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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN MOROCCO: THE ROLE OF ARGAN OIL COOPERATIVES

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Introduction.

Studies of women's empowerment can act as a catalyst for social, political and economic advancement. Lately, the topic of women empowerment has assumed a central role in the debate on sustainable development, especially thanks to the Millennium Development Goals. Morocco constitutes an interesting case study because notwithstanding the huge steps made in terms of gender equality, strong disparities persist, especially in rural areas, in educational attainment and access to the labor market. In this context, the cooperative system emerged as an innovative mechanism of inclusion aimed especially at rural women.

Among the many cooperatives, argan oil ones will be the objective of this research and are studied due to their role for gender emancipation. Indeed, argan oil, in addition to being a valuable resource with international relevance, is a protagonist of gender-related development policies aimed at economic involvement of marginalized groups.

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the evolution and the state of gender equality in Morocco, in relation to education and labor market. Yet, the ultimate goal of the thesis is analyzing the extent to which argan oil cooperatives contribute to the process of women's empowerment in Morocco, with particular attention to the dimension of financial independence. This objective cannot be meaningfully addressed without framing the structural conditions that shape Moroccan women's opportunities and constraints.

For this reason, the present work pursues a combination of interrelated objectives. First of all, to contextualize women's economic empowerment by reconstructing the historical evolution of women's role in the Moroccan society. Second, it aims to identify key gender disparities in education and labor market participation, which represent foundational conditions to

achieve economic independence. Finally, it estimates whether and how cooperatives can help overcoming these inequalities.

Accordingly, the first chapter reconstructs the evolution of women's role in Moroccan society from the protectorate period to the present day, highlighting the most significant cultural changes. This historical perspective is essential since cultural norms and social expectations continue to shape gender relations and hinder women's access to education and employment. The second and third chapters analyze the gender gap in education and labor market, respectively, foregrounding the main challenges and the possible policies which can improve the situation. Building on this analytical framework, the fourth chapter deals with the Moroccan cooperative system, its development, and its empowerment potential, delving into the case of argan oil cooperatives through qualitative interviews conducted with women from rural areas. Since argan oil cooperatives are predominantly located in rural areas, each chapter delves into the differences experienced between women living in those areas and women living in urban areas.

By analyzing the presence of literacy programs and childcare services, the inclusion of marginalized groups, and workers' subjective perceptions of empowerment, the thesis aims to answer the following research question: Can women employed in argan oil cooperatives achieve financial independence? Before get to that, the research requires to answer the following questions which allow the readers to better contextualize: what is the current situation of gender equality in Morocco and how much did women progress? What gender disparities persist in access to education, and how do these disparities affect women's economic opportunities? To what extent the argan industry contributes to female empowerment and gender equality? Can women employed in argan oil cooperatives achieve financial independence?

Chapter 1. Historical Development of Women Status in Morocco.

1.1 Women's Place in the Moroccan Society Before Independence.

The first chapter will deal with the women's role into the Moroccan society. This argument will be analyzed in light of the improvements they have achieved over the years. The time horizon taken into consideration will not be very broad and, apart from some introductory notions, the starting point will be the protectorate period (1912-1956). The time-period choice has been chosen because of the consequences that colonialism brought to Moroccan society. In particular, the recurring dichotomy modern-traditional has its historical roots on the promulgation of the Berber Dahir (decree) in 1930.¹ As will be explained in the following chapters, this dichotomy will lead to the separation of the Moroccan people into different categories, e.g. Berber vs. Arab, including labelling women either as traditional or modern.

The Moroccan society has for long been permeated by the patriarchal system, leading to the fact that women "still stay subject to the pressure of a patriarchal system" because of social norms which help the preservation of inequality between the sexes.² Starting from the protectorate period, Moroccan women have been described through a dichotomic lens: modern vs. traditional. The "modern" was represented by the colonizers, which regarded the female elite as an instrument for transmitting Western norms, values and lifestyle. The "traditional" view was that of the nationalists which claimed women's role as bearers of tradition, belittling their agency. Despite these narratives confined Moroccan women to mere extremes of a dualism, Moroccans' identities are complex, and this can bring to gender

¹ F. Sadiqi, *The Center: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Women's Rights* in Pre- and Post-Arab Spring North Africa, in H. Darhour & D. Dahlerup (edited by), *Double-Edged Politics on Women's Rights in the MENA Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020.

² S. Belhabib, *Deconstructing Female Identities Within a Polyphony of Feminist Voices*, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi & K. Vintges (edited by), *Moroccan Feminisms New Perspectives*, Africa World Press, 2016, pp. 145-161.

status variations person-to-person. This layering of identities which emerges from the diverse culture of Morocco reflects itself in differences of both claim and expectations thus, it is difficult, if not impossible, to restrict a group to a single model and, consequently, have only one type of feminism.³

In “*Femme Dans la Ville*” the author Safaa Monqid illustrates women’s status into the Moroccan society from the end of the 1900s to the early 2000s. Hamidi observes in this regard:

“From a young age, each gender was taught the responsibilities they had to take care of, girls were also told to always protect their Chasity and to appear innocent and fragile, but the boys had to always be strong”.⁴

These beliefs were projected in the dichotomy between private space/public space. The dichotomy has been analyzed and interpreted, arriving at the categorization of the two constituents as completely exclusive. The public space, reserved to men, represents the place of power while the private space is the home where women are relegated.⁵ Thus, from spaces to duties and responsibilities, everything was gender-based, at least as long as the protectorate occurred.

One of the main changes that colonizers brought with them regards education. While previously education was male-restricted, overtime the middle class’s desire to educate their daughters aroused, ultimately resulting in the birth of a group of educated women.⁶ Moreover, during the colonial period many women began to work and, in the 1952 census one in eight women resulted as employed. This event disrupted the dichotomy

³ Ibid.

⁴ F. Hamidi, *The Role of Women in A Modern Moroccan Society; By Safaa Monqid’s “Femmes Dans la Ville” as a case study*, Université Hassan II, Casablanca 2022, pp.1-38.

⁵ F. Sadiqi & M. Ennaji, *The feminization of public space: Women’s activism, the family law and social change in Morocco* in “Journal of Middle East women’s studies”, 2(2) (2006), pp.86-114.

⁶ It is important to underline that a difference persisted in the subjects taught. The ultimate aim was to teach women how to be good housewives and mothers.

F. Hamidi, *The Role of Women in A Modern Moroccan Society; By Safaa Monqid’s “Femmes Dans la Ville” as a case study*, Université Hassan II, Casablanca 2022.

private space/public space, the interaction permitted women to negotiate power and affirm their potential. Indeed, men did not react well to what they saw as a disruption of custom. Also, these changes were well accompanied by a growing gender differentiation in towns, contributing to the intensification of the already existing gender inequalities.⁷

Furthermore, during colonization, women's role has been exploited by both the colonizers and nationalists. The former tried to draw on women elite as an example of Western values and lifestyle; while the latter presented women as the bearers of their homeland and, hence, traditions. Notwithstanding that, the middle- and upper-class women tried to have the best of both worlds, finally being able to gain in terms of both education and access to the public sphere.⁸ It was precisely these women who created what is considered to be the pioneer women's movement in Morocco: *Akhawat Al-Safaa'* (Sisters of Purity).⁹ These women decided to focus both on nationalism, in line with the climate of the then colonized Morocco, and on women's rights, publicly expressing women's individual and collective aspirations. What marks the position of *Akhawat Al-Safaa'* in the history of Moroccan women's movements is the document (*al-Wathiqah*), emanated in 1946, incorporating many legal demands such as dignity at home, abolition of polygamy and more representation in the public sphere.¹⁰ Also, it is important to remark that, with this document, the Association acted independently from the political party it was associated thus, distancing itself from the male feminism of the era. Indeed, many political parties incorporated feminist ideas to gain more

⁷ S. Bentaher, *Exploring the Dynamics of Gender Role Attitudes in Morocco: A Socio-Cultural Examination of Differences between Men and Women in Diverse Contexts*, Seoul National University, Seoul, 2024.

⁸ F. Sadiqi, *An Assessment of Today's Moroccan Feminist Movements (1946–2014)*, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi & K. Vintges (edited by), *Moroccan Feminisms New Perspectives*, Africa World Press, 2016, pp. 51-75.

⁹ F. Sadiqi, *The Center: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Women's Rights in Pre- and Post-Arab Spring North Africa*, in H. Darhour & D. Dahlerup (edited by), *Double-Edged Politics on Women's Rights in the MENA Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020.

¹⁰ F. Sadiqi, (2016), op. cit., p.52.

support, but it was not something sincere, it was part of a larger national plan. The education of women was mainly seen as a “solution” for the backwardness of Morocco.¹¹ The changes in the status of Moroccan women over different periods is summarized in Table 1. The periods are divided in pre-colonial period, protectorate period (1912-1956), early independence (1956-1980s), reform era (1990s-2000s), contemporary period (2010s-Today) and they show a gradual change in the position of women over time.

Table 1- Moroccan women position through history

Moroccan women position through history				
Period	Education	Legal Status/ Rights	Work	Political participation
Pre-colonial Morocco	High illiteracy rates, in particular in rural areas.	Mainly based on local customs and Islamic law.	-Located mostly in rural areas -Jobs such as harvesting or weaving carpets.	Very limited public role due to the strict division between private space (reserved for women) and public space (reserved for men)
Protectorate Period (1912-1956)	-Men were favored -Only few women had access to it, usually from upper-middle and high classes.	New legal and administrative framework but maintenance of the same Family Law.	Disruption of the public-private dichotomy and consequent increase in the number of women entering the workforce.	-Women as instruments for nationalist and colonialists in pursuing their conflicting goals -Active participation in the struggle for freedom.
Early Independence (1956-1980s)	-Women's education is still not prioritized. -Development of public education.	The Family Code, also known as <i>Mudawana</i> (1957-58), maintained its patriarchal values such as repudiation.	Socio-cultural norms continue hindering women's employment options	Spreading of women's associations to promote gender equality
Reform Era (1990s-2000s)	-Higher female enrollment -wide gap between urban and rural areas -High drop-out rates	-1993: the King started to revise the <i>Mudawana</i> . -Feminists described the changes as mostly symbolic. -Adoption of CEDAW.	-Women increasingly access microfinance -Industrialization increase women's employment possibilities	-Women gain access to the Parliament -Introduction of quotas
Contemporary Period (2010s-Today)	-High gender equality in access to education -Poor quality of education both for males and females	-Achievement of constitutional equality with the 2011 reform. -Uneven implementation persists.	-Growing workforce participation but still very low compared to male -Continued dominance in informal sectors	-More activism (20th February Movement) -More women in important positions however, large gender gap.

¹¹ F. Sadiqi, *The central role of the family law in the Moroccan feminist movement* in “British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies”, 35(3) (2008), pp. 325–337.

Source: Author's elaboration based on: Abidi, F. Z., & Samihi, Y. (2025)¹²; Benadada, A., Belkamel, B., & Université Mohammed V (Rabat) (2014)¹³; Bentaher S. (2024)¹⁴; Bourdane Y. & Bounou K. (2024)¹⁵; Ennaji M. (2018)¹⁶; Ennaji M. (2019)¹⁷; Nabli, M. K., & Chamlou, N. (2004)¹⁸; Naciri, R. (2014)¹⁹; Rignall, K. E. (2019)²⁰; Sadiqi, F. (2014)²¹; Sadiqi, F. (2016)²²; Sadiqi, F. & Ennaji, M. (2006)²³; UN Women (2024)²⁴; Zvan Elliott K. (2015)²⁵.

It is essential to also examine the issue from another point of view, that of Amazigh women. Indeed, Morocco saw the presence of Amazigh (Berber) people first. It is documented by ancient history that the Amazigh family at first was matriarchal, and this reality shines through when looking at their language. Indeed, the word “woman” translates into “*Tamghrat*”, the leader. Unfortunately, history it is generally written from a male point of view thus the figure of Amazigh woman is laced with mythology and

¹² F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, *Female Participation in the Moroccan Labor Market: A Catalyst for Inclusive Growth*, in “International Review of Applied Finance, Economics and Management”, 1(1) (2025), pp. 1-30.

¹³ A. Benadada & L. El Bouhsini (edited by) *Le mouvement des droits humains des femmes au Maroc: approche historique et archivistique*, Université Mohammed V, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Rabat 2014, pp. 1-421.

¹⁴ S. Bentaher, *Exploring the Dynamics of Gender Role Attitudes in Morocco: A Socio-Cultural Examination of Differences between Men and Women in Diverse Contexts*, Seoul National University, Seoul, 2024.

¹⁵ Y. Bourdane & K. Bounou, *The role of education in reducing income disparities in Morocco: empirical evidence from the ARDL approach*, in “International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics” 5(11) (2024), pp. 466-489.

¹⁶ M. Ennaji, *Morocco's experience with gender gap reduction in education*, in “Gender and Women's Studies” 2(1) (2018), pp. 1-18.

¹⁷ M. Ennaji, *Women's Activism in North Africa: A Historical and Socio-Political Approach*, In in H. Darhour & D. Dahlerup (edited by), *Double-Edged Politics on Women's Rights in the MENA Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020, pp. 157-178.

¹⁸ M.K. Nabli & N. Chamlou, *Gender and development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the public sphere*, The World Bank, Washington 2004, pp.1-197.

¹⁹ R. Naciri, *Le mouvement des femmes au Maroc*, in “Nouvelles questions féministes”, 33(2) (2014), pp. 43-64.

²⁰ K. E. Rignall, *Is rurality a form of gender-based violence in Morocco?*, in “Journal of Applied Language and Culture Studies”, 2 (2019), pp. 15-33.

²¹ F. Sadiqi, *Moroccan feminist discourses*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2014, pp. 1-235.

²² F. Sadiqi, *An Assessment of Today's Moroccan Feminist Movements (1946-2014)*, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi & K. Vintges (edited by), *Moroccan Feminisms New Perspectives*, Africa World Press, 2016, pp. 51-75.

²³ F. Sadiqi & M. Ennaji, *The feminization of public space: Women's activism, the family law and social change in Morocco*, in “Journal of Middle East women's studies”, 2(2) (2006), pp.86-114.

²⁴ UN Women, *Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy*, UN Women, New York 2024, pp. 1-39.

²⁵ K. Zvan Elliott, *(Dis) Empowering education: the case of Morocco*, in “Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development”, 44 (1-2) (2015), pp. 1-42.

legends. Notwithstanding that, there is another evidence of the ancient matriarchal Amazigh society, Vanderbroeck cite:

“The textile art of Berber women is one of the last pieces of evidence for a former matricentric society. In the historical period and up to today, matrixial art has been completely replaced by (patriarchal) mastery and Phallic art.”²⁶

Overall, analyzing Amazigh’s point of view is important because it is profoundly different from other Moroccans’ one. In general, Imazighen²⁷ have been often described either as a minority or indigenous, or simply as distinguished from Moroccans.²⁸ Probably, the main reason must be found in the division between rural and urban areas, an aspect that continues to be evident in the present day. This difference exacerbated during the colonial period in line with the *divide et impera* (divide-to rule) strategy and with the creation of the Berber *Dahir* (decree). The Berber *Dahir* (1930) aimed at the division among the Moroccan population through the different treatment under the law. Indeed, while people from urban areas were subjected to the *Shari’a* law (Islamic law), the civil proceedings of Amazigh people were entrusted to the tribal council. Moreover, it enshrined the creation of “Berber” schools where Amazigh people were taught in French and Amazigh languages, preventing them from learning Arabic language.²⁹ Standard Arabic was seen as an emblem of national unity and in light of this it was foreshadowed by the French colonizers. Even if French failed to separate Moroccan people, since the Berber *Dahir* was greeted with disagreement, the repercussions are discernible in several aspects. For instance, feminism arose from urban, upper-class women,

²⁶ H. El Aissi, *The 2011 Constitution: The Moroccan Amazigh Woman’s Empowerment* in “Sinestesie Online” 8 (26) (2019), pp. 8-14.

²⁷ Imazighen is the plural of Amazigh.

²⁸ S. Gagliardi, *Indigenous peoples’ rights in Morocco: subaltern narratives by Amazigh women*, in “The International Journal of Human Rights” 23 (1-2) (2019), pp. 1-16.

²⁹ A. Ouldahmed, *The Beginning of the Berber Dahir in Morocco and National Reactions to It*, in “Journal of Human and Society Sciences”, 14(2) (2025), pp. 885-900.

leaving aside the situation of rural women, likewise those of single mothers and many other groups.

