as individuals (Guerroudi, 1993).

The name of the association is painted in Arabic language in the outside door. The center is made of terracotta and the walls are clean, but it is surrounded by sand, stones and dust⁹. The center is constituted of 4 rooms. The prevalent and main room that serves as a multipurpose space with a large table in the middle for the board members meetings, this room contains the equipment that is seven sewing machines, several chairs and one small table. For the Women's Club, there are also several posters, such as Coranic Verses, driving awareness campaign and United Nations advertisements, fixed to the walls¹⁰. The second room is the Director's office that is constituted of a desk with a computer; one can notice the portrait of the late King Hassan II and the national Moroccan flag¹¹. The third room constitutes a kinder garden for the children who have their parents enrolled in the association¹². The fourth room is used as a kitchen according to Mr. Karami.

The vice president of the MAECSW was wearing the traditional Moroccan dress that is the Djalleba whereas the treasurer was wearing fashionable modern clothes. They seemed modernized and well educated since they had some sentences in Classical Arabic and French language. Though they were not used to come on Saturday mornings, there were eight women attending because they heard of my arrival and the importance they had in answering the research question. They were all wearing the traditional black veil

⁹ refer to picture C in the index section

¹⁰ refer to picture D in the index section

¹¹ refer to picture E in the index section

¹² refer to picture F in the index section

of the region and they all had their hair covered¹³. There was a relaxed and happy atmosphere between them; they seemed motivated and interested in what they were doing. They took the class time as an opportunity to chat and laugh willingly. During the frame time of the research in the association, each woman was sewing in her machine (two students were waiting for their turn) and Ms Taghlaoui the teacher did not judge necessary to get up of her machine and have a look at the job of her apprentices; and she did not take attendance when the class finished.

Problems and Constraints

The major obstacle faced was time constraint. The time allocated for collecting the data in the field was two hours which limits the amount of data. The interview with Mr. El Yamani and Mr. Karami took longer than expected and little time was left for interviewing Ms Taghlaoui and the women that are considered to be the most important interviewed in the research. The fact of negotiating access entry to the women and being left alone with them to get truthful information partially succeeded since Mr. El Yamani and Mr. Karami left the main room at the end of their interview and went to the director's office; but they were going back and forth once in a while. It resulted in not having the large expected amount of data from the women.

The second constraint was my visit, as an Al Akhawayn University (AUI) student, to the association in itself. AUI was inaugurated on 1996 by Royal Dahir of the Late King Hassan II and therefore it has a special status and it is respected through Morocco. Though it is conceived as a Moroccan University, AUI is modeled on the American system of higher education. Al akhawayn University students benefits from the latest

¹³ refer to picture G in the index section

technology and knowledgeable faculty members (Al Akhawayn University Catalog, 2003-2005). These reasons have contributed to shape a reputation to this university that looks as follows: "It is an impressive institution where study the rich elite". People often don't know that some AUI students can manage to go to school thanks to grants and loans. People in the MAECSW were expecting some help from the university; especially after their last visit to the association when some students promised to use their networking abilities to get funds for the MAECSW. People in the association were disappointed to not hear from anyone and I faced dissatisfaction and frustration. It took some time and effort before the atmosphere could lighten up.

Data Analysis

The Vice President Mr. Kamari and the Treasurer Mr. Yamani are enthusiastic and very involved in the general administration of the MAECSW; but concerning the Women's club, they seem to have delegated all the authority to the teacher Ms Taghlaoui and they feel comfortable in doing so. Regarding the cultural context of the Tafilalet, they judge it is the role of a female to supervise a club reserved for women. The structure of the program is constituted of the teacher and the women. Ms Taghlaoui is in charge of teaching sewing skills to the students but she does not do it in an organized manner, such as keeping notes of the women's evolution or maintaining a week planner. She coaches them randomly and sometimes forgets to do so because she is absorbed in sewing a piece of material, as it was observed during the timeframe of the data collection.

The statement of Mr Yamani and Mr Karami claiming there is no as gender division of space and gender control in the association is arguable. The fact of delegating

Moroccans, it is as unknown as the famous story of 'Jazirat al Waqwaq' (literally meaning the Waqwaq Island) of Ibn Battouta. Arabs speak a lot about this island, described in details by Ibn Battouta, but nobody can say he has been there. Civil society exists in our modern imaginary, like 'Jazirat AL waqwaq' exists in our mythical imaginary, but the difference is that the future of our country depends on the first one (Mernissi, 1993).

The Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work is a leading model in the Tafilalt region. It is an association that aims to improve the socio-economic conditions of the people in the Tafilalt and to integrate rural women to the social development of their region. The Women's Club is a successful initiative in which it gathers women in a social context to teach them sewing skills and allow them to generate income from their work. The beneficiaries of this program say they progressed a lot since they enrolled in the club. They are feeling the club has improved their life on an emotional and financial level. However, there are some negative aspect that can represent a danger to the success and the sustainability of the program. The non follow up of the Women's Club by the MAECSW leaves the teacher without any king of surveillance, which can be harmful to the club. The lack of organization of the teacher can make the women unmotivated and have them leave the program especially that the beneficiaries represent a minority comparing to the female whole population of Mazguida. Finally, the limited financial resources of the Mazguida Association for Education and Culture and Social Work restrict the women demands to improve their lifestyle; which is the ultimate goal of the women income generation program.

all the executive power in the Women's Club to the teacher and the will to build a private space for the club contradict their declaration of over passing gender limitations. The broadening of the women sphere of action outside the household, where they were always been kept, was not accompanied with a change in their status. Surprisingly, the constant of the women presence in the public sphere does not imply in definitive, neither a large and undifferentiated appropriation of the public space by women nor a mixed use by the two genders. The tolerance that characterizes the presence of women in the public sphere is regulated by restrictive codes and modulated practices that in fact reveal the exclusion of women as social actress on the public scene (Guerroudi, 1993).

There are some positive aspects to this program. The MAECSW benefits from a good reputation in Mazguida; it is a respectable place where families go to, therefore males perceive the association as an acceptable place for their female family members. The Women's Club is has consequently made an exception in the Tafilalt; in others terms, women can go there with the agreement of the Mazguida society. The association primary role is to ameliorate the financial conditions of the household. The best image of women is the one offering the image of mother and the obedient wife who takes care of the home. Independent working woman are perceived as being responsible for social chaos and family instability. Therefore, women from middle and lower social classes are induced to work primarily for monetary reasons (Sediqi, 2003).

Conclusion

A lot of people have already head about the concept of civil society in Morocco, but few of them really understand it. The concept of civil society is unknown for most

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Pictures A, B, C, and D



Pictures E, F, G and H

E



G



F



H

