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Steps to the Integration of Moroccan Women in Development

MOHA ENNAJI*

ABSTRACT *This paper casts a gender perspective on development in Morocco. While Moroccan women contribute to development, their socio-economic situation has hardly improved over the years as a result of their participation. Despite the increasing aid afforded to the country and despite the numerous programs of development financed by world organizations, all the indications show that there exists an increase of poverty, particularly among women. The evaluation of projects specific to women's promotion has shown the limits of the economic approach. The role of women in development and growth is crucial. Education and training are so important for women to enable them to meet the new challenges, and to help them safeguard their rights and interests. The development of society cannot be achieved without the integration of women in the process of growth. To promote women's emancipation, the State must open doors to women who ought to be adequately trained to use the new information technology. By gaining new skills, Moroccan women can develop their productivity and improve their standards of living and those of their families.*

I. Introduction

This paper discusses current endeavors to integrate Moroccan women in development and attempts to empower women. The global context is the liberalization turn in economic policy, which is characterized by price and trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation of the State, and the growth of unregulated financial markets. Today, Morocco is 'located at a global crossroads of ideas, markets, and development plans; Morocco has experienced transformation not only in the organization of its market and policies but also in the more profound issues of political identity and social structure'.¹ Despite the recent efforts of government and civil society to modernize the country and promote women, the challenges facing women and development remain significant.

Morocco, which is at the cross-roads of Africa and Europe, covers a surface of 750,000 square kilometers for a population of 30 million people (2004 census). It is divided into eight administrative and economic regions. The rural population is estimated at 51% while the urban one represents 49%. Rural exodus has had a great impact since the 1960s when the rural population was estimated at 75%.

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¹ S. Cohen and L. Jaidi, *Morocco: Globalization and Its Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 149.

The birth rate is 30%, and fertility rate 4.4 children per woman in the rural areas, and 3.5 children per woman in the cities. Life span is estimated at 70 years and death rate at 7%.²

Only 50% of the population has access to sanitation, drinkable water, electricity and hygiene, and 79% of the rural population has no water or electricity. So far as education is concerned, the rate of schooling is 72% while the rate of literacy is nearly 54%. Nevertheless, illiteracy rate among urban women is very high 55%, and in the rural areas it is even higher 65%.³

The economy is dominated by agriculture, followed by phosphates and the remittances of Moroccan workers abroad. Agriculture represents 49% in the Gross National Product, industry 17% and services 34%.⁴ Note that due to a drought of three years (from 1999 to 2001) there is a large gap between the GNP and demographic growth.

Since 1983, Morocco has engaged in a large structural adjustment program to clean or improve the economic environment. This program has had a positive impact on the macro-economy, but some bad consequences on the micro-economic level: increase of unemployment (16%), stagnation of salaries, low level of education and health services.⁵

At the socio-political level, after the political reforms of the 1990s (re-amendment of the constitution and law on elections), which led to more democratization, we notice the emergence of numerous women's associations with a great national and regional impact. As a case in point, we cite the following most well-known women's associations: *Josour*, *l'Union Féminine Marocaine*, *l'Organisation Démocratique des Femmes*.⁶

In Morocco, women play a crucial role in socio-economic development despite the fact that there exist large inequalities between men and women so far as access to resources is concerned.

In the rural areas, which are marked by labor and gender division between men and women, women have growing responsibilities in ensuring the survival and well-being of the family, and in doing their share of farming and of production, small trade, and services.

A considerable, though small proportion of women in Morocco are active in jobs related to the public and private sectors. In the formal sector, women are active in the public domain and in social services. The rate of women working in the public sector has been increasing since the 1960s. However, they have had little access to top jobs or decision-making positions, which is due to negative attitudes and prejudices against women. Today a lot of change has occurred as a result of education and of the democratization process that the country is slowly attesting.

State feminism, which may be defined as the government's official policy and intervention that seek to achieve the emancipation of women and gender equity in all walks of life, started to develop in North Africa after the independences in the

² M. Ennaji, *Civil Society, Gender, and Development* (Fès: Fès-Saïss Publications, 2004).