Moroccan women, both Arab and Amazigh also participated in the armed struggle against colonizers, further demonstrating to be an active and integral part of the society. Some examples can be found on the oral tradition, such as the oral poems of the Amazigh woman Tawgrat Walt Aissa N'Ait Sokhman who urged women "to carry the flag."³⁰ However, after independence (1956) they could not experience any status' development.³¹

1.2. The Post-independence, Women's Associations Trying to Change the Law.

During the protectorate the state priority was only one, to obtain the independence. Even after it was achieved, the State continued to put women-related issues in the background to focus attention on other concerns. This point can be clearly seen in the Personal Status Code emanated in 1957-1958, where principles such as repudiation and women's deference towards their husbands were preserved.³² The Personal Status Code, also known as *Mudawana*, was superintended by men only and it was based on the religious Maliki law, making it sacred. This detail had a great importance at the time because was the reason why matters regarding the *Mudawana* were not open to public debate.³³

The following years were characterized by the attitude to moderate freedom and growing authoritarianism. This period, also called by the opponents of King Hassan II "the years of Lead", ended around 1975. A

³⁰ F. Sadiqi, *Women in Morocco*, in "Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History" (2024).

³¹ M. Yachoulti, *The Women of 20-February Movement: A New Moroccan Feminist Consciousness*, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi & K. Vintges (edited by), *Moroccan Feminisms New Perspectives*, Africa World Press, 2016, pp.163-183.

³² R. Naciri, *Le mouvement des femmes au Maroc*, in "Nouvelles questions féministes", 33(2) (2014), pp. 43-64.

³³ Sadiqi F., *The central role of the family law in the Moroccan feminist movement*, in "British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies", 35(3) (2008),

new and completely different political climate established itself, mainly characterized by greater freedom of expression. This environment fostered the creation of new women's associations both unofficial and socio-professionals. During this period, more specifically in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was promulgated. Even if Morocco did not adopt it at first, this event was certainly an opportunity to open a debate and raise awareness of the topic. Indeed, the subsequent decade (1980-1990) witnessed more consciousness on women issues, mainly expressed through writings.³⁴ One example which is worth mentioning is the magazine *8 Mars* (March 8), created in 1983 by women of the party *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (Socialist Union of Popular Forces, USFP). This magazine had a very important role in the diffusion of feminist ideas, especially because it was the means used for the launching of the One Million Signature Campaign in 1992.³⁵ The women of the organization *Union de l'Action Féminine* (Union of Women's Action, UAF) decided to institute on the International Women's day the campaign, which was "a sort of unofficial Referendum designed to raise enough support to reform the Personal Status Code."³⁶ The petition was made of nine amendments aimed at greater gender equality and the obtainment of women's rights such as equal rights to ask for divorce or for the charge of the couple's children.³⁷

According to Zvan Elliot, the Campaign raised many doubts not only by the opposition, which manifested it through the creation of an official counterpart, but also from other secularist groups. The requests were criticized for being too abrupt and for the use of a universal model of

³⁴ R. Naciri, op. cit., p.49.

³⁵ C. Hemström, *Feminist movements as agents of political change: An analysis of feminist social movements' impact on labor rights legislation in Morocco*, 2019, pp.1-37.

³⁶ K. Zvan Elliott, *Reforming the Moroccan personal status code: A revolution for whom?*, in "Mediterranean Politics", 14(2) (2009), pp.213-227.

³⁷ C. Hemström, op. cit., p.22.

human rights. Even leftist political parties, such as USFP, thwarted the project at birth because the topic could be too controversial and feared the exclusion from some privileges which came with their support to the status quo. The highest peak of antagonism towards the project was achieved when the Islamic scholar Muhammad al-Habib al-Tujkani, accused the organizers of apostasy. This *fatwa*³⁸ was followed by the encouragement to oppose the petition, bringing to a counter-petition spread in the mosques. These struggles ended when the King Hassan II mediated between the two parts clarifying his authority. Nevertheless, the King's involvement made the topic reach a larger audience and the Campaign make it to more than one million signatures. Afterwards the King created a commission suited to the revision of the Family Code together with some women's groups and on 1st May 1993 the king notified the changes made.³⁹ Some changes regarded the tutorship and the polygamy which are now restricted, for example the woman can sign the engagement contract and needs to be informed if the husband wants a second wife. Moreover, topics of divorce and children legal tutorship underwent some changes but, as the others, the new amendments were defined by the feminists as symbolic changes because of the continued legacy of women seen as depending on men. Yet the most striking result was achieved because changing the *Mudawana* meant putting an end to the text being seen as sacred and untouchable.⁴⁰ The reform of the *Mudawana* came together

³⁸ *Fatwa* is "a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar. [...] Though considered authoritative, *fatwas* are generally not treated as binding judgements and serve more typically as advisory opinions.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "fatwa", Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fatwa>. Accessed 19 June 2025.

³⁹ K. Zvan Elliott (2009), op. cit., p. 216.

⁴⁰ F. Sadiqi & M. Ennaji, *The feminization of public space: Women's activism, the family law and social change in Morocco*, in "Journal of Middle East women's studies", 2(2) (2006), pp.86-114.

with forwarding access to justice and this led to the fact that more and more women accessed to the charge of judge.⁴¹

Moreover, during this period, Moroccan feminists saw another big step in their fight because of Morocco's adoption of the Convention to End Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on August 26, 1993. This achievement came from years of liberal feminists' involvement in global events aimed at the discussion of women's rights promotion and at the diminishment of gender-based biases. Notwithstanding that, Morocco lifted some reservations justified by the presumed clashes between those articles and *Mudawana*.⁴² More specifically the articles concerned were article 2, 9, 15, 16 and 29. Article 2 required the change of the law in order to avoid the presence of discrimination against women. For Article 15 it is mandatory that women and men are equal before the law while Article 16 presupposes the same legal rights for husband and wife in terms of family matters. Both the ratification of CEDAW and the reservations attached to it constituted fertile ground for a new clash between the two Moroccan Feminisms. Islamist impeached CEDAW of seeking full equality between the sexes notwithstanding the fact that there are articles that deal with biological differences between the two sexes. Moreover, Islamic Feminists hardly disapprove Western intervention in national affairs.⁴³ On the other hand, Secular Feminists didn't accept the reservations and continued to exhort for a complete approval of CEDAW claiming "equality without reservations."⁴⁴ The reservations were rescinded in 2011, and Morocco adopted the Addition Protocol, a structure with the aim of fulfilling the CEDAW.

⁴¹ After two years from the reform, the 19% of judges were women and the 16% of those on the Supreme Court.

F. Sadiqi, *Moroccan feminist discourses*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2014, pp. 1-235.

⁴² F. Sadiqi, (2008), op. cit., p. 329.

⁴³ F. Sadiqi (2016), op. cit., p.57.

⁴⁴ I. Bouzghaia, *Whose Gender Equality? On the Boundaries of Islam and Feminism in the MENA Region*, in H. Darhour & D. Dahlerup (edited by), *Double-Edged Politics on Women's Rights in the MENA Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020, pp. 71-93.

Both obstacles and achievements didn't stop liberal feminist in their fight against injustices and inequalities and almost simultaneously to the One Million Signature Campaign Morocco saw the emergence of the *Cent Mesures et Dispositions* (100 Steps and Provisions). In 1992 the ADFM created the *Collectif 95 Égalité* (CMÈ) together with Algerian and Tunisian feminist associations. The aim of CMÈ is to dispense means to achieve equality and freedom.⁴⁵ They compared the laws of different Maghreb countries in order to highlight how these divert from international treaties on women's rights. The *Collectif 95 Égalité* argue that gender prejudices arise from the *Mudawana* itself, particularly from its sacredness, and also from the generalizations existing about considering the Maghreb as a whole. In the document the solution for these differences is found in the need of a base of respect for women both in the private and in the public sphere. Broadly, the document addresses issues such as the reconceptualization of women's role in the society, in the judiciary and in the family. The document was presented at the Beijing Conference (1995), an important platform which gave women the opportunity to gather new perspectives and to expose their ideas to an international audience. Not long after the Conference Morocco witnessed the emergence of new laws which allowed women to participate in the economy to a greater extent by employment contracts.

Four years after the Beijing Conference Moroccan regime announced the *Plan d'Action National pour l'Intégration de la Femme au Développement* (The Plan for Integration of Women in Development, addressed as PANFID or The Plan.)⁴⁶ The Plan was rooted on CEDAW and it was proposed by the Secretary of State for the Family, the Children and the Disabled Mohamed Said Saadi. It was presented as an alternative to the

⁴⁵ D. M. Draoui, *Le Collectif Maghreb-Égalité 95: pour un mouvement féministe maghrébin*, in "Nouvelles Questions Féministes" 33(2) (2014), pp.132-135.

⁴⁶ C. Hemström, op. cit., pp. 26-28.

policies proposed in the past by the State. The aim of The Plan was to take into account women's roles in the political, legal, and public institutional spheres. The Plan present women's situation as a sum of cultural heritage and policies which perpetuate injustices.⁴⁷ Above all, the intention was to transform those unequal relations through the reform of different legal codes such as the Penal Code, the Nationality Code and the Personal Status Code. It was particularly this last purpose to unleash the contraposition between Islamic Feminists and Secular Feminists. Indeed, on March 12, 2000, two marches occurred with opposing point of view. One march, organized by Secular Feminists Associations such as ADFM and UAF, took place in Rabat while the streets of Casablanca witnessed the opposing march organized by Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the Islamist Movement *Al-Adl wa'l-Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality). The source of controversy was "the question of cultural authenticity" and not the reform of the Code itself as one can think.⁴⁸

Even if the Plan wasn't carried out, the King decided to establish a Commission to update the *Mudawana*. Differently from the past, the new King Mohammed VI selected both men and women to be part of the Commission and there was also the presence of members non-related to the religious sphere. In 2004 the new Code was approved, the "*Mudawanat al-Usra*" made significant changes to women's situation compared to the previous amendments of 1992. The minimum age for marriage was changed from 15 to 18, as for men, furthermore women can now come to terms on marriage without the *wali*'s⁴⁹ permission and can integrate sections in the marriage contract. Other rights regard the right to ask for

⁴⁷ S. Eddouada, *Women and The Politics of Reform in Morocco*, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi & K. Vintges (edited by), *Moroccan Feminisms New Perspectives*, Africa World Press 2016, pp. 13-28.

⁴⁸ K. Zvan Elliott (2009), *op. cit.*, p.217.

⁴⁹ The term "*wali*" refers to the legal tutor of the woman in question, usually the father or the brother.

Ibid.

divorce, of having the custody of children and to oppose polygamy, which is now restricted, but not fully abolished.

Even if these changes constituted the original goals of the secular feminist movement, it does not mean that it represented the finishing line for them. They continued to ask for more rights and for changes regarding some laws they saw as biased and unjust. Additionally, activists organized trainings for the public in order to make the law understandable among everyone.⁵⁰ The obtainment of more women's rights and thus equity in Morocco will be seen after the so-called "Arab Spring" which involved many Arab countries and didn't left Morocco apart.

1.3 From the Arab Spring to the Current Situation of Moroccan Women.

In December 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor from Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire after enduring repeated harassment and humiliation by local authorities. This act of self-immolation is widely regarded as the catalyst for the Tunisian revolution and the broader wave of uprisings known as the Arab Spring.⁵¹ There were numerous reasons that led to the uprisings, including a youth-dominated population with limited social mobility, widespread perceptions of corruption and poverty. These factors fueled the 2011 protests, however, compared to other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, the response of Moroccans was more gradual and circumspect.⁵² In Morocco the debate started on social media, via Facebook, and continued when a group of young people posted a video on YouTube to hasten people to join the Movement and explaining the reasons for doing so.⁵³ On the 20th February 2011 a national

⁵⁰ M. Ennaji, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Movements in Morocco. Contentions, Achievements, and Challenges*, in M. Ennaji, F. Sadiqi & K. Vintges (edited by), *Moroccan Feminisms New Perspectives*, Africa World Press 2016, pp.29-50.

⁵¹ M. Tazi, *The Arab Spring and Women's (Cyber)activism: "Fourth Wave Democracy in the Making?" Case Study of Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco*, in "Journal of International Women's Studies", 22(9) (2021), pp.298-315.

⁵² I. F. Molina, *The Monarchy VS. the 20 February Movement: who holds the reins of political change in Morocco?*, in "Mediterranean politics" 16(3) (2011), pp.435-441.

⁵³ F. Sadiqi (2014), op. cit., p. 141.

manifestation took place in the capital of Morocco, Rabat, and it was rapidly followed by many other cities such as Casablanca, Fez, Tangier but also smallest and rural cities and villages. The demands were various, and the movement didn't center their agenda solely on women's issues, the focus was on human rights in general, among which there was gender equality. I will mainly focus on gender issues and the demands and achievements of Imazighen for reasons related to my research.

The 20th February movement can be defined innovative for many reasons, one of these is that for the first time in the history of Morocco a movement introduced Amazigh's rights into their agenda.⁵⁴ Amazigh women were for a long time emarginated because of their linguistic identity even though they had a pivotal role in the precolonial era. One example is they were always on the frontline to resist the colonizers, acting also as leaders of armies. Thanks to the inclusion of this group in the activists' agenda, Amazigh people saw their mother tongue (Tamazight) as official language, next to Arabic.⁵⁵

Indeed, less than a month after the protest, the king Mohammed VI announced in a televised speech that there would be a constitutional reform to ensure greater democracy. Before the approval, a referendum was held on July 1 with the vote resulting almost unanimous.⁵⁶ The figure of the king remains "inviolable", but it is no more "sacred", with his power diminished. The new Constitution also states that the unity of the country is built on the confluence of its diverse components, namely Arab-Islamic, Amazigh, and Saharo-Hassanian. Moreover, it introduces the principles of equality and non-discrimination among genders.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ F. Sadiqi (2014), op. cit., pp.138.

⁵⁵ H. El Aissi, *The 2011 Constitution: The Moroccan Amazigh Woman's Empowerment*, in "Sinestesie Online" 26 (8) (2019), pp.8-14.

⁵⁶ F. Sadiqi (2014), op. cit., p.141.

⁵⁷ S. Gagliardi, *Indigenous peoples' rights in Morocco: subaltern narratives by Amazigh women*, in "The International Journal of Human Rights", 23 (1-2) (2019), pp. 1-16.

Notwithstanding the revolutionary power of the updated Constitution, for the 20th February Movement it was not enough. This was especially due to the wrangle on women's seats in the Parliament. Before the elections in November 2011 had been decided that 60 out of 326 seats were reserved to women but it resulted as a mere promise as only one woman were designated.⁵⁸ Additionally, even if the new constitution set down some progresses on women's rights, the priority is always given to tradition, religion and monarchy.⁵⁹ In addition, the language used for the Constitution often is vague and its nominal recognition of both women and Amazigh's rights remains vacant in the absence of corresponding domestic legislation following its promulgation. Furthermore, as Gagliardi observes, "Morocco was one of the countries that were absent during the voting on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)."⁶⁰

Actually, the reform process went together with a diplomatic initiative aimed at obtaining international support for the changes, which, however, had not been completed yet. From this attitude it can be evinced that Moroccan constitutional reform was intentioned to obtain foreign recognition too. It may explain why such reforms are often not matched by effective implementation in the daily lives of Moroccan citizens.⁶¹

Despite the criticism the 2011 Constitution, together with the 2004 Family Code, constitutes the main achievement of Moroccan Feminist Movement. The acknowledgement of the bilingual and multicultural background of the country paved the way for a new female identity timeless and

⁵⁸ K. M. McKanders, *Anatomy of an uprising: Women, democracy, and the Moroccan feminist spring*, in "Boston University International Law Journal", 32 (147) (2014), pp.147-175.

⁵⁹ Article 19 of *Mudawana* says that those progresses can happen "with [the] respect for [...] the constants and of the laws of the Kingdom."

S. Boutkhil, *Moroccan women in limbo: On liminal citizenship and the quest for equality* in Sadiqi F. "Women's Movements in Post-"Arab Spring" North Africa", New York: Palgrave Macmillan US 2016, pp. 251-265.

⁶⁰ S. Gagliardi, op. cit., p. 7

⁶¹ I. F. Molina, *The Monarchy VS. the 20 February Movement: who holds the reins of political change in Morocco?*, in "Mediterranean politics", 16(3) (2011), pp.435-441.

boundless. Freedoms of assembly, opinion and joining political organizations for both men and women were introduced. The new environment fostered the emergence of many NGOs which contributed to narrowing the divide between women and the institutional political sphere. These associations enabled women to assume more prominent roles in public administration and at the same time facilitated the attainment of financial autonomy. Although, the initiatives of these associations had a focus on urban areas.⁶²

For what concerns the Imazighen, many women of letters started to empower illiterate women in order to involve them in political activism and civil society. One striking example is the artist Fatima Tabaamrant who managed to win a seat in parliament in the 2011 elections. Her aim was to defend her culture and language and in 2012 she decided to speak in Amazigh inside the Parliament, denouncing the differences between law and reality. As a matter of fact, the recognition of Amazigh language was not followed by its use on Moroccan institutions, as it was enshrined by the law. This occurrence inspired many Imazighen who found associations intended for the revival of Amazigh language also understood as a metaphor for the voice of Amazigh women.⁶³ Comprehensively, these NGOs try to foreground the concerns that the other feminist movement failed to capture.⁶⁴

1.3.1 The Post 2011 Period: Towards Greater Gender Equality and the State's Commitment Promoting Women's Empowerment.

The abovementioned were the main requests and achievements of the Moroccan women's Movements. To explain how the women's situation

⁶² F. Sadiqi (2014), op. cit., p. 123.