³ *Al-Alam*, 16 September 2000, p. 10.

⁴ See R. Mejjati Alami, 'Femmes et Vulnérabilité sur le Marché du Travail' in F. Sadiqi (ed.), *Mouvements Féministes* (Fès: Faculty of Letters Publications, 2000), pp. 15–28.

⁵ M. Ennaji, 'Social policy in Morocco' in M. Karshenas and V. Moghadem (eds.), *Social Policy in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan and UNRISD, 2006), pp. 116–127.

⁶ See F. Sadiqi (ed.), *Feminist Movements: Origins and Orientations* (Fès: Faculty of Letters Publications, 2000).

late 1950s and the early 1960s. In Egypt, state feminism started to develop along with Nasser's regime, which promised equality of men and women and a better lifestyle for all. But, in the long run, its main beneficiaries were people from the upper and upper middle classes.

In the 1980s, however, with the application of economic reforms (the structural readjustment plan), the economic and social retreat of the State began, which weakened the prospects of a better future for women of the working and the middle classes.

State feminism is considered a historical strategy that has been adopted in different parts of North Africa to improve women's conditions and to contribute to their well-being. Thus, the provision of education, health, and work to women helped to brighten up the image of the State. All North African states, under specific conditions, declare in their constitutions that all citizens are equal under the law, and segregation on the basis of gender is forbidden. Labor laws were amended to ensure women's participation in the labor force, and they entitled women to a reasonable period of maternity leave. As a consequence, people's attitudes to women's problems, education, and employment have gradually changed in favor of women.

By contrast, the conservative forces view women's role to be limited to home, reproduction, and child rearing. As a result, in Egypt, for instance, the personal status laws passed in 1979 are still implemented. However, in Morocco, the personal status laws (The Mudawana) was first amended in 1993. In 2004, new changes were introduced despite opposition from the Islamists. In Egypt, Libya, and Algeria, the personal status laws define women as economically dependent on men, and as minors under the law; they have no say in their personal affairs including marriage, where the need for a matrimonial guardian is compulsory, and divorce which they have no right to claim, except in exceptional cases and under exceptional conditions.

In Algeria, the 1984 personal status laws, known as the Family Code, in which polygamy was maintained and whereby women's rights were violated, especially the right to divorce and to inheritance, have been replaced by the new reform in 2004, in which polygamy is highly restricted and women's rights are guaranteed.

Up until the 1990s, women in North Africa were almost totally excluded from the political scene by their respective governments to the extent that their participation in political life and their representation in parliament and in policy-making was insignificant.

Thus, although state feminism succeeded in giving women access to education, health, and employment in most North African countries, it did not really challenge the negative social attitudes towards women who are still regarded as dependent on men; these conservative views are reflected in the attitudes of the male judges who often refuse to apply the new laws, and persist on applying the old personal status laws.

The economic reforms which were implemented in the 1990s as a result of the adoption of the structural readjustment, which fostered economic liberalization and free trade, led to a reduction of state feminism. The relative retreat of the State from the economic scene as the main agent of change undermined its commitment to gender equality. In general, it is working-class women who have suffered most from these unfair economic and social reforms. This new situation created a vacuum which was soon filled by the Islamists. The Islamists' views on women's

education and employment have been to the detriment of the accomplishments realized by women and by state feminism. Islamists have been rather hesitant about women's work. For them, education is good for women so long as it helped them become obedient wives and good mothers. However, non-government organizations have recently taken the lead by stepping in to encourage women to fully take part in development and to mobilize society as a whole to women's role in democratization and development.

As far as employment is concerned, women's rate of unemployment is still remarkably higher than that of men, and kept rising during the 1990s. While the progressive forces assessed the positive economic effects of women's employment on families and society as a whole, Islamists who opposed women's work focused on the negative impact it had on children and families.