⁶³ H. El Aissi, *The 2011 Constitution: The Moroccan Amazigh Woman's Empowerment*, in "Sinestesie Online", 8 (26) (2019), pp. 8-14.

⁶⁴ F. Sadiqi, *Constructing North Africa: The Role of Berber Women*, in N. Boudraa & J.O. Krause (edited by), *Women and Resistance in the Maghreb: Remembering Kahina*. Routledge, London 2021, pp.33-53.

changed after the so-called Arab Spring, it is necessary to introduce some concepts.

The issues dealt in the previous paragraphs are irreversibly linked to gender inequality. Gender inequality is “the differential access to opportunity and security for women and girls.”⁶⁵ Those differences not only affect women as protagonists of discrimination but also the society in which they live. As a matter of fact, gender inequality constraints a nation’s economic performance and hinder the full employment of human talent, compromising economic growth. In order to advance gender equality, the State must enhance strengthen women’s participation in decision-making processes and ensuring greater institutional accountability to promote fairness and equality.⁶⁶ The Gender Inequality Index (GII) “shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements [...] in three dimensions- reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market [...]”⁶⁷ Analyzing the chart illustrating the GII’s evolution over the years (Fig. 1), a significant improvement may be observed. Precisely, “the lower GII values represent a better performance regarding gender inequality”⁶⁸

Figure 1, GII of Morocco compared to the world's GII.

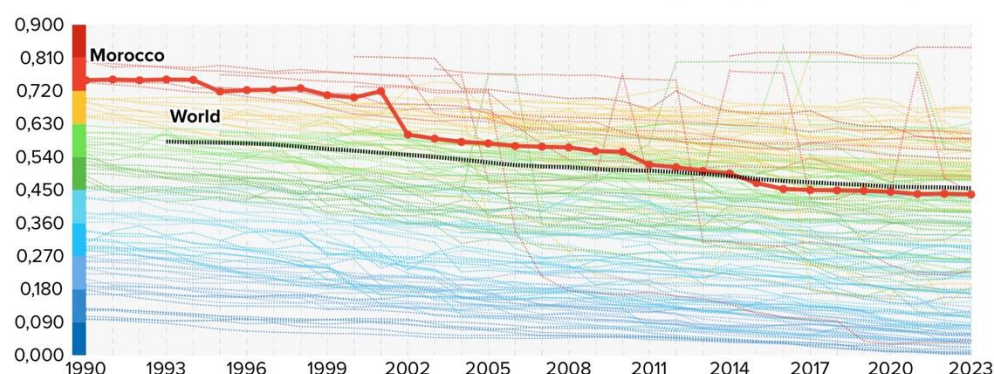
⁶⁵ World Bank, *Gender and development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the public sphere*, The World Bank Group, 2004.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ United Nations Development Programme.

<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII> accessed on 15 September 2025.

⁶⁸ Ibid.



Source: Human Development Reports- Gender Inequality Index (GII)

<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

In the period 1990-2001 the Moroccan index remains quite stable while in 2002 can be noticed a sharp decline to then arrive at an alignment with the global average around 2015.

Starting from 2000, Morocco endorsed the commitments aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The third of the eight goals was to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women. The methods employed by the Kingdom of Morocco were various, such as Gender Responsive Budgeting.⁶⁹ It provides a practical framework for integrating gender considerations into policy formulation and implementation. The aim is to reallocate resources in ways that address the needs of the entire population while acknowledging the disadvantages position of women.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in 2006 the government ratified the National Strategy for Gender Equality which pursue the promotion of girls' education and women's rights to reduce the gender gap. This program was followed by the National Strategy for Equity and Equality

⁶⁹ Kingdom of Morocco, *Morocco between Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, Achievements and Challenges*, 2015.

⁷⁰ World Bank, *Gender and development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the public sphere*, The World Bank Group, 2004.

(2012-2016) which entailed eight fields of activities related to gender equality.⁷¹

Since the focus of this work is on women empowerment in Morocco, it is pivotal to introduce its notion. The term empowerment was employed for the first time by Freire (1973) understanding it as “liberation of marginalized people through education.”⁷² Even if access to education continues to be an integral part of it, the modern definitions of empowerment comprehend other indicators, such as work, legal and political rights.⁷³ These main sectors will be presented and examined more rigorously in the following chapters dedicated to them.

Chapter 2. Gender and Education in Morocco: Barriers and Reforms.

Berhanu Kuma & Abebech Godana's (2023) study reveals that educational level, amongst other factors such as participants' perception toward economic empowerment, income generation and decision-making in daily life, significantly affect women's economic empowerment and thus increase their economic resilience and ability to face hardships and not depend on a male figure for sustenance.⁷⁴

Since education is an integral part of what is defined as empowerment, analyzing its role is pivotal to understand how it can work in order to reduce inequalities in general, and particularly those related to gender. However, the process through which the enlargement of education impact (gender) inequalities is complicated. Indeed, the available literature

⁷¹ M. Ennaji, *Morocco's experience with gender gap reduction in education*, in “Gender and Women's Studies” 2(1) (2018), pp. 1-18.

⁷² F. Sadiqi (2014), *op. cit.*, p.115.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ N. A. Mhamdi, *Moroccan Education: Bridging the Gender Empowerment Gap for Women's Social and Economic Resilience*, in Albuquerque A. & Bouziane K. (edited by) *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences: Fostering Global Resilience through Cross-cultural Collaboration* (2023), pp.37-47.

provides ambivalent results⁷⁵ although, education, together with equity⁷⁶, were put at the forefront by many development agencies and national governments.⁷⁷ For example, MDGs No.2 and No.3, aimed at achieving gender equality in education, gave governments the opportunity to face the norms that limits women's access to educational opportunities. Whilst this is undoubtedly a step forward, the UN declared that "women and girls persist in a state of double jeopardy caught in a constant cycle of poverty and illiteracy."⁷⁸ As other types of inequalities, educational inequality is a multidimensional concept, and it is influenced by numerous factors⁷⁹ (see Fig.2). Thus, even if some improvements can be noticed looking at part of its constituents, it does not mean that there was a real improvement in terms of educational equality. For example, Morocco saw a sharp increase in the number of children enrolled in school, but these developments come together with the loss of quality of education.⁸⁰ This phenomenon represents an important issue since, as Ennaji mentioned, "in education, gender equality should not be confined to access only, but rather must occur at all levels of education."⁸¹

Figure 2, Dimensions and components of educational inequality

⁷⁵ Y. Bourdane & K. Bounou, *The role of education in reducing income disparities in Morocco: empirical evidence from the ARDL approach*, in "International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics", 5(11) (2024), pp. 466-489.

⁷⁶ Here a clarification is needed: equity and equality are not synonyms. Quality is defined as "the state of being equal in terms of quantity, rank, status, value, or degree." Equity addresses how education ensures fairness and impartiality in providing resources, opportunities, and outcomes for all learners.

W. J. Jacob & D. B. Holsinger, *Inequality in education: A critical analysis*, in Holsinger D.B. & Jacob W.J. (edited by) *Inequality in education: Comparative and international perspectives*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht 2008, pp. 1-33.

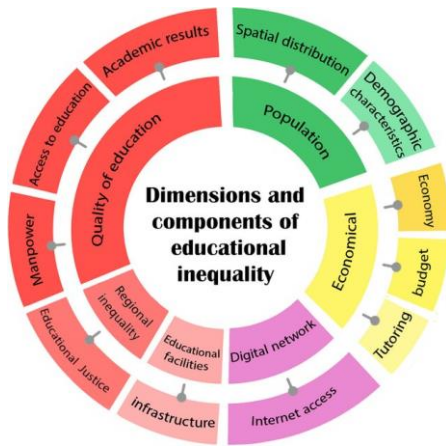
⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, *Gender inequalities in educational participation*, in Holsinger D.B. & Jacob W.J. (edited by), *Inequality in education: Comparative and international perspectives*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht 2008, pp. 128-148.

⁷⁹ V. Thomas & W. Yan, *Distribution of opportunities key to development*, in Holsinger D.B. & Jacob W.J. (edited by) *Inequality in education: Comparative and international perspectives*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht 2008, pp. 34-58.

⁸⁰ M. Bouzahzah, *Quality of the education system and economic growth. Projections in the case of Morocco*, in "WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics" 18(1) (2021), pp. 949-961.

⁸¹ M. Ennaji (2018), op.cit., p. 2.



Source: Kheyroddin, R., Alalhesabi, M., & Maleki, F. (2024).

2.1 Root Causes of Morocco's Gender Education Gap.

In 1956 the illiteracy rate in Morocco amounted to 80% approximately, while in 2015 it was 35%. This result is mainly linked to the performance of the primary education cycle and its attendance, as can be observed in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2, Evolution of the Average Years of Schooling and the Education Gini Index (1950-2015) for the Moroccan Population Aged 15 to 64

Year	Average years of schooling	Education Gini Index	Proportion of the Population by Educational Attainment Level (in %)			
			Non-schooled	Primary	Secondary	Higher
1950	0,30	0,95	96,17	1,51	2,08	0,25
1955	0,39	0,94	94,99	1,85	2,91	0,25
1960	0,51	0,93	93,47	2,62	3,4	0,5
1965	0,75	0,91	90,85	3,05	5,52	0,58
1970	1,05	0,88	86,22	5,8	6,89	1,01
1975	1,43	0,85	80,72	9,38	8,1	1,8
1980	1,88	0,81	75,4	12,01	9,58	3,01
1985	2,45	0,77	69,28	14,91	11,36	4,45
1990	3,05	0,72	62,67	18,2	13,22	5,91
1995	3,64	0,68	56,9	20,35	15,49	7,26
2000	4,09	0,64	52,12	22,25	17,73	7,9
2005	4,63	0,60	46,39	24,65	20,04	8,93
2010	5,27	0,55	40,46	26,33	23,2	10,02
2015	6,02	0,50	35,02	27,39	23,43	14,16

Source: Bourdane Y. & Bounou K. (2024) based on Barro-Lee data (1950-2015).

Table 3, World Development Indicators: Participation in education

Measure	2015		2019	
Gross enrollment ratio – Pre-primary*	Total	56.8	Total	54.9
	Female (%)	50.8	Female (%)	51.5
	Male (%)	62.5	Male (%)	58.0
Gross enrollment ratio – Primary*	Total	107.8	Total	114.8
	Female (%)	106.6	Female (%)	112.7
	Male (%)	112.3	Male (%)	116.7
Gross enrollment ratio – Secondary*	Total	78.5	Total	81.2
	Female (%)	N. A.**	Female (%)	78.2

	Male (%)	N. A.**	Male (%)	84.1
Gross enrollment ratio – Tertiary*	Total	28.7	Total	
	Female (%)	27.8	Female (%)	39.1
	Male (%)	29.0	Male (%)	38.1
Children out of school – Primary school-age, male	118,433		N. A.	
Children out of school – Primary school-age, female	126,778		N. A.	

*(% of relevant age group)

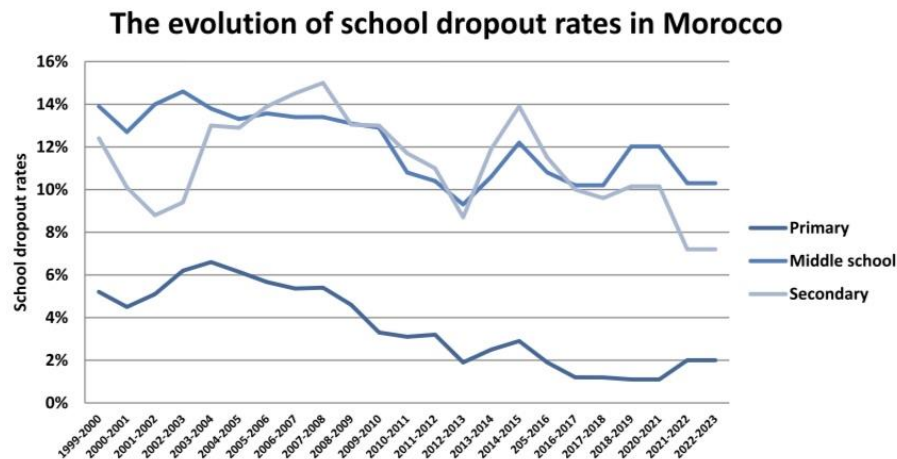
**Gross enrolment ratio divided per gender was not available in 2015. The latest time-period before 2015 in which the data were available was 2012. Gross enrollment ratio, secondary, female (%) was 64.1; Gross enrollment ratio, secondary, male (%) was 75.1.
Source: World Development Indicators, The World Bank (last updated 7 October 2025).
<https://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.8#>

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, accessed on 25 November 2025.
<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/education-statistics-%5Eall-indicators>.

Data show a significant improvement among the population although, it is important to take into account other factors such as the quality of education. As previously noted, this progress has not translated into higher efficiency of the educational system, a fact clearly reflected in the data on dropout (Fig. 3) and grade repetition. Indeed, analysis of data of these two topics revealed that these challenges are particularly acute at the primary and secondary levels, especially at the conclusion of each cycle. Such high rates of failure and dropout contribute to generally low levels of educational attainment. Moreover, grade repetition represents a major

barrier to student achievement within the educational system and further intensifies the problem of school dropout.⁸²

Figure 3, *The evolution of school dropout rates in Morocco*



Source: Ibourk A. & Raoui S. (2025)⁸³

These statistics also serve as measures of disparities in access to education. The educational gender gap in Morocco has deep historical roots, as women’s education was not prioritized by policymakers during either the pre-colonial or colonial periods. Postcolonial education significantly empowered urban girls and created new opportunities for them to access salaried employment. However, despite the numerous efforts had a notable impact on reducing female illiteracy, the expansion of education remained largely urban-centered and, even within urban areas, was unevenly distributed.⁸⁴ Notable progress has been achieved in literacy, particularly among individuals aged 15 to 24; however, women’s education continues to lag behind, and overall literacy rates remain low.⁸⁵

The State tried to tackle this issue differently through the years but notwithstanding its efforts, girls’ education constitutes still a concern for

⁸² Y. Bourdane & K. Bounou, *The role of education in reducing income disparities in Morocco: empirical evidence from the ARDL approach*, in “International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics”, 5(11) (2024), pp. 466-489.

⁸³ A. Ibourk & S. Raoui, *Territorial obstacles causing early school dropout in Morocco: Multivariate spatial analysis*, in “Heliyon”, 11(1) (2025), pp 1-19.

⁸⁴ F. Sadiqi (2014), op. cit., p. 117.

⁸⁵ M. Ennaji (2018), op. cit., p. 4.

the Ministry of Education. Despite apparent improvements, almost in quantitative terms, progress is slow, and Morocco was ranked 137th out of 148 countries in the 2025 Global Gender Gap Report.⁸⁶

Many scholars have researched the possible root causes of gender education gap; the major barriers will be summarized in this paragraph. UNESCO Institute of Statistics groups them in two main categories: socio-economic and cultural factors and political and institutional factors (e.g., education policies).⁸⁷

One of the causes related to the first category has highlighted by the UNESCO report is of particular importance because occur before children have power over the circumstances: inequality of opportunity. Even if inequalities in early childhood development (ECD) are haltable, in Morocco the disadvantaged people benefit less from early childhood care and education (ECCE). As El-Kogali, Krafft et al. stated: “In 2012, the least advantaged child had a 45 percent chance of ECCE compared to a 95 percent chance for the most advantaged.”⁸⁸ Even Ennaji (2018) considers the scarcity of pre-schools as an obstacle from the very beginning of children’s life. Furthermore, he underlines that in most cases rural areas do not have this type of facilities while in urban areas they are mainly private.⁸⁹

Secondly, parents from lower-income backgrounds seldom prioritize their children’s education. Furthermore, when families can do it, male’s education is prioritized to the detriment of females.

⁸⁶ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report* (2025), pp. 1-395.
https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf

⁸⁷ UNESCO, *Gender-sensitive education statistics and Indicators* (1997), pp. 1-39.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000109177>

Accessed on 14 October 2025.

⁸⁸ S. El-Kogali, C. Krafft, T. Abdelkhalek, M. Benkassmi, M. Chavez, L. Bassett & F. Ejjanoui, *Inequality of opportunity in early childhood development in Morocco over time*, in “Policy Research Working Papers” 7670 (2016), pp. 1-38.

⁸⁹ M. Ennaji (2018), op. cit., p.5.

Gender inequalities in the field of education are also attributed to the underrepresentation of women in education leadership positions and the gender stereotypes in textbooks.⁹⁰ Indeed, many scholars underlined the importance of textbooks as vehicles of values and norms, including gender ideology. Bettach explored textbooks content, highlighting the presence of unequal power relationship which reinforce the assumption that male is the dominant part of the society. She remarks: “As a result, [...] [students] tend to see women as being less hierarchical and subordinate to male privilege”.⁹¹

Scholars such as Hyer et al. highlighted another element which influences both gender equality and quality of education: the hidden curriculum. The “hidden curriculum” refers to the underlying assumptions, beliefs, values and social norms that operate alongside both the formal curriculum (classroom-based instruction) and the informal curriculum (learning opportunities that occur outside formal teaching).⁹² This includes biased teacher attitudes and behaviors toward girls, sexual harassment by male teachers or students, and textbooks’ depiction of gender-based stereotypes. Furthermore, these implicit messages arise from the organizational structure of schools, where men often hold higher-level administrative positions and from the gender segregation of classroom activities. Indeed, within classrooms, boys frequently dominate discussions and teacher interactions, irrespective of the teacher’s gender.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ I. Bettach, *The Moroccan Constitution & Gender Equality: Issues of Implementation in Education*, in Lobah J. & Tayebi H. (edited by) *Trajectories of Change in Post-2011: Challenges and Prospects*, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Marrakech 2017, pp. 140-157.

⁹² Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning.

<https://www.cctl.cam.ac.uk/mind-gap-toolkit/reasons/hidden-curriculum> accessed on 11 October 2025.

⁹³ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, op. cit., p. 136.

2.1.1 Beyond Access: Structural and Cultural Constraints on Rural Girls' Education.

Overall, Morocco's education system continues to suffer from deep-seated inequalities rooted in learners' geographical contexts. Persistent disparities remain across regions and among individuals who possess unequal levels of economic, cultural and social capital. Despite numerous reform efforts Morocco still faces pronounced regional imbalances, reflected in the prevalence of underprivileged areas with persistently low educational outcomes.⁹⁴ Dichter brought in the "one step forward two steps back" pattern in relation with the Moroccan education. This pattern implies that despite the growth of key parameters, inequality rises in the life of common people.⁹⁵ Evidence show that this phenomenon takes part in rural areas even to a greater degree because of the persistence of the underdevelopment of rural areas in comparison with the urban counterparts. The major educational policies concentrated on schooling although it represents an insufficient condition for achieving truly inclusive education. In any case, the aim was not achieved as Trani et al. (2017) found that the region of residence significantly influences school enrolment with individuals living in rural areas being 1.8 to 2.4 times less likely to have access to schooling than those residing in urban areas.⁹⁶ Furthermore, rural areas are characterized by lack of infrastructure and the foregrounding of boys' education rather than girls.⁹⁷ Especially the remoteness of schools discourages rural families from sending their daughters to school. Indeed, parents tend to be more concerned with the

⁹⁴ A. Ibourk & S. Raoui, *Inclusive education and school dropout of special needs students in Morocco: A spatial analysis*, in "Review of Education", 12(1) (2024), pp.1-28.

⁹⁵ T. W. Dichter, *One step forward, two steps back: Education in Morocco in the late 1960s and today*, in "Hesperis Tamuda", 55(2) (2020), 245-262.

⁹⁶ A. Ibourk & S. Raoui, *Inclusive education and school dropout of special needs students in Morocco: A spatial analysis*, in "Review of Education", 12(1) (2024), pp.1-28.

⁹⁷ M. A. Chentoufi, A. A. Alla & N. Mamdouh, *Impact of Gender Inequalities on Education in Morocco: An Economic Analysis of Barriers and Opportunities*, in "International Journal of Civilizations Studies & Tolerance Sciences", 1(1) (2024), pp. 18-27.

safety of their daughters than that of their sons because a girl's sexual purity is closely tied to the family's honor. Parent's fear further worsens because classes are mixed and teachers in rural schools often are male.⁹⁸ Out of concern for their safety, parents often keep them at home, where they are expected to contribute to household and agricultural labor. Speaking of that, Idrissi argues that are usually men who consider daughters (or women in general) inappropriate (to study) because it leads to the loss of their work at home.⁹⁹ Simultaneously, Christie J. Edwards (2010) found a correlation between girls' dropout and child labor. Thus, can be argued that the two phenomena build upon each other.

Rural areas situation is further exacerbated by the linguistic problem. Even if Berber (Amazigh) is the mother tongue of most people, the primary language of schooling is standard Arabic. This discourages many girls from attending school, as they are unable to comprehend the lessons effectively. Despite the official recognition of Berber as a second national language and the promise to provide teachings in Amazigh, the majority of teachers in these zones lack proficiency in it.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, manuals are mainly in standard Arabic and, referring back to what was said earlier, they contribute in spreading the stereotype of rural women as marginalized by their depiction of them in relation to illiteracy and poverty.¹⁰¹

Research has consistently demonstrated a strong association between girls' school dropout and low academic achievement. Scholars such as Boyle et al. (2002) and Hunter & May (2003) shown that children with lower levels of achievement are more likely to drop out than their higher-performing peers. This underperformance is influenced by various factors, including

⁹⁸ F. Sadiqi, *Moroccan feminist discourses*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2014, pp. 1-235.

⁹⁹ L. Idrissi, *Education, Illiteracy and Women in Rural Morocco: Case Study of Taounate Province*, in "Feminist Research", 6(2) (2022), pp. 51-59.

¹⁰⁰ M. Ennaji (2018), op. cit., p.6.

¹⁰¹ F. Sadiqi, *Moroccan feminist discourses*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills 2014, pp. 1-235.

student absenteeism, quality of instruction and household circumstances.¹⁰²

Because of the factors abovementioned the Moroccan educational system continues to reproduce gender disparities by steering rural and low-income girls toward less prestigious and economically marginal disciplines with restricted career prospects. Furthermore, patriarchal norms and traditions frequently normalize female school dropout, sustaining the belief that marriage provides an acceptable path to economic stability.¹⁰³

2.2 Reforming Inequality, State Strategies and Their Limits.

The state has undertaken significant measures to promote gender equality within the educational system. But, as it has been observed by many scholars and important education indicators, Morocco still has a lot of work to do to improve. Thus, an analysis of government educational policies can be useful to understand what went wrong during the journey towards a better education system.

Improving education has been for a long time seen as a key driver of long-term economic growth carries significant implications. But, from a policy perspective this calls into question the relevance and effectiveness of numerous education policy recommendations, especially those implemented at the international level that emphasize access to education. Such policies often overlook the qualitative dimensions of education in developing countries and specifically, the acquisition of cognitive skills essential for sustaining socio-economic development.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, efforts to promote gender equity in education are often undermined by factors which should act in the opposite way such as the World Bank and

¹⁰² M. Derdar, *The Causes of Primary School Dropout among Rural Girls in Morocco: a Case Study of Sidi Smail District*, in “Arab World English journal” 5(3) (2014), pp. 86-99.

¹⁰³ N. A. Mhamdi, *Moroccan Education: Bridging the Gender Empowerment Gap for Women's Social and Economic Resilience*, in Albuquerque A. & Bouziane K. (edited by) *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences: Fostering Global Resilience through Cross-cultural Collaboration* (2023), pp.37-47.

¹⁰⁴ M. Bouzahzah, *Quality of the education system and economic growth. Projections in the case of Morocco*, in “WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics” 18(1) (2021), pp. 949-961.

IMF policies.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, this could be also the case of Morocco, where “most programs that aim to reduce the gender gap in education are funded either by the government, the European Union, or the World Bank through ministries, governmental organizations and NGOs [...]”¹⁰⁶ The World Bank’s neoliberal policy proposals on education include privatization, decentralized school management and the reallocation of subsidies from higher to basic education.¹⁰⁷ Even if some studies found a positive side coming from these factors, the literature in developing countries disprove this view.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, these strategies can compromise the quality of education in several ways: they exacerbate ethnic, class and urban-rural disparities in access; weaken teachers’ rights and job security; and leave higher education institutions underfunded and dysfunctional.¹⁰⁹ Ziky & El-Abdellaoui analyzed the World Bank’s Education Support Program in Morocco and highlighted some regards concerning the program’s success. In particular, they question the emphasis imposed on ECE without accounting for cultural differences between home and school environment, arguing that this can create disconnects ultimately leading to negative perceptions of schooling. Furthermore, over time, prioritizing early schooling over community-based cultural learning may erode indigenous identities, a process historically associated with colonial efforts to impose ideological control. Overall, the authors question the imposition of “Westernized” framework rather than an education which align with Moroccan values and knowledge systems.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, op. cit, p. 140.

¹⁰⁶ Ennaji, M. (2018), op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁰⁸ F. Ewulley, M. A., Anlimachie, M. K. Abreh & E. E. Mills, *Understanding the nexus of school types, school cultures and educational outcomes and its implication for policy and practice*, in “International Journal of Educational Research”, 121 (2023), pp. 1-17.

¹⁰⁹ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, op. cit. p. 141.

¹¹⁰ M. Ziky & L. El-Abdellaoui, *Can sustainable development goals go hand in hand with economic growth? Evidence from Morocco*, in “Problems and Perspectives in Management”, 21(3) (2023), pp. 656-670.

Aside policies focused on access to education, Morocco implemented programs aimed at promoting gender equality and fostering competition among schools, bringing to improvements in teaching quality. Rusakova (2020) considered the National Educational Emergency Programme (2008-2012) as a positive example however without overlooking its negative aspects. The author highlighted how several persistent challenges remained, including unequal and incomplete access to basic education, the exclusion of vulnerable groups, low levels of knowledge acquisition, and inefficiencies reflected in high repetition and dropout rates.¹¹¹

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Moroccan authorities continued to prioritize reforms targeting the most disadvantaged and rural populations. The primary aim of these initiatives has been to reduce both the direct costs of schooling (e.g., transportation) and the indirect costs (e.g., the opportunity cost of keeping a child in school rather than contributing to the family's income). Another program, *1 Million de Cartables* (One Million School Bags Royal Initiative) was launched in 2008 by King Mohammed VI and renewed each year since then. The objective is to subsidize poor families through the provision of school material and reinforce mandatory schooling. This program has the widest reach in Morocco with 4.36 million students targeted in the period 2018-2019.¹¹²

Despite the authorities' efforts over several decades, the system continues to exhibit persistent weaknesses. The causes of these shortcomings are numerous and multifaceted, rooted in political, economic, historical, and cultural factors. According to the Moroccan Higher Education Council, several elements contribute to the system's underperformance such as the limited expansion of preschool education and inadequate learning

¹¹¹ E. Rusakova, *Evaluation of public policies to support education: the case of Morocco*, 2020, pp. 1-86.

¹¹² Ibid.

conditions because of class size, teachers' commitment and so on. Akesbi highlighted management deficiencies:

"These include centralized management of public education contracts, lack of management of public education contracts, lack of organized and systematic external control of colleges and delegations, backlog in school construction, lack of competition between companies and fast deterioration of reconstructed schools."¹¹³

Moreover, the Moroccan education system lacks several key components essential for efficiency and innovation. Recent academic studies highlight the need to leverage new technologies in the creation of modern learning environments and to promote the sustainable development of educational institutions through enhanced information and communication systems.¹¹⁴

As regards the gender gap in education Hyer et al. (2008) used as an explanatory key the fact that often gender is not considered indispensable in educational policies. For example, many policies operate on the assumption that increasing boys' enrolment will naturally lead to higher enrolment rates among girls. However, evidence indicates that policies focusing solely on children in general often contributes to the continued exclusion of girls.¹¹⁵

In order to be effective, education policies must be accompanied with a critical evaluation of the existing power dynamics within society. Politically, limited access to decision-making roles and representation leads to the neglect of women's priorities and needs. Within households, patriarchal structures sustain women's dependence thus, discouraging families from viewing girls' education as economically valuable. Finally, gendered divisions in legal and economic fields together with the

¹¹³ M. Bouzahzah, *Quality of the education system and economic growth. Projections in the case of Morocco*, in "WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics" 18(1) (2021), pp. 949-961.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, op. cit., p. 131.

persistence of gender-based violence hinder the full implementation of educational policies. For these reasons, Hyer et al argue, policies which focus on equality excluding equity are ineffective.¹¹⁶ This is the reason why educational policies need to have as requisite “the recognition that students’ difficulties arise from aspects of the education system itself, including: the ways in which education systems are organized currently, the forms of teaching that are provided, the learning environment, and the ways in which students’ progress is supported and evaluated”.¹¹⁷

Many scholars and official reports have suggested strategies to secure equity in education. In the case of Morocco, a policy which involves instruction in the local language can be useful for Tamazigh speakers since education provided in a language unlike their mother tongue can be alienating. Another applicable policy involves the creation of a safe learning environment for girls.¹¹⁸

It is evident that Morocco’s public education system is undergoing a profound crisis. In recent years, scholars, journalists and official reports have highlighted the system’s inability to align well-conceived policies with its actual development. As a result, the implemented educational reforms faced persistent challenges related to centralization, pension reform and job security.¹¹⁹ Moroccan people recognize the endurance of the problem, and this was demonstrated between the end of September and October 2025. Indeed, a grassroots movement called GenZ 212 gathered hundreds of people into the streets to peacefully demonstrate against the neglect of public services. Moreover, many reported the investment of billions in football infrastructure in view to the World Cup to be held in Morocco in 2030, funds that should be allocated to other sectors, protesters

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ UNESCO, *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education* (2017), pp.1-46.

¹¹⁸ K. E. Hyer, B. Ballif-Spanvill, S. J. Peters, Y. Solomon, H. Thomas & C. Ward, op. cit., p. 137.

¹¹⁹ T. W. Dichter, *One step forward, two steps back: Education in Morocco in the late 1960s and today*, in “Hesperis Tamuda”, 55(2) (2020), pp. 245-262.

argue.¹²⁰ Even if the main catalyst for the protests was the lack of health services, following the death of eight pregnant women at a public hospital in a month, slogans such as "وتوعينا تقرينا زوينة مدرسة بغينا" (We want a good school that educates and enlighten us) were not missed.¹²¹ These rallies were followed by a speech of King Mohammed VI where he "called for accelerating reforms to create jobs for young people, improve public services, and *reduce regional inequalities by giving greater attention to the mountain and oasis regions*".¹²² On 19th October the Moroccan royal palace announced that in 2026 will be allocated 140 billion dirhams (\$15 billion) to health and education. Particularly, he promised that the aim will be "the implementation of a 'road map' for reforming the education system, by accelerating the universalization of primary education, strengthening school support services and *improving the quality of education*".¹²³

Morocco is experiencing a cultural paradox: while parents and nations alike vocally affirm the vital importance of education, in practice, public education remains a low-status and low-priority endeavor.¹²⁴ A developing country as Morocco cannot afford anymore this situation if wants to foster sustainable development and gender equality. For the umpteenth time the Moroccan people have shown that they pretend more rights, and the

¹²⁰ C. Magee, *Gen Z protesters rally across Morocco demanding health, education reforms* In Aljazeera.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/29/gen-z-protesters-rally-across-morocco-demanding-health-education-reforms> accessed on 19 October 2025.

¹²¹ S. El Kouiti, *من "ديسكورد" إلى الشارع.. جيل زد بالمغرب يواصل الاحتجاج ويرفض العنف*, In Al-Jazeera Arabic.

<https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2025/10/3/بالمغرب-ز-دجيل-الشارع-إلى-ديسكورد-من> accessed on 20 October 2025.

¹²² News Agencies, *Morocco king calls for social reforms amid youth-led protests* in Al-Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/10/youth-led-protests-in-morocco-push-for-reforms-ahead-of-kings-speech> accessed on 20 October 2025.

¹²³ *الصحة-على-الإنفاق-زيادة-يقرر-المغرب* 15 إلى والتعليم الصحة على الإنفاق يزيد المغرب <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2025/10/19/الصحة-على-الإنفاق-زيادة-يقرر-المغرب> accessed on 20 October 2025.

¹²⁴ T. W. Dichter, *One step forward, two steps back: Education in Morocco in the late 1960s and today*, in "Hesperis Tamuda", 55(2) (2020), pp. 245-262.

government has reacted accordingly. It will be seen whether the next reforms will change or maintain the current situation, where the implementation is very different from theory.

“Education not only fosters individual empowerment but also drives national economic growth, reduces social tensions, and promotes inclusive societies. Furthermore, it creates opportunities for marginalized groups, including women, rural populations, and ethnic minorities, to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the development of their communities.”¹²⁵

Chapter 3. Women in the Moroccan Job Market: Trends, Challenges and the Urban-Rural Divide.