Despite criticisms and harassment leveled by Islamists against working women, women kept on clinging to their jobs. In fact, most official studies demonstrate that two incomes in a family are far better than one. Privatization and inflation rates push many women to join the work force. Some women have opted for migration with their husbands in order to improve their living conditions. Many mothers stay behind in order to avoid the disruption of children's education. Although, they generally work for a small salary, they assume their responsibilities as breadwinners and as educators of their children.⁷

The remittances sent by emigrated males have allowed women and their children to live comfortably, although migration provokes emotional suffering and a disruption of families. Many wives and mothers complain of loneliness and broken families; their children often give up school and become a serious problem to their families and society in general.

On the whole, economic adjustment reforms and privatization have had negative effects on working-class and lower-middle-class women across North Africa. These reforms seriously undermined their economic and social well-being as a consequence of the high rate of unemployment among women. Many have to delay their marriage plans for lack of an income or to accept separation from their unemployed husbands who are unable to cater for their families.

A large proportion of these working-class women gave their support to the Islamists, and often donned the veil as a reaction against their poverty and their marginalization in society. Many who wear the veil see it as liberation from objectification and standards of beauty, enabling women to be treated with respect and more like equals to men in society.⁸ By contrast, the market economy has given advantages to middle- and upper-class women who have access to top jobs in the public and in the private sectors, or who have made important investments in the world of business.

Economic liberalization has led to political liberalization, as the State has moved slowly from the autocratic system to some form of a democratic system. Despite this important move, women have not benefited from a larger participation in public affairs and in decision-making. Although the state has declared its readiness to share power, it puts conditions that specify which group or party it is ready to work with and which group it is not ready to tolerate.

⁷ For more details see M. Ennaji, and F. Sadiqi, *Migration and Gender in Morocco* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2008).

⁸ P.K. Taylor, 'I just want to be me' in Jennifer Heath (ed.), *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore and Politics* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 2008), pp. 119–138.

Moreover, women's issues have been exploited by the states to attain political goals and to show to the world that the process of democratization is being seriously launched. Women have been used also by political parties for purposes of elections (i.e. to gain more votes). State decrees in favor of women, the reforms of the personal status laws and the participation of women in parliament and government were meant to polish the political image of the regimes, and distinguish their social orientations from that of the opposition parties.

In Morocco, the parliament has recently decided to reserve 10% of seats for women; as a result, 34 women were elected members of parliament in September 2007 in the hope of encouraging their involvement in politics and their representation in parliament and government. The aim of this new law is to build a secular anti-Islamist bloc in a new tacit accord with the State. The law would also enhance the positive image of the political system as it asks for economic and political support, especially from the European Union and the United States.

On the whole, economic structural adjustments and liberalization were neither accompanied by a greater emancipation of women nor by gender equity. Rather, they have introduced changes that reinforced gender inequality at the economic and political levels, which enhanced women's dependence on the State to protect their rights and foster their participation in active life.

In Morocco, women in general continue to struggle so that the State can respond to their economic, social, and political needs; nonetheless, they do not yet enjoy a position of strength. They need to have strong lobbying and organizations which will help to exert their influence on the political scene to defend their rights. Indeed, multiple women's organizations are needed to represent women of all social strata and classes given that economic liberalization and globalization have resulted in dividing women into groups with different social needs and interests.

Despite the positive changes and the growing emancipation of women in all domains, there are still obstacles that hamper their full participation in active life like illiteracy, lack of education and information, lack of technical and professional training, weak resources available to them, difficult access to loans, weak participation in public life and weak or lack of representation in the spheres of policy and policy-making, unfavorable legal status, and weakness in the capacity of organization and associations of women.

The economic situation of these women is distressing; women suffer more than men from poverty, which reveals gender discrimination. Additionally, the rate of schooling among girls is low compared to the schooling rate of boys. On the health level, early marriages are more frequent among girls than boys.

The phenomenon of exclusion strikes more women than men; their poverty is noticeable in the rural areas and in the poor urban districts, and in the growing number of beggars amongst women (generally widows, divorced women, sick women, handicapped women, or women with many children). The Moroccan government has recently launched a campaign to fight against poverty and illiteracy among rural women, which had a great impact on the women's welfare and people's attitudes in general.