In order to promote women empowerment within the society the country needs to invest in women’s economic empowerment. As UN Women states:

“Women’s economic empowerment means ensuring women can equally participate in and benefit from decent work and social protection; access markets and have control over resources, their own time, lives, and bodies; and increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.”¹²⁶

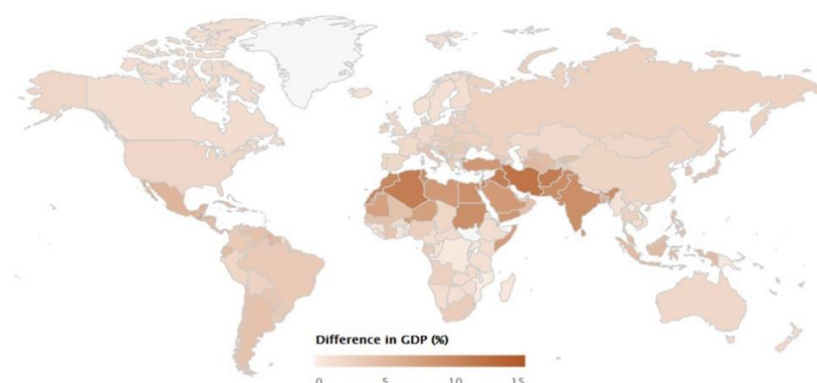
Even if Morocco has made significant strides in diminishing gender gaps in education, health, and political representation, data show that this is not the case in the job market participation. Recently, a global interest towards this problem has brought to growing research examining the correlation between gender gap in employment and the economic growth of the

¹²⁵ O. Ben Haman, *Are conditional cash transfer programs the answer to social inequalities in rural education? Insights from Morocco’s Tayssir program*, in “Journal of Social Service Research”, 51(3) (2025), pp. 870-887.

¹²⁶ UN Women Knowledge portal, *Facts and figures: Economic Empowerment*, 2024. <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-economic-empowerment>

country.¹²⁷ In particular, Dadam et al. (2017) measured how gender inequality affects output growth in Morocco and found that gender inequalities reduce growth, particularly in countries at earlier stages of development. Furthermore, the authors estimated income losses stemming from the misallocation of women in the labor market, finding that the costs reach 46% of income per capita compared to a situation in which there is equality between genders.¹²⁸ A similar estimation, aimed at finding how women's participation could help economic growth, can be observed in Figure 4.

Figure 4, Potential GDP Growth Increase if Women's Participation Rates Were Increased by 25%



Source: Canuto & Kabbach (2023).

3.1 Main Characteristics of Gender Inequalities in Moroccan Labor Market: Facing Vulnerable Employment and Gender Pay Gap.

To better understand the country situation a brief introduction is needed. Due to a series of recent global shocks, namely the pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and climate risks, many workers have been pushed back into low-quality jobs, especially in the MENA region. This is also true in

¹²⁷ O. Bargain & M. C. Lo Bue, *The economic gains of closing the employment gender gap: Evidence from Morocco*, in “WIDER Working Paper”, 2021/79 (2021), pp. 1-19.

¹²⁸ L. Kolovich & A. Ndoye, *Implications of gender inequality for growth in Morocco*, in “IMF’s Report Morocco’s Quest for Stronger and Inclusive Growth”, IMF, Washington DC 2023.

Morocco where this reality intersects with obstacles in participating in the labor market, ultimately leading to high unemployment rates.¹²⁹ Indeed, International Labour Organization (ILO)’s 2019 evaluation show that while men participation rate was 76%, females was only 27.5%. This already worrying statistic worsens when looking at the evolution of the data through time. Indeed, women labor force participation has decreased of 24% since 2000.¹³⁰

Table 4, Unemployment rate in Morocco (2014-2024)

Unemployment (modeled ILO estimate)	2014	2024
Total (% of total labor force)	9.70	8.94
Female (% of total labor force)	10.29	10.48
Male (% of total labor force)	9.50	8.51

Source: World Development Indicators, accessed on 29 November 2025.

<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

¹²⁹ O. Canuto & H. Kabbach, *Gender inequality in the labor market: the case of Morocco*, in “Policy Center for the New South” 2309 (2023), pp. 1-10.

¹³⁰ O. Bargain & M. C. Lo Bue, *The economic gains of closing the employment gender gap: Evidence from Morocco*, in “WIDER Working Paper”, 2021/79 (2021), pp. 1-19.

Table 5, Labor force participation rate in Morocco (2014-2024)

Labor force participation rate (modeled ILO estimate)	2014	2024
Total (% of total population ages 15-64)	50.67	47.67
Female (% of total population ages 15-64)	26.27	21.24
Male (% of total population ages 15-64)	74.72	73.57

Source: World Development Indicators, accessed on 29 November 2025.

<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

This indicator himself cannot incorporate the multifaceted reality of women's struggles in accessing the job market. As Canuto & Kabbach observed: "Even when women participate in the labor market, they continue to face unequal access to employment opportunities making it more challenging for them to secure jobs compared to their male counterparts." One example is the continuous trend of occupational segregation¹³¹ which disproportionately locate women in few sectors further increasing gender disparities in the labor market.¹³² Furthermore, the measures show that the distinctiveness of occupations among women is shrinking, further narrowing women occupational choices.¹³³ This gendered division of labor brings many consequences with it, first and foremost vulnerable employment (Figure 5). Women are disproportionately concentrated in informal and precarious forms of work

¹³¹ "Gender segregation in the workplace is defined as a situation in which workers are assigned, de jure or de facto, to different occupations based on their gender."

E. Ezzahid, *Cartographie et caractéristiques de l'emploi féminin au Maroc* (2023), pp.1-87.

¹³² O. Canuto & H. Kabbach, op. cit., p. 2.

¹³³ E. Ezzahid, *Sectoral potential for the creation of female jobs and proposed avenues to achieve gender equality on the labor market: a Moroccan perspective* (2023), pp. 1-29.

(Figure 6), characterized by low wages, limited access to social protection and a major exposure to external contingencies.¹³⁴

Figure 5, vulnerable Employment
(Female-to-male ratio, in percent)

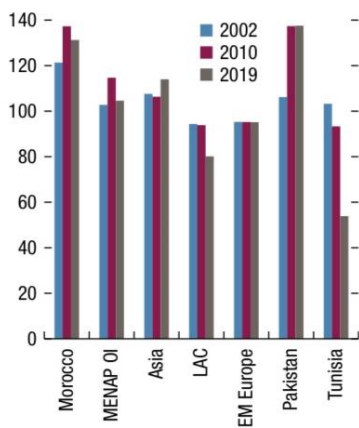
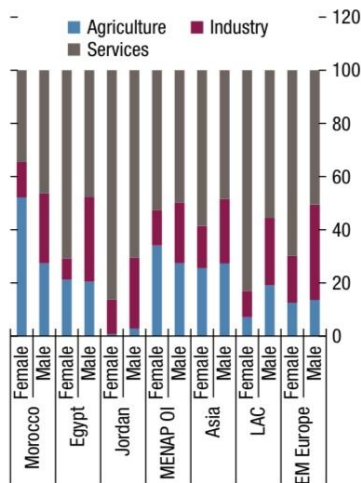


Figure 6, Total Percentage of Total Male and Female Employment by Sector, 2019



Source: Kolovich & Ndoeye (2023).

On top of all that, gender pay gap participate in exacerbating the already difficult situation. Chelyat & Sahraoui noted that this contrast comes out early and tends to worsen as time goes on.¹³⁵ According to Hanchane & Mounir (2023), men consistently earn a higher monthly salary than women across all the year analyzed¹³⁶ and in every area of residence. Table 6 shows that the wage-earning population in Morocco is heavily male dominated, with women representing only a small share (around 20%), a trend that has remained stable over time. Moreover, it is striking how salaried workers are predominantly urban (more than 70%). This distribution underscores the limited employment opportunities available

¹³⁴ UN Women Knowledge portal, *Facts and figures: Economic Empowerment*, 2024. <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-economic-empowerment>

¹³⁵ N. Chelyat & D. Sahraoui, *Gendered pay satisfaction: Development and Validation of a Measurement Scale Among Women Executives in the Private Sector in Morocco*, in “Alternatives Managériales Economiques”, 7(3) (2025), pp. 680-701.

¹³⁶ The authors took into account data from 2012, 2015 and 2017 from the National Employment Survey.

in rural areas, reflecting structural disparities between rural and urban regions.

Table 6, Distribution of wage earners by gender and area of residence (2012-2017).

Category	2012		2015		2017	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender distribution						
Men	18,031	79.66	23,254	79.06	27,380	80.01
Women	4610	20.34	6142	20.94	6847	19.99
Total	22,641	100.00	29,396	100.00	34,227	100.00
Area of residence						
Urban	15,923	70.32	21,708	73.83	24,191	70.68
Rural	6718	29.68	7688	26.17	10,036	29.32
Total	22,641	100.00	29,396	100.00	34,227	100.00

Source: Hanchane & Mounir (2023).

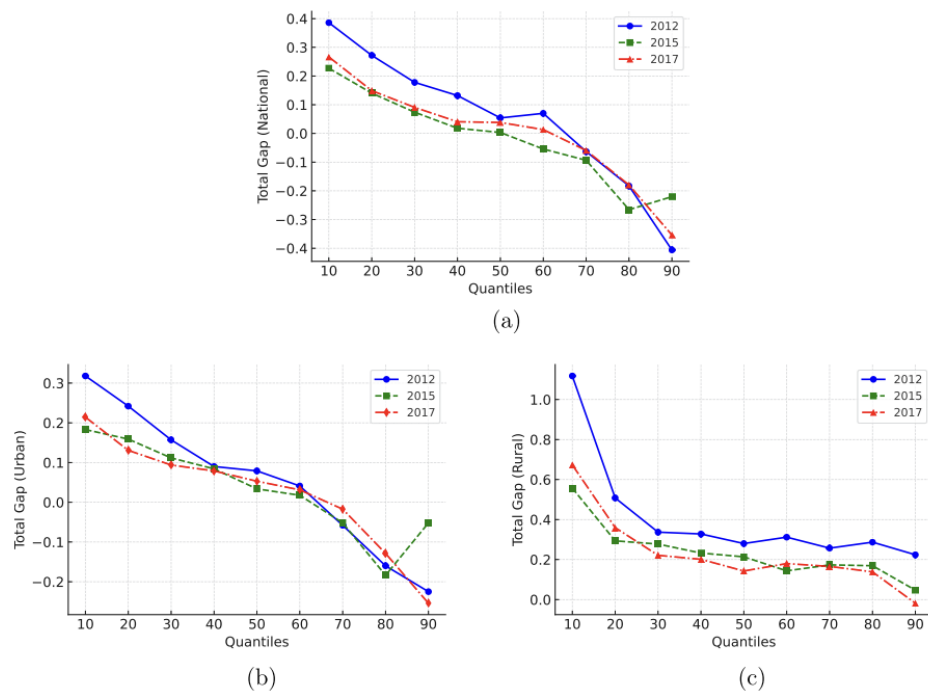
The authors estimated four models differentiated by the addition of a new set of variables¹³⁷ to assess how different factors influence the overall gender wage gap. The main results indicate that:

1. Women's higher educational attainment should lead them to earn more.
2. Occupational segregation persisted through time, with women remaining concentrated in lower-paying roles even within the same sector, revealing structural barriers and unequal wage-setting practices.
3. Discrimination and structural constraints continued to influence women's wages beyond observable characteristics.
4. The widest gender gap occurs at the bottom of the wage scale, indicating barriers that hinder women's early career progression while high-skilled women at the top often earn wages comparable to men's (Figure 7).¹³⁸

Figure 7, Gender wage gaps across the wage distribution by area and year. a) Total Wage Gap - National. b) Total Wage Gap - Urban and c) Total Wage Gap - Rural.

¹³⁷ See more in S. Hanchane & F. Mounir, *Understanding gender pay gaps in the Moroccan labor market*, in "World bank Group" (2023), pp. 8-9.

¹³⁸ S. Hanchane & F. Mounir, *Gender pay gaps in Morocco: urban-rural disparities across the wage distribution*, In "Development Studies Research" 12 (1) (2025), pp. 1-17.



Source: Mounir et al. (2025)

Kerras et al. (2021) highlighted that the pay gap is projected to persist for at least another 71 years in absence of deliberate and targeted interventions.¹³⁹

The following chapters will clarify the catalyst of this difficulty in progressing gender equality in the labor market, trying to analyze which policies could help in reducing the gender gap in both employment and wages. Moreover, the usual gap between urban and rural areas will be considered and investigated.

3.2 Social Customs Preventing Women's Access to Job Market: Arguments and Solutions.

As in the education field, socio-cultural norms are proven to be one of the major causes preventing women accessing the job market. In this context,

¹³⁹ H. Kerras, S. Bautista, D. S. Piñeros Perea & M.D. de-Miguel Gómez, *Is the Gender Pay Gap an Outcome of Other Gender Gap?*, in Primo T.T., Gomes A.S., Moreira F., Collazos C. (edited by) *Advanced Virtual Environments and Education*, Springer, Cham 2022, pp. 26-41.

early marriage, intergenerational transmission of beliefs and perceptions of safety stands out.¹⁴⁰

First of all, the traditional ideas related to women tend to see them as deeply connected to family and thus home. Therefore, conventions discourage women to look for a full-time job, preferring instead part-time work or no work, especially when she has dependent children.¹⁴¹ Verme et al. (2014) noticed how women seem to leave the labor market approximately at the marriage age, without rejoin it again, thus suggesting a correlation between the two events.¹⁴² Expanding more, Lopez-Acevedo et al. (2021) state: “Being never married makes it less likely that the woman will remain [out of the labor force] (OLF). While in urban areas remaining single reduces the probability of being OLF by 30 percent, in rural areas, it does so by 20 percent.” Moreover, they found that the presence of other inactive women in a household increases the likelihood that a woman herself will be inactive, highlighting the presence of intergenerational transmission of attitudes.¹⁴³ Notwithstanding the fact that married women participate less than non-married, having an active partner increases the chances of entering the workforce both in urban and rural areas.¹⁴⁴

Many scholars examined the attitudes of Moroccan people toward female work to better understand how this can shape the actual involvement in daily life. In this case “attitudes” refer to gender role attitudes, which are described as “the opinions and beliefs about the differentiation of family

¹⁴⁰ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p.7.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

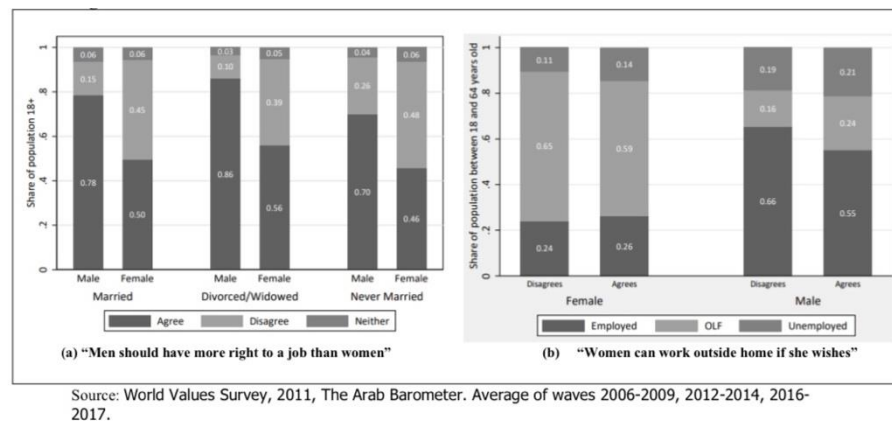
¹⁴² P. Verme, A. G. Barry & J. Guennouni, *Female labor participation in the Arab world: some evidence from panel data in Morocco*, in “World Bank Policy Research Working Paper”, (7031) (2014), pp. 1-22.

¹⁴³ G. Lopez-Acevedo, F. Devoto, M. Morales & J. R. Rodriguez, *Trends and Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Morocco*, in “World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper”, 9591 (2021), pp. 1-42.

¹⁴⁴ P. Verme, A. G. Barry & J. Guennouni, *Female labor participation in the Arab world: some evidence from panel data in Morocco*, in “World Bank Policy Research Working Paper”, (7031) (2014), pp. 1-22.

and work roles based on sex.” These attitudes capture the extent to which individuals support a traditional division of labor in which men are viewed as primary breadwinners while women are expected to serve as primary caregivers responsible for household tasks and the care of dependents. Numerous studies have shown that such beliefs influence social values and contribute to the reproduction of gender inequalities across various social contexts.¹⁴⁵

Figure 8, Attitudes toward female work. Average of waves 2006-2009, 2012-2014, 2016-2017.



Source: Lopez-Acevedo G., Devoto F., Morales M., & Rodriguez J. R. (2021)

The first panel (a) show that men are far more likely than women to agree with the statement across all status groups, with married men showing a very high agreement rate. Never Married women express the highest rate of “disagree” compared to women of the other two status. Overall, the second panel (b) suggests that most people who oppose women working are themselves outside the labor force, either men or women. On the other hand, the men more open to female work had a highest labor force

¹⁴⁵ S. Bentaher, *Exploring the Dynamics of Gender Role Attitudes in Morocco: A Socio-Cultural Examination of Differences between Men and Women in Diverse Contexts*, Seoul National University, Seoul 2024, pp. 1-94.

participation rate, revealing that positive attitudes toward women's employment may correlate with participation rates for both genders.¹⁴⁶

3.2.1 Unpaid Care Work: a Constraint on Reducing Gender Inequalities.

Traditional statistical measures often overlook unpaid work making it easier for policymakers to disregard the harmful consequences of cuts to public services that support the care of children, the sick and the elderly.¹⁴⁷

Nonetheless, the analysis of statistics on the occupation of inactive women can solve this issue. Looking at Table 7, one can immediately notice that more than half of those belonging to this group are homemakers. Women are appreciated for the essential roles they play as mothers and caregivers, often dedicating significant time and energy to ensure the well-being of their families. Even if they have the right to participate in the workforce, prevailing social norms continue to emphasize their supposedly natural responsibilities within the household. These expectations frequently position women primarily as housewives and mothers, bringing many of them to internalize these assumptions, even at the expense of professional aspirations.¹⁴⁸

Table 7, Proportion of women aged 15 and above by type of activity (2009-2019)

Population Groups	2009 (%)	2019 (%)
Employed	22.2	19.9
Unemployed	1.2	1.2
Inactive :	76.6	78.9
- Homemakers	55.6	52.6
- Students	1.8	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0

¹⁴⁶ G. Lopez-Acevedo, F. Devoto, M. Morales & J. R. Rodriguez, *Trends and Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Morocco*, in "World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper", 9591 (2021), pp. 1-42.

¹⁴⁷ M. Bertoli, *Women and unpaid care work: a barrier in bridging gender gaps*, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice 2021, pp. 1-102.

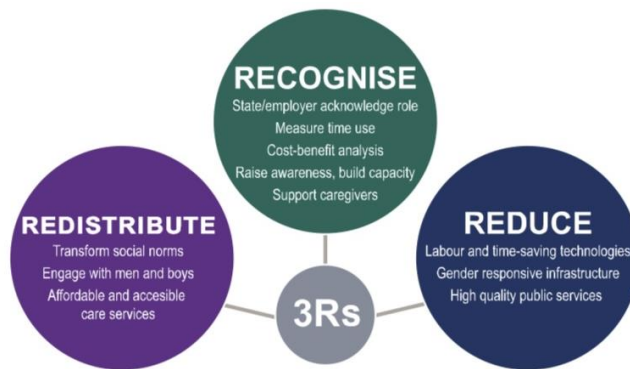
¹⁴⁸ S. Bentaher, *Exploring the Dynamics of Gender Role Attitudes in Morocco: A Socio-Cultural Examination of Differences between Men and Women in Diverse Contexts*, Seoul National University, Seoul 2024, pp. 1-94.

Source: Bentaher (2024).

This dynamic continually reinforces the perception of women as the foundational pillars of family success, without taking into account the fact that care of people, but also indirect care (e.g., cooking and cleaning), are recognized as unpaid work. It is now increasingly acknowledged that it constitutes a barrier to both economic growth and women's economic empowerment. Reducing gender inequality in unpaid care can promote women's economic empowerment. This is also underlined in Sustainable Development Goals in Target 5.4: "Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate." This issue has been addressed through the use of the 3Rs as a framework for policies (Figure 9). Recently, ILO proposed a revision of the approach, adding "Reward for care workers and their Representation in social dialogue with employers and the state". In order to solve the question, policies such as the incorporation of unpaid care into development programs are highly recommended.¹⁴⁹

Figure 9, The 3Rs approach

¹⁴⁹ OCDE, *Enabling Women's Economic Empowerment: New Approaches to Unpaid Care Work in Developing Countries*, OECD Publishing, Paris 2019, pp. 1-113.



Source: OCDE (2019).

Even if discrimination may originate in the sociocultural framework, it often becomes the standard when hiring, promoting or establishing wages. Indeed, discrimination theories advocate that systematic biases contribute hampering women's full participation.¹⁵⁰

3.2.2 Recommended Policies to Bridge the Gender Gap in the Labor Market.

Morocco has already implemented some important policies to promote women empowerment in the country. Particularly, the country can boast the most developed gender budgeting plan in MENA.¹⁵¹ The significance of gender budgeting lies in the fact that by systematically assessing how public spending affects men and women differently, it promotes a more equitable allocation of resources. The government might direct funds towards vocational training programs designed to enhance women's employability or subsidize childcare services, thereby helping to alleviate some of the obstacles that women face. However, the effectiveness of gender-responsive budgeting hinges on the availability of reliable gender-disaggregated data and the presence of sufficient technical expertise within ministries to carry out robust impact assessment.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ R. Newcomb, *Gender, globalization, and the urban-rural divide: Examining the effects of legal and social change throughout Morocco*, in "Hespéris-Tamuda", 55(3) (2020), pp. 393-410.

¹⁵¹ L. Kolovich & A. Ndoeye, *Implications of gender inequality for growth in Morocco*, in "IMF's Report Morocco's Quest for Stronger and Inclusive Growth", IMF, Washington DC 2023, pp. 167-82.

¹⁵² F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p. 9.

Anyway, promoting women's economic inclusion in Morocco requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates education, social policy and labor market regulation. As Abidi & Samihi (2025) observed, in many settings short maternity leave, the absence of paternity leave and limited access to public childcare facilities make it difficult for women to balance paid employment with the demands of domestic life. Expanding childcare options through public daycare centers, incentives for companies to provide on-site childcare or community-based nurseries can free up women's time and allow them to enter, remain in or advance within the labor market. Flexible working arrangements also play a crucial role. Options such as part-time schedules, remote work, or adaptable hours help women better manage the daily tension between household responsibilities and professional growth. Evidence from advanced economies show that such policies are strongly associated with higher female employment rates, largely because they reduce the conflict between career ambitions and motherhood.

At the same time, these policies must be paired with measures that protect women's job security and career advancement. Without strong anti-discrimination laws and enforcement procedures, extended leave might unintentionally harm women's long-term professional prospects, creating the very inequalities such policies aim to address.¹⁵³ Furthermore, awareness of existing legal protections, such as anti-discriminatory provisions in the labor code, remain limited among women in both rural and urban areas. Abidi & Samihi (2025) revealed that several respondents in the study reported a lack of awareness of rights such as harassment complaints, often citing fears of vengeance or even losing their jobs. These insights echo quantitative evidence showing that without well-designed

¹⁵³ Ibid.

programs and strong enforcement mechanisms, policies struggle to produce large-scale, transformative change.¹⁵⁴

Another key task should be the acknowledgement of unpaid care work, coupled with its reduction, and equitable sharing. Furthermore, it needs stronger representation and recognition as a public good deserving of sustained investment.¹⁵⁵ Bertoli highlighted how one of the most tangible ways to boost women's participation in the workforce is to ease the heavy load of childcare and other family responsibilities that women disproportionately carry. Many scholars suggest the implementation of policies that stimulate men's participation in family care. In order to promote this alternative, it will be useful to clarify both the costs and profits of care: "maintenance require costs in the form of lost opportunities, financial obligations, and foregone wages, but it also generates intrinsic rewards, social ties, and stronger families, and high-quality services for children and dependents."¹⁵⁶

Ultimately, promoting gender equitable employment requires policies that deliberately prioritize the most vulnerable groups of women, those facing overlapping forms of disadvantage. Targeting these women is essential both for effectiveness and for breaking the cycles of exclusion and self-reinforcing vulnerability that keep them trapped in poverty. For these groups, comprehensive programs are needed: combining strong affirmative measures such as job quotas, expanded social protection, capacity-building opportunities, conditional cash transfers, and support for self-employment or income generating activities. Some steps have already been taken, for instance the 2022 investment charter introduced a requirement for investors to create a minimum number of jobs for women

¹⁵⁴ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁵⁵ UN Women, Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy, UN Women, New York 2024, pp. 1-39.

¹⁵⁶ M. Bertoli, *Women and unpaid care work: a barrier in bridging gender gaps*, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice 2021, pp. 1-102.

in order to qualify for certain incentives. Yet much more can be done to explore how positive discrimination could more effectively support women facing layered disadvantages.¹⁵⁷

3.3 Uneven Opportunities: Understanding Morocco's Urban-Rural Labor Gap.

International economic observers commend Morocco for its success in attracting investment and generating growth but while luxury spaces for the wealthy have proliferated in the cities, rural residents continue to experience basic shortcomings.¹⁵⁸

If one of the root causes that prevent women from working is the intergenerational transmission of attitudes, this is particularly visible in rural areas (index “refusal of the father or relative” in Figure 10). The full realization of the potential of women living in rural areas of Morocco is hampered by parental reservation on mobility. Indeed, as already observed in chapter 2, concerns about reputation or the risk of harassment in public spaces often discourage women from seeking work outside their immediate family networks. Furthermore, even if early marriage is not allowed in Morocco,¹⁵⁹ UNICEF observed that the number of minors who married has increased from 7% in 2004 to 11.5 % in 2013.¹⁶⁰ Abidi & Samihi (2025) noticed that early marriage provides an excuse to take children out of school, contributing in impeding their ability to fully develop their skills and thus participate in the labor market.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ E. Ezzahid, *Sectoral potential for the creation of female jobs and proposed avenues to achieve gender equality on the labor market: a Moroccan perspective* (2023), pp. 1-29.

¹⁵⁸ R. Newcomb, *Gender, globalization, and the urban-rural divide: Examining the effects of legal and social change throughout Morocco*, In Hespéris-Tamuda, 55(3) (2020), pp. 393-410.

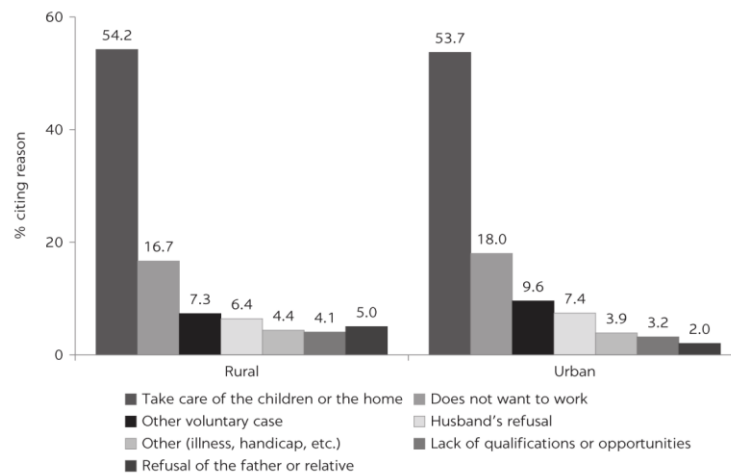
¹⁵⁹ The *Mudawanat al-Usra*, or 2004 Family Code, established the lowering of the age at which women could marry from 15 to 18 (article 19). Although, the judges still have the right to give the final judgement in some cases.

K. Zvan Elliott, op. cit., p.218.

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Middle East and North Africa Regional Office in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (IRCW), *Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa- Morocco Country Brief*, 2017, pp.1-19.

¹⁶¹ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p.7.

Figure 10, Main reasons for women's inactivity



Source: Lopez-Acevedo G., Betcherman G., Khellaf A., Molini V. (2021)

Adding to these facts the still low level of education of rural women results in struggles to access formal employment opportunities. Indeed, even if data suggest that female labor force participation is higher in rural than urban areas (Figure 11), changing perspective can clarify the issue better.¹⁶² Lower unemployment rates in rural areas are largely due to the fact that unemployment is not an economically viable option there.¹⁶³ Measures reveal an immediate passage from employment to inactivity among rural women.¹⁶⁴ Instead, people enter the agricultural sector, where most women working in rural areas are employed in, representing in 2018 around 92% of all rural female employment.¹⁶⁵

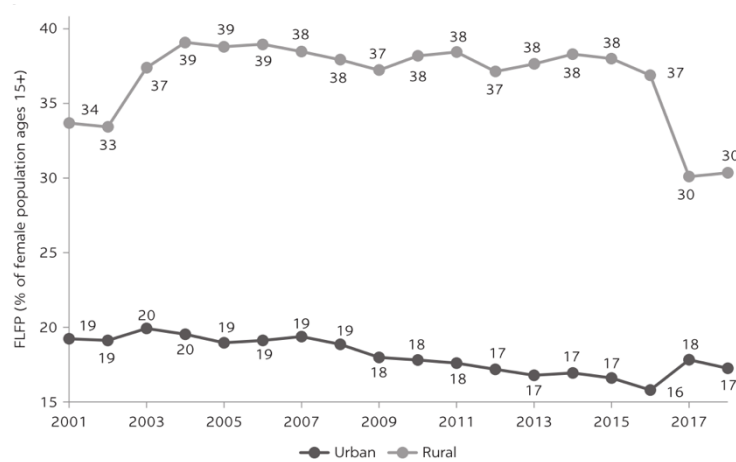
¹⁶² G. Lopez-Acevedo, G. Betcherman, A. Khellaf, V. Molini, *Morocco's Jobs Landscape, Identifying Constraints to an Inclusive Labor Market*, The World Bank, Washington 2021.

¹⁶³ Danish Trade Union Development Agency, *Labour Market Profile Morocco–2020/2021*, pp.1-37.

¹⁶⁴ E. Ezzahid, *Cartographie et caractéristiques de l'emploi féminin au Maroc* (2023), pp.1-87.

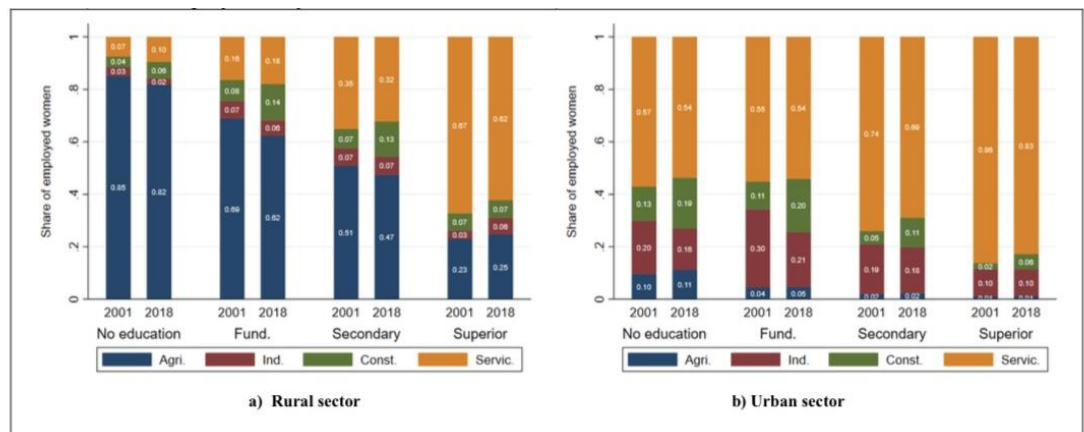
¹⁶⁵ G. Lopez-Acevedo, F. Devoto, M. Morales & J. R. Rodriguez, *Trends and Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Morocco*, in "World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper", 9591 (2021), pp. 1-42.

Figure 11, Female labor force participation (% of female population ages 15+)



Source: Lopez-Acevedo G., Betcherman G., Khellaf A., Molini V (2021)

Figure 12, Female employment by sector and educational level



Source: Lopez-Acevedo G., Devoto F., Morales M., & Rodriguez J. R (2021)

This is also due to the fact that local economies are primarily based on agriculture and subsistence farming. As a result, women frequently perform significant amounts of unpaid labor on family farms or in small retail stores, meaning their labor is not included in official statistics. Still, when included statistics show the high proportion of women working in the informal sector bringing with them several limitations as “lack [of] social protection, healthcare coverage, or contractual safeguards, thereby

reinforcing cycles of precariousness and limiting upward social mobility”.¹⁶⁶

In addition to the economy, which varies depending on the area, one factor that influences the labor market is education. For example, Canuto & Kabbach mention that:

“[The existence of gender gap in the service sector] can partly be attributed to gender disparities in education and training, which limit women’s access to skills necessary for high-paying service sector jobs.”¹⁶⁷

Even though the rural female population now includes fewer women with no education, this has translated only partly into increased employment.¹⁶⁸

On the contrary, the number of educated women accessing the labor market has decreased over time.¹⁶⁹ It is arguable that the probability of a woman being employed is positively correlated with her educational attainment, yet it fails to account for the broader set of barriers that disproportionately impact women.¹⁷⁰

This pattern of female employment largely reflects the marginal integration of women, and men as well, into activities in rural areas that require low levels of specialized skills.¹⁷¹ The downward trend for both sexes reflects the constraints of a tight labor market that fails to generate enough opportunities to absorb existing job applicants and new entrants alike. Developing the labor market and stimulating economic growth are crucial to significantly increasing women’s participation rates.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p.8.