On the legal and institutional level, we note discrimination in the laws to the disadvantage of women. The situation of women is made worse by: (i) their ignorance, (ii) the sporadic application of these laws and of the international accords on women's rights, and (iii) the relatively reduced intervention of

Table 1. Unemployment Rates in the 1990s

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1992	13%	25.3%	16%

government structures and of civil society in favor of women or for the protection of women's rights.

II. The Socio-Economic Situation of Women in Morocco

While Moroccan women contribute to development, their socio-economic situation has hardly improved over the years as a result of their participation. Despite the increasing aid afforded to the country and despite the numerous programs of development financed by world aid organizations, all the indications show that there exists an increase of poverty, particularly among women. The evaluation of projects specific to the improvement of women's conditions has shown the limits of the economic approach.

The economic reforms which were implemented in the 1990s as a result of the adoption of the structural readjustment which fostered economic liberalization and free trade led to a reduction of state feminism. The relative retreat of the state from the economic scene as the main agent of change undermined its commitment to gender equality. In general, it is working-class women who have suffered most from these unfair economic and social reforms.

As far as employment is concerned, women's rate of unemployment is remarkably higher than that of men. Unemployment among women kept rising in the 1990s⁹ (see table 1).

Privatization and inflation pushed many women to join the work force. Hence, the feminization of the labor force which began in the 1970s and developed in the 1990s manifested itself in the public sector, industries and services. Since 1990, women became attracted to the private sector, which generally offered them better wages although it did not guarantee social benefits like maternity leave, health care, and transportation.

On another level, State decrees in favor of women, the reforms of the personal status laws and the participation of women in parliament and government were meant to promote the emancipation of women. In Morocco, the parliament has recently passed the new reform of the family law (on 16 January 2004), whereby women are treated as equal to men before the law: divorce is no longer in the hands of the husband, polygamy is drastically restricted, and the woman is free to marry a man of her choice.¹⁰

Moroccan women represent 51% of the population, 16% of whom live in rural areas. They have a crucial role in socio-economic development despite the fact that there exist large inequalities between men and women so far as access to resources is concerned.¹¹

⁹ World Bank (1995b) p. 5; ESCWA (1999, 2000) p. 37; ILO (1996); Moghadam (1998).

¹⁰ See Sadiqi and Ennaji, 'The Feminization of Public Space: Women's Activism, the Family Law, and Social Change in Morocco', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies (JMEWS)*, 2(2) (2006), pp. 86–114.

¹¹ M. Ennaji and F. Sadiqi, *Migration and Gender in Morocco* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2008), Chapter 4.

Table 2. Unemployment by gender, its Evolution from 1990 to 1997

UNEMPLOYMENT BY GENDER	YEAR
Male labor force	13.9% (1990)
	15.8% (1997)
Female labor force	19.6% (1990)
	23% (1997)
Male percentage of total employment	67% (1990)
	65% (1997)
Female percentage of total employment	33% (1990)
	35% (1997)

In the rural areas, which are marked by labor and gender division between men and women, women have growing responsibilities in ensuring the survival and well-being of the family, and in doing their share of farming and of production, small trade, and services.

A small proportion of women in Morocco are active in jobs related to the public and private sectors. In 1994, women represented only 13.5% of salaried people in the formal sector, of which 70% were concentrated in social services. The rate of women working in the public sector was around 25%. However, they had little access to top jobs or decision-making positions, which is due to negative attitudes and taboos against women. Today a lot of change has occurred within the context of democratization that the country is attesting.

The socio-economic situation of women is generally alarming; women seem to be more struck by poverty than men, a fact that indicates inequality of the sexes. Recently, the Moroccan government launched a campaign to fight against poverty and illiteracy among rural women, which had a great impact on the women's welfare and people's attitudes in general (see table 2).¹²

At the educational level, even in present-day Morocco, the soaring percentages of illiteracy amongst women in the country are in the majority of cases composed of rural women. According to official statistics, 65% of rural women and 55% of urban women are illiterate.¹³ In spite of the considerable endeavors that are being made at the government and civil society levels to remedy this state of affairs, the specter of illiteracy is still very real. In retrospect, it seems that another vector of discrimination against rural women is the Moroccan educational system, which has till recently favored urban areas to rural ones. Indeed, generalized education has not systematically favored equality between urban and rural women and between men and women. Even in urban areas, girls are generally encouraged to opt for the least prestigious disciplines or for the ones that lead to the least available professional prospects, and dropping out of school is considered less problematic for girls than it is for boys, because they can always find a husband who can provide for them.