¹⁶⁷ O. Canuto & H. Kabbach, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

¹⁶⁸ G. Lopez-Acevedo, F. Devoto, M. Morales & J. R. Rodriguez, *Trends and Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Morocco*, in “World Bank Group Policy Research Working Paper”, 9591 (2021), pp. 1-42.

¹⁶⁹ O. Canuto & H. Kabbach, op. cit., p.6.

¹⁷⁰ S. Hanchane & F. Mounir, *Understanding gender pay gaps in the Moroccan labor market*, in “World bank Group” (2023), pp. 1-30.

¹⁷¹ E. Ezzahid, *Cartographie et caractéristiques de l’emploi féminin au Maroc* (2023), pp.1-87.

¹⁷² M. Boucetta, *Women’s Access to Economic Opportunities in Morocco* (No. 2315), in “Policy Brief”, 18 (23) (2023), pp.1-12.

It is reasonable to suggest that narrowing the rural-urban divide becomes a key priority to overcome the socio-cultural barriers that hinder women's employment. Enabling women to move from informal livelihood activities into formal sector jobs would provide not only higher and more stable incomes but also vital legal protections.¹⁷³ Up to this point, development initiatives have largely concentrated on sustainable agriculture to meet women's immediate needs. Although, advancing gender-responsive macroeconomic policies is crucial to meet rural women's long-term needs and address the structural barriers they face, such as unpaid work and informality, while also improving their access to social protection, public services, and sustainable infrastructure.¹⁷⁴ Practical steps, such as streamlining registration procedures for cooperatives or expanding microfinance programs tailored to rural women entrepreneurs, can play a decisive role integrating more women into formal and recognized market structures.¹⁷⁵ This argument and the possible benefits it could bring to the process of women's empowerment in Morocco will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Moroccan Argan oil cooperatives as agents of women Empowerment process.

Since independence, cooperatives played a crucial role in Moroccan development process. Since then, the government promoted the creation and expansion of cooperatives to support sustainable development and job creation while improving living conditions.¹⁷⁶ Along with this, many financial initiatives have been implemented with the aim of reducing

¹⁷³ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p.8.

¹⁷⁴ UN Women, *Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy*, UN Women, New York 2024, pp. 1-39.

¹⁷⁵ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p.8.

¹⁷⁶ B. Bennani, *Marketing, quelle place dans la gestion des coopératives au Maroc: Cas des coopératives de la région Tensift-Haouz*, in "Revue Marocaine de Recherche en Management et Marketing", (8) (2013), pp. 171-183.

major socio-economic deficits and stimulate economic growth. One of these is the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), launched by King Mohammed VI in 2005.¹⁷⁷ It was soon followed by another initiative, focused on the improvement of rural areas: the *Plan Maroc Vert* (Morocco Green Plan).¹⁷⁸ This project relies on two main pillars, the first seeks to develop a competitive and export-oriented agricultural sector while the second focuses on rural development through sustainable management of natural resources.¹⁷⁹ These two projects are just one example of the commitment that the government has shown to overcome inequalities in Morocco. Although, it is reasonable to question to what extent these initiatives have impacted the segment of the population involved. The author will put the focal point on argan oil cooperatives, and particularly on women working there, trying to highlight if and how their occupation influences their life choices and their empowerment process.

4.1 Cooperatives History in Morocco.

Before delving into the history of cooperatives in Morocco, a definition must be given. Law No. 24-83 defined a cooperative as a “group of individuals who agree to come together to create a business responsible for providing, for their exclusive satisfaction, the product or service they need, and to operate and manage it by applying fundamental principles (cooperative principles whose purpose is to improve the socio-economic situation of its members.”¹⁸⁰ The cooperative principles, recognized by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), are: “(i) Voluntary and open membership; (ii) Democratic power exercised by the members; (iii)

¹⁷⁷ W. Perry, O. Rappe, A. Boulhaoua, L. Hassan Loux, Y. Elhouss, H. Ait Ahssain, Z. Ait Barich, H. Akhiyat, T. A. Aznague & S. Hraïd, *Argan oil and the question of empowerment in rural Morocco*, in “The Journal of North African Studies”, 24(5) (2019), pp. 1-30.

¹⁷⁸ B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, *Understanding gender and poverty dimensions of high value agricultural commodity chains in the Souss-Masaa-Draa region of southwestern Morocco*, Summary report, ICARDA, 2014, pp.1-65.

¹⁷⁹ B. Montanari, *Shifting Priorities or Perpetuating the Cycle: The Excluded Rural Women of the Green Moroccan Plan*, in “hal open science” (2017), pp. 1-6.

¹⁸⁰ B. Bennani, op cit., p. 173.

Autonomy and independence; (iv) Education, training and information; (v) Cooperation between cooperatives; (vi) Commitment to the community.”¹⁸¹ This definition, along with these principles, follows the guidance of ILO which define a cooperative as “an association of people who have voluntarily grouped to achieve a common economic goal by the constitution of a democratically run company, by providing a fair share of the necessary capital and by accepting a fair share of the risks and fruits of this enterprise.”¹⁸²

Cooperative practices appeared in Morocco long time back with different systems, objectives and implementations.¹⁸³ Originally cooperation was more present in rural areas since agricultural activities need substantial human resources.¹⁸⁴ One example is the *Iggoudar*, a granary used to store and protect the collective properties.¹⁸⁵ The colonial period represented a turning point in the history of cooperatives in Morocco. In particular, in 1922 a Dahir allowed the creation of consumer cooperatives for European settlers. In 1935 a second Dahir enshrined the establishment of agricultural cooperatives, benefitting the same group. Another two years had to be waited to see the participation of Moroccan population but not long after it was restricted to agriculture and handcrafts sectors only.¹⁸⁶

When Morocco gained its independence in 1956 the State began to pursue a policy aimed at promoting an economic model based on cooperatives

¹⁸¹ I. Nejari & A. Hassine, *Do Moroccan agricultural cooperatives have a social responsibility? An exploratory qualitative study*, in “American Journal of Agricultural Science, Engineering, and Technology”, 7(1) (2023), pp. 44-52.

¹⁸² B. Bennani, op. cit., p.173.

¹⁸³ The use of the term “cooperative practices” instead of “cooperatives” is not accidental. Indeed, as Angade (2024) declared, cooperative can be analyzed from two distinct perspectives. In this case, it is intended as a model of collective entrepreneurship rather than an institutional movement.

K. Angade, *Cooperative entrepreneurship in Morocco: the case study of women's cooperatives in the Souss Massa region*, CIRIEC International, Université de Liège, Liège 2024, pp.1-34.

¹⁸⁴ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, *Du coopérativisme au Maroc: évolution, contraintes et opportunités*, In “Revue Française d'Economie et de Gestion”, 3(11) (2022), pp. 168-191.

¹⁸⁵ K. Angade, op. cit., p.5.

¹⁸⁶ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.172.

and to achieve national growth, a range of government programs¹⁸⁷ have been implemented.¹⁸⁸ At that time, there were only 62 operative cooperatives, most of which working in agricultural and crafting sectors.¹⁸⁹

4.1.1 Institutional Framework of Cooperatives in Morocco.

“In Morocco, cooperatives are governed by Dahir No. 1-83-226 of 9 *Moharrem* 1405 (October 5, 1984) promulgating Law No. 24-83 establishing the General Statute of Cooperatives and the missions of the Office for the Development of Cooperation (ODECO), as amended by Dahir Law No. 1-93-166 of September 10, 1993.”¹⁹⁰ ODECO was created in 1963 with the aim of providing cooperatives with assistance such as legal support. However, the programmed linked to the support of cooperatives which are considered to be of greatest importance are two: INDH and the Morocco Green Plan.

INDH, introduced in 2005 by King Mohammed VI, is generally seen as a key tool for re-establishing a direct connection between the King and the population. The first phase of the initiative went from 2006 to 2010, witnessing the allocation of 10 billion Moroccan dirhams (around €900 million) which reached approximately 5.2 million people.¹⁹¹ Alaoui & Zouiten (2022) reported that at the end of its second phase, in 2018, the INDH had subsidized around 9400 activities, with women representing about 50%.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Government programs along with strategies implemented will be presented in paragraph 4.2.1 “Institutional Framework of cooperatives in Morocco.”

¹⁸⁸ K. Didi & H. Attouch, *Dynamique Coopérative au Maroc et Nouveau Modèle de Développement*, in “International Journal of Financial Accountability, Economics, Management, and Auditing”, 4(2) (2022), pp. 205-223.

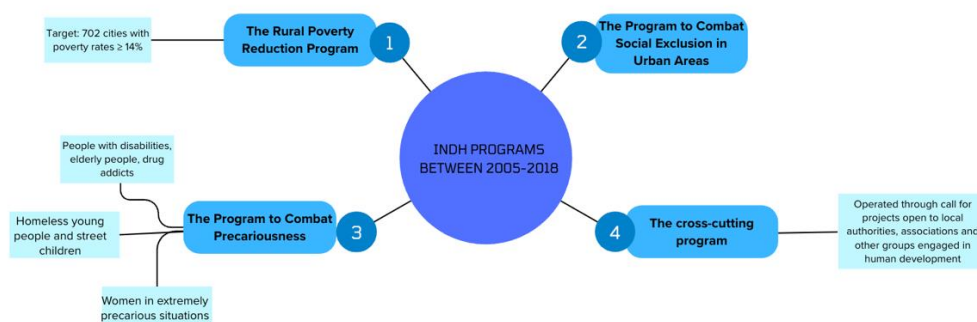
¹⁸⁹ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.172.

¹⁹⁰ B. Bennani, op. cit., p.173.

¹⁹¹ S. I. Bergh, *The politics of development in Morocco: Local governance and participation in North Africa*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017. pp. 1-340.

¹⁹² Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.179.

Figure 13, INDH Programs between 2005-2018



Source: Author's elaboration based on Alaoui Y. M., & Zouiten M (2022).

The third phase (2019-2023) was mainly focused on redefining interventions in human development. Indeed, INDH devoted a whole program, to fund these activities: the “Improving Income and Economic Inclusion of Young People” Program.¹⁹³

Legitimately launched in 2008¹⁹⁴, the Morocco Green Plan (*Plan Maroc Vert* or PMV) relies on two main pillars:

“(i) a pillar dedicated to modern agriculture, whose objective is the accelerated development of high value-added and high productivity agriculture through the proactive creation of high value-added agricultural and agri-food development hubs in line with market requirements, and (ii) a pillar dedicated to supporting solidarity-based agriculture.”¹⁹⁵

On the whole, PMV seek to reduce socio-economic disparities between modern and traditional agricultural sub-sectors by boosting productivity following four key objectives:

- Alleviating poverty in rural communities;
- Ensuring food security;
- Supporting the sustainable management of natural resources;

¹⁹³ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.179.

¹⁹⁴ B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p.8.

¹⁹⁵ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.181.

-Facilitating equitable access for all farmers to both national and international markets.¹⁹⁶

In 2010 these two initiatives have been flanked by a plan of action which emphasized the Social and Solidarity Economy (SNESS), giving emphasis to cooperatives. Indeed, SNESS key objective is to increase “the cooperative’s penetration rate in relation to the working population from 3.1% to 7.5%, increasing the sector’s contribution to job creation from 50,000 to 175,000 jobs, and increasing its share of GDP from 1.6% to 3.9% by the end of 2020.”¹⁹⁷

Another program which is worth to mention when analyzing the cooperatives of Morocco in the *Mourafaka* Program. It was introduced in 2014 with duration of five years in order to sustain 2,000 new¹⁹⁸ cooperatives offering services to enhance the long-term feasibility of cooperatives beyond the starting phase.¹⁹⁹ Among these services there are financial backing and technical support.²⁰⁰ The program proceeds following five levels of intervention, namely: “strategic diagnosis, group training for managers, individual coaching of managers in management, coaching for the implementation of the cooperative’s development plan and marketing.”²⁰¹

Finally, the government came up with the New Development Model (NDM) in 2021. Central to the NDM is the acknowledgement of women’s participation and empowerment as core components of national growth. It aims to reduce institutional and social barriers by strengthening social protection for working women while promoting equal access to employment. The second line of action is focused on education and

¹⁹⁶ B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p.6.

¹⁹⁷ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.178.

¹⁹⁸ “New” understood as having been started for less than two years.

¹⁹⁹ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.180.

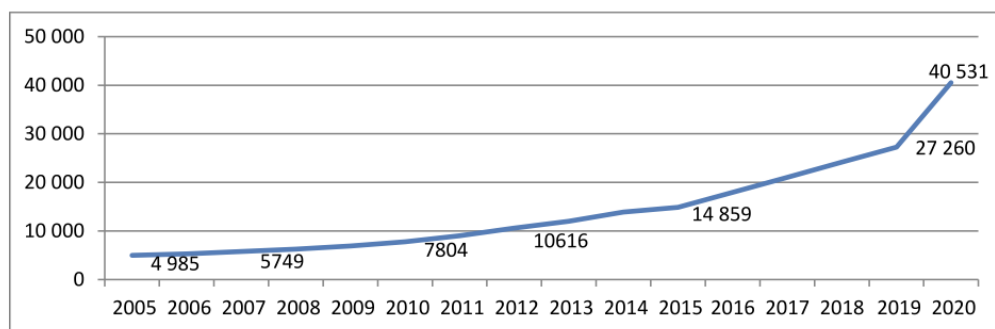
²⁰⁰ A. Ibourk & S. Hninou, *Empowering women through agricultural cooperatives: a multilevel analysis in Morocco’s Marrakech-Safi region*, in “Discover Sustainability”, 6(1) (2025), pp. 1-22.

²⁰¹ K. Angade, op. cit., p.11.

economic inclusion by protecting property rights for rural women and sustaining female entrepreneurship through targeted financial mechanisms. The last objective of the model is to foster societal awareness of gender equality and parity as foundational values.²⁰²

All these programs have exercised an important role in the growth of cooperatives in Morocco (see Figure 14). Notwithstanding the fact that cooperative model has largely demonstrated to be a key element in the Moroccan development context, many scholars question how these initiatives have helped this process.²⁰³ Since the focus of this thesis will be on the Argan oil cooperatives, a brief introduction of this ancient tradition is needed.

Figure 14, Evolution of the number of cooperatives in Morocco (2005-2020)



Source: Alaoui Y. M., & Zouiten M. (2022).

4.2 Argan oil: a centuries-old craft boosting the local economy, but at what price?

The argan tree, known as “*Argania spinosa* (L) Skeels”, can be found in Morocco especially in the provinces of Agadir, Essaouira, Taroundant and Tiznit. The importance of this endemic tree lies in the significant role it plays in the ecosystem of this area (named Argan Forest Region), but

²⁰² A. Ahnach, W. Zouhair & L. Rachidi, *Pathways to women's empowerment and social inclusion through cooperative entrepreneurship: Insights from Morocco*, in “Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics” (2025), pp.1-34.

²⁰³ K. Didi, K & H. Attouch, *Dynamique Coopérative au Maroc et Nouveau Modèle de Développement*, in “International Journal of Financial Accountability, Economics, Management, and Auditing”, 4(2) (2022), pp. 205-223.

above all in the lives of the local populations who inhabit it.²⁰⁴ Long before argan was employed for the highly requested cosmetic oil, it served to Berbers as food, fuel wood, medication and, finally, beautifying.²⁰⁵

With regard to the environment, the argan tree has a pivotal role in preserving the soil against the growing desertification.

These characteristics all together guaranteed the forest the designation of biosphere reserved by UNESCO in 1998.²⁰⁶

4.2.1 Argan Oil Production process and its Environment.

Argan oil production has traditionally been a women-centered activity profoundly embedded in Berber culture. Thus, it represents national pride and currently serves as an important source of income. The extraction process is divided into two branches: while in villages is still predominantly done by hand, cooperatives and commercial enterprises usually depend on mechanical techniques. Either way, the production of argan oil follows a series of well-defined steps carried out depending on gendered lines of responsibilities. Indeed, men have traditionally not been involved in the processing of argan except for the transport of harvested fruits from the forest to the household.²⁰⁷

The first step in the production chain is harvesting, which usually consists in collecting the fruit which falls when mature (in general between mid-May and Mid-September).²⁰⁸ Another method, less commonly used, involves the use of sticks or stones to let the fruit fall.²⁰⁹ In the past there was another alternative, now obsolete, which involved the collection of

²⁰⁴ T. J. Lybbert, C. B. Barrett & H. Narjisse, *Market-based conservation and local benefits: the case of argan oil in Morocco*, in "Ecological Economics", 41(1) (2002), pp. 125-144.