The rate of schooling among girls (55%) is low compared to the schooling rate of boys (86%).¹⁴ On the health level, early marriages are more frequent among girls than they are among boys: 16 years for 27% of women against 21 years for 19% of men.

¹² Source: World Bank: <http://www.genderstats.worldbank.org>

¹³ See M. Ennaji and F. Sadiqi (2008), *Migration and Gender in Morocco*, Chapter 4.

¹⁴ See the Moroccan daily *Al-Alam* of 16 September 2000, p. 10.

Rural women contribute considerably to agricultural and rural development. They work in the fields, feed livestock, search for water and wood, participate in artisan activities, and in many cases, actually manage all household operations while also caring for their children. Given this level of female participation, all development programs need to incorporate women in their activities. However, almost all government interventions until just recently were targeted exclusively to men. Statistical indicators such as literacy, primary school attendance, life expectancy, and maternal mortality clearly point to the disenfranchised status of rural Moroccan women. There exist daily constraints upon rural women's productivity. These constraints are tied to their health, time allocated to each activity, and economic, socio-cultural, and institutional obstacles, as well as existing impediments to social and technical services. Measures facilitating the lifting of such constraints must begin by lightening the burden upon rural women so that they may improve their economic situations. Other measures may be implemented, including those in the areas of preventive and reproductive health, other efforts designed to increase incomes, and actions aiming to improve women's status over the long term.

Non-government associations play an important role in the integration of women in development. Many help mostly illiterate rural women to sell the rugs and other textiles they weave on the Internet, which could provide a solution to the perennial problem of marketing the products of isolated rural women. This measure allows women to increase their revenues as well as obtain some degree of empowerment. The profits are at times used to support the family or contribute towards children's education.¹⁵

Moroccan urban women started to participate in the household economy in the 1930s. Their work was not an act of 'militantism', rather it was dictated by poverty, as most of these women worked as domestics in French or upper-class Moroccan households or were recruited as low-paid workers doing unskilled jobs in the fields or in factories. However, a few Moroccan urban women managed to create their own enterprises in the 1930s and 1940s in cities.¹⁶ After Morocco's independence, a growing number of Moroccan urban women were incorporated in the 'official' labor market. Women's rate of 'economic activity' in urban areas increased from 5.6% in 1960, to 10.8% in 1971, 14.7% in 1982, 17.3% in 1994, and to 27% in 2004, according to the general statistics of the Moroccan Ministry of Population and Housing. Further, the rate of the feminization of the labor force (15 years of age or more) grew during independence and reached 33% in the 1990s.¹⁷ Women's work in industry greatly helped Morocco's economic development. The greatest majority of salaried women has been and is still constituted of the lower and average parts of the job ladder. Very few women have managed to reach top positions in their jobs.

¹⁵ S. Schaefer Davis, 'Women Weavers Online: Rural Moroccan Women on the Internet', in *Gender Technology and Development*, 8(1) (2004), pp. 53–74. Cf. also F. Mernissi, 'Le Tapis Amazigh et les Tisseuses Artistes', in Moha Ennaji (ed.), *La Culture Amazighe et le Développement Humain* (Fès: Publications of Fès-Saïss, 2007), pp. 15–20.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Belarbi, 'La représentation de la femme à travers les livres scolaires', in M. Al Alahyane et al. (eds.), *Portraits De Femmes* (Casablanca: Le Fennec, 1987), pp. 47–68.

¹⁷ cf. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 1996.

III. Family Strategies

To face the economic crisis and the low family income, many families are mobilized to reduce the effects of this hardship and of unemployment. Many poor families incite women or young children to work in the informal sector (as maids, or as shop assistants or as cheap labor in handicraft). A majority of 79% of Moroccan women in urban centers confirm that their first contact with a job was the result of the family strategy to help surmount their socio-economic difficulties.

Female employees are for the most part confined to commerce and services, but recently women have also gained access to the domain of industry which recruits a young and less qualified workforce. In the latter sector, the rate of women workers increased from 46.5% in 1982 to 50% in 1990 with a strong concentration in the food and textile industries. In the 1990s, however, employment became more important in the area of services. Very few women have access to jobs requiring degrees and diplomas or to administrative jobs (8.9%). Access to technical, scientific, or liberal professions is very limited.¹⁸

In Morocco, for example, the rate of active women in urban areas increased from 5.6% in 1960, 10.8% in 1971, 14.7% in 1982 to 17.3% in 1994 according to government statistics on population.¹⁹ Women usually work in departments of services and domestic spaces. Every year, this branch of activity occupies the first place.

Recent research has shown that industrial growth is closely linked to women's active place in employment. Women's employment has reached a rate of 9.54% between 1980 and 1993, whereas the rate of global employment reached only 5.38%.²⁰ Salaried women, generally young and illiterate, are at the bottom of the social ladder and are discriminated against in matters of recruitment and social promotion through their jobs. Women's qualifications remain weak when confronted with the new needs of globalization which constitute a real challenge for women's emancipation. It is hard to imagine how Moroccan economies can integrate world economy which is very competitive at a time when the female work force is both unqualified and underpaid. This is a real challenge because it is hard to guarantee women stable and decent jobs in a context where unemployment is very high (15%), as a result of the economic readjustment implemented since the 1980s. This inequality and economic hardship have hit women more than men.

The main objective of any plan to promote women in society should be centered on finding ways of integrating them into the development and democratization processes. Gender issues are to be included in the social and economic perspectives of the country. This can be done by examining the role of women in economic development, and by assessing the effects of economic transformations on women. Thus, a new culture has to be established which takes into account a gendered agenda, which is generalized to all institutions and organizations as an important component in any development strategy. To implement this culture, all actors of change have to be involved, mainly government institutions and civil society.

Civil society plays a crucial role in sensitizing officials and people alike about the role of women in development and in training them to adopt this new culture,

¹⁸ Mejjatti Alami, 'Femmes et Vulnérabilité sur le Marché du Travail', pp. 15–28.

¹⁹ Direction des Statistiques, 1999.

²⁰ Mejjatti Alami, 'Femmes et Vulnérabilité sur le Marché du Travail', pp. 15–28.

starting by fighting illiteracy among women. Civil society has also a role to play in sensitizing employers to take measures favorable to women by protecting their rights and by being aware of their impact on development and the competitiveness of the economy as a whole.

All this necessitates the training of women and the training of non-government organizations. New information technologies can be helpful in training women and valorizing products made by women and to find new markets for these products. Thus, women and women's organizations have to be initiated to these technologies like the computer, the internet, etc., as well as to the modern techniques of marketing and management.

These objectives cannot be realized without a national policy which seeks to protect women's rights and to valorize their products, and without a research strategy that seeks to enhance the participation of women in the processes of development and democratization. Decision-makers must take into account the gender dimension in all their undertakings and transactions, be they national, bilateral, or international accords. Up until now, men are the first actors on the economic, social, and political levels. Women are often ignored as the gender element has not been considered; many decisions are taken without considering their impact on gender, which reinforces their exclusion.

IV. Conclusion

The role of women in development and growth is crucial. Education and training are so important for women to enable them to meet the new challenges and to help them safeguard their rights and interests. The development of society cannot be achieved without the integration of women in the process of growth.

To promote women's emancipation, the State must open doors to women who ought to be adequately trained to use the new information technology. By gaining new skills, Moroccan women can develop their productivity and improve their standards of living and those of their families.

Women's associations and civil society in general play a major role in sensitizing women, families, and social actors as to the importance of integrating women in economic, social, and cultural development. Further steps in favor of protecting women's rights are badly needed to ensure their strong contribution to sustainable development.