²⁰⁵ B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p.26.

²⁰⁶ Z. Charrouf, & D. Guillaume, *The argan oil project: going from utopia to reality in 20 years*, in "OCL", 25(2) (2018), pp.1-.5.

²⁰⁷ B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p.59.

²⁰⁸ T. J. Lybbert, C. B. Barrett & H. Narjisse, op. cit., p.128.

²⁰⁹ F. Elame, E. Erraoui, & H- Lionbouli, *Economic analysis of the "Argan" sector in Morocco*, in "Revue des Études Multidisciplinaires en Sciences Économiques et Sociales", 6(3) (2021), pp. 37-50.

kernels already stripped of their shells thanks to the goats that eat them.²¹⁰

This practice has been discontinued for both quality and hygienic reasons, as it was found to affect both the flavor and chemical composition of the oil.

Afterwards, fruits are placed in traditional clay containers to let them air-dry for approximately ten days. This procedure facilitates the removal of the shells which will be removed by hand to obtain the nut. Then, the nut must be cracked to obtain the kernel (one or more).²¹¹ The procedure is done on a hard plane with the aid of a rock. As Jenzano et al. (2014) reflected, the fact that there is no mechanical way to carry out this procedure “women have proprietary rights to this critical function within. The production process, and to a function without which the whole value chain for argan oil breaks down.”²¹²

From this moment onwards the procedure changes depending on the use one wants to make of the oil, cosmetic or culinary. In the latter case the kernel is roasted to enhance the nutty flavor of the oil and to reduce the presence of argenine.²¹³ In the former case kernels are reduced to paste with a traditional grinder (see Step 5 in Figure 15). This tool can be replaced with a machine which performs the same function. Finally, the paste is modeled by hand to let it separate from the oil which will be filtered and left to decant before being bottled.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ T. J. Lybbert, C. B. Barrett & H. Narjisse, op. cit., p.131.

²¹¹ A. A. Degen, *Indigenous women in North Africa: Amazigh women and argan oil*, in Léo-Paul D., Nziku D. M., Palalić R., & Ramadani V (edited by) “Environments for Women Entrepreneurship in North Africa”, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore 2023, pp.1-35.

²¹² B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p.15.

²¹³ A. A. Degen., *Indigenous women in North Africa: Amazigh women and argan oil*, in Léo-Paul D., Nziku D. M., Palalić R., & Ramadani V (edited by) “Environments for Women Entrepreneurship in North Africa”, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore 2023.

²¹⁴ B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p.29.

Figure 15, The steps in the traditional (manual) edible argan oil production process



Source: Gebrai Y., Naughton C. C., Sánchez K. D., Bargach J., & Deubel T. F. (2025).

Photos by Colleen Naughton.

4.2.2 The costs of argan oil production: forest degradation threatening sustainable development.

As previously mentioned, in 1998 UNESCO declared the argan forest region a Biosphere site. In conjunction with this fact, argan oil experienced a sort of “second birth”, followed by a growing interest from many fields, from economics to sustainable development ecology.²¹⁵ This brought to heightened awareness of the need to conserve and restore the argan ecosystem to prevent deforestation.²¹⁶ In 2010 the Moroccan government also established the National Agency for the Development of Oases and

²¹⁵ Z. Charrouf & D. Guillaume, *The argan oil project: going from utopia to reality in 20 years*, in “OCL”, 25(2) (2018), pp.1-.5.

²¹⁶ A. Santoro, V. Ongoma, M. Ait el Kadi, F. Piras, B. Fiore, A. Bazzurro, F. Romano, B. Meskour, M. Hssaisoune, A. Labbaci, A. Tairi, T. Chfadi & L. Bouchaou, *Innovation of argan (Argania spinosa (L.) Skeels) products and byproducts for sustainable development of rural communities in Morocco. A systematic literature review*, in “Biodiversity and Conservation”, 34(9) (2025), pp. 3211-3239.

Argan Forests (ANDZOA) to promote sustainable development in AFR while promoting rural development as well.²¹⁷

This attention, however, seems to be more noticeable among institutions and experts rather than among farming communities. For example, Boussaid (2011) presents in his paper the contribution of the *Tamri* cooperative, which took part to a project organized by the *Arganeraie* Biosphere Reserve Association's Network (RARBA). Throughout the project, cooperative members were informed of the ecological importance of the argan ecosystem and were stimulated to take an active role in its sustainable administration. The cooperative also took part in initiatives aimed at the re-establishment of degraded land. However, this task was complicated to accomplish because authority over the rights of collective land is predominantly detained by men. Being the cooperative all female, it faced the risk of bring about controversies both within the community and with external institutions, particularly the Water and Forest Administration, which superintend forest resources and land-use rules.²¹⁸ Another reason is that such initiatives have delivered only slight improvements in the livelihoods of local households. Furthermore, the difficulties increase in contexts where natural resources are limited, and short-term exploitation provides immediate profit that outweigh the perceived benefits of long-term sustainability.²¹⁹ As le Polain De Waroux & Lambin noticed:

²¹⁷ A. Santoro, V. Ongoma, M. Ait el Kadi, F. Piras, B. Fiore, A. Bazzurro, F. Romano, B. Meskour, M. Hssaisoune, A. Labbaci, A. Tairi, T. Chfadi & L. Bouchaou, *Innovation of argan (Argania spinosa (L.) Skeels) products and byproducts for sustainable development of rural communities in Morocco. A systematic literature review*, in "Biodiversity and Conservation", 34(9) (2025), pp. 3211-3239.

²¹⁸ M. Boussaid, *Arganeraie Biosphere Reserve, Morocco, and the Role of Women's Cooperatives*, in Austrian MAB Committee (edited by) "Biosphere Reserves in the Mountains of the World", Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, Vienna 2011, pp.81-83.

²¹⁹ A. Santoro, V. Ongoma, M. Ait el Kadi, F. Piras, B. Fiore, A. Bazzurro, F. Romano, B. Meskour, M. Hssaisoune, A. Labbaci, A. Tairi, T. Chfadi & L. Bouchaou, *Innovation of argan (Argania spinosa (L.) Skeels) products and byproducts for sustainable development of rural communities in Morocco. A systematic literature review*, in "Biodiversity and Conservation", 34(9) (2025), pp. 3211-3239.

“Research in the northern part of the argan region found that, given current property rights, people had little economic incentive for conservation and most of the gains appeared to have accrued to non-locals able to overcome capital and infrastructural constraints to entry into the mechanized, high-end market.”²²⁰ The protective role that forests play in supporting rural livelihoods can be significantly weakened when commercial exploitation results in the depletion of forest resources. Such degradation diminishes the availability of products while heightening households’ vulnerability to economic, environmental and climatic shocks. Thus, forest commercialization under these conditions can lead to increasing insecurity and deepening poverty instead of contributing to its reduction.²²¹

To date, government strategies have overlooked conservation measures, and that a comprehensive environmental management should be included. The problem of forest degradation is further worsened by the illegal uprooting of argan trees to clear the way for vegetable production to furnish restaurants in the Agadir and Essaouira regions. Despite official bans on tree cutting, enforcement remains weak, mostly leaving monitoring efforts to local communities. Addressing these challenges will require closer collaboration between national agricultural research institute in Morocco (INRA) and agricultural extension services. A key point should be the inclusion of farmers, guaranteeing their participation at every stage of biosphere management.²²²

²²⁰ Y. le Polain De Waroux & E. F. Lambin, E, *Niche commodities and rural poverty alleviation: Contextualizing the contribution of argan oil to rural livelihoods in Morocco*, in “Annals of the Association of American Geographers”, 103(3) (2013), pp. 589-607.

²²¹ T. J. Lybbert, A. Aboudrare, D. Chaloud, N. Magnan & M. Nash, *Booming markets for Moroccan argan oil appear to benefit some rural households while threatening the endemic argan forest*, in “Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences”, 108(34) (2011), pp. 13963-13968.

²²² B.P. Jenzano, N. S. Kassam & A. H. Aden, op. cit., p. 37.

4.3 Argan Oil Cooperatives Can Help Women Empowerment Process? Morocco as a Case Study.

4.3.1 Methodology.

A total of five interviews were conducted with women working at Argan cooperatives, either employed or owners. The recruitment of participants was difficult, especially at the beginning. Initially, I asked people I knew if they knew anyone who was working in the field of interest, finally encountering “Interviewed 1”, namely Amina²²³, and “Interviewed 3”, Yasmine. The recruitment of “Interviewed 2” (Aisha) was achieved through the snowball sampling technique, requesting that the first respondents identify additional members who could be relevant to the research. “Interviewed 4” (Nour) and “Interviewed 5” (Layla) were recruited during my stay in Essaouira. Essaouira and Agadir regions are loaded with argan oil cooperatives and one can find several of them walking into the main streets of the cities. However, due to the lack of fluency in Arabic, Moroccan Darija or French, establishing communication was often difficult. Even when communication in English was possible, many women appeared reluctant to participate. Moreover, two or three women initially agreed to take part in the interviews but later stopped responding or backed out. Thus, finding respondents was the most difficult part of the current research, especially due to linguistic barriers. The interviews were semi-structured, the preferred method for collecting qualitative data.²²⁴ The interviews lasted about an hour and thirty minutes and interviews’ questions were divided into four key themes: (a) Education and Childcare; (b) Cooperative’s inclusion of marginalized groups; (c) Empowerment’s perceptions; (d) Economic Independence.

²²³ As it comes on the following page, the names mentioned are fictitious names.

²²⁴ M. A. Merroun, *Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Women's Empowerment in Rural Morocco: Challenges and Prospects*, in “Revue Internationale de la Recherche Scientifique” (Revue-IRS), 3(1) (2025), pp.846-861.

All participants were provided with understandable and comprehensive information regarding the aims of the research and the ways in which the data collected would be used. Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained to record the entire conversation. Although all participants agreed to use their real names, fictitious names have been adopted in this study out of respect for their privacy.

All interviews were carried out online via WhatsApp calls, which allowed flexibility in scheduling and facilitated participation. To ensure that participants could express themselves as clearly and comfortably as possible, the interviews were conducted with the support of a native speaker who translated the questions into Moroccan Darija before the interview. Unstructured questions were translated on the spot. This approach helped minimize language barriers and potential misunderstandings thereby improving the quality and depth of the data collection.

Only one interview was conducted in English by the author alone since the interviewed was a participant with a high level of English proficiency, estimated to be equivalent to a C1 level.

Qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this research as it allows the prioritization of who is directly involved, enabling an exhaustive understanding of participants' perspectives. For this reason, primary data have been integrated with secondary data, comprehending the review of scientific literature but also data coming from International Organizations such as UN Women and the World Bank.

4.3.2 Education Programs for women and Childcare Options Offered by the Cooperatives: Evidence of a Severe Lack.

Cooperatives are ideally established and managed by women, although some are also managed by men. Members frequently hold voting rights within the general assemblies and are entitled to receive a wage as well as a share of the cooperative's profit. However, this model is not always

perfectly implemented as the use of the word “ideally” can easily suggest. One example of particular importance in this research is the provision of literacy programs and childcare services to these women.²²⁵ As reported in the previous chapters, education is one of the key elements needed to reach full women empowerment. Moreover, childcare services could provide very important help to the lives of these women as housework is one of the main hindrances to women’s education and employment.

Among women interviewed, only two reported the lack of literacy programs in their cooperatives, one was discontinued due to financial constraints (Lalla²²⁶ Amina) while in Lalla Layla’s cooperative it was due to the inconsistent attendance.

Lalla Aisha’s and Nour cooperatives offer literacy programs to learn the Quran, basic literacy but also project management and operations.

Yasmine, a young girl and activist from a small village near Agadir, was the only interviewed lacking an active cooperative because she is currently waiting for some papers which is a time-consuming procedure. When she was asked about literacy programs she stated: *“Yes, the whole point of the project is to support girls’ education in the region of Souss-Massa. The whole thing of creating this cooperative is to generate money through which we can support [girls] also educationally through workshops so they will be able to develop their skills, build their capacities and be aware of the importance of education. [...] We already did two programs: the first one to teach languages such as Arabic and French while the second one was all about soft skills: public speaking, debate [...] and creative writing.”*²²⁷

²²⁵ B. Montanari, M. Handaine & J. Id Bourrous, *Argan oil trade and access to benefit sharing: a matter of economic survival for rural women of the Souss Massa, Morocco*, in “Human Ecology”, 51(5) (2023), pp. 995-1007.

²²⁶ “Lalla” is a title of respect, used as a prefix to the name of the woman. The author will use it when speaking of an older woman as it was the French “vous”.

²²⁷ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 13 May 2025.

These words exemplify the spirit that women's cooperatives should have as they have been designed. However, the privilege of participating to literacy programs encountered different reactions to what many scholars report. Huang noticed that those types of programs slowly diminished through time. Her findings are consistent with those of Skog (2013) and Montanari (2023) who found something very similar to what Lalla Layla mentioned. Women often lose interest in attending the lessons, for different reasons. These can go from having difficulty with the lessons being thought in standard Arabic, thus preferring Moroccan Darija, to favour income-generating activities.²²⁸ These programs must be accessible in the local language to assure a significant attendance by women working at cooperatives. This simple incorporation would be a huge step forward since education provides better opportunities in the labour market as well as improving their children's outcomes.²²⁹

As already mentioned, "the cooperatives also provide child-care facilities so the women do not have to worry about their children while they are working [...]"²³⁰ This service should be one of the main constituents of women cooperatives given their connection with house care. Indeed, when this type of facility is missing, this can bring to serious consequences. Flores (2023) noticed that in the absence of childcare facilities, mothers are often forced to bring their children to the workplace. Moreover, the long working hours of women in argan cooperatives occasionally created accidental consequences. Namely, some researchers noticed that some women were forced to withdraw their daughters from school to manage

²²⁸ P. Huang, *Liquid gold: Berber women and the argan oil co-operatives in Morocco*, in "International Journal of Intangible Heritage", 12(1) (2017), pp. 140-155.

²³⁰ B. Laghssais & I. Comins-Mingol, *Beyond vulnerability and adversities: Amazigh women's agency and empowerment in Morocco*, in "The Journal of North African Studies", 28(2) (2023), pp. 347-367.

housework.²³¹ Similarly, Montanari et al. (2023) reported that children frequently take care of their brothers and sisters while parents are working.²³²

The sample interviewed confirmed that there is no daycare centre in the cooperatives they are working at, except for Nour's cooperative. Luckily, who has children has the full support of her family, also helping to keep her child on business hours. To better understand how this influence their lives they were asked this question: "How has employment in the cooperative affected your ability to care for your children and manage household duties?"

Lalla Amina replied:

*"Honestly, I try hard to achieve a balance between caring for my children and my household duties. My employment in the cooperative has positively affected my ability to achieve the above-mentioned balance. [...] when I am busy with work, my sisters take care of my children until I complete my tasks. My husband also encourages and supports me. All of this positively impacts both me and my experience within the cooperative."*²³³

Closely, Lalla Aisha stated that before joining the cooperative, childcare took almost all her time but now she cannot do it anymore. *"I try my best to balance caring for my children and managing household responsibilities. Time is a challenge in achieving this balance. My children are cared for by my family members while I am away, and this support positively affects me and my experience."*²³⁴ Unfortunately, not all women

²³¹ N. Flores, *Argan oil and the economic development of Morocco: a study of the economic development of the Amazigh community within Morocco*, University of Malta and the George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, United States, Msida 2023, pp. 1-114.

²³² B. Montanari, M. Handaine & J. Id Bourrous, *Argan oil trade and access to benefit sharing: a matter of economic survival for rural women of the Souss Massa, Morocco*, in "Human Ecology", 51(5) (2023), pp. 995-1007.

²³³ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 13 May 2025.

²³⁴ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 21 May 2025.

have the privilege of being supported by their families, especially when it comes to women from rural areas. The lack of these services could lead to the passing of the household responsibility to the daughters or the giving of their jobs, leading to disempowerment instead of empowerment.

4.3.3 Cooperatives Significance in Inclusion of Marginalized Groups.

As Ahnach et al. (2025) highlighted, among the many definitions of empowerment, McWhirter (1998) extended the concept, describing it as “a process through which marginalized individuals gain control over their lives, without infringing on others’ rights.”²³⁵ In Morocco, gender inequalities in the labor market persists and some groups experience social exclusion more than others. In this chapter the term “marginalized groups” means groups of people discriminated against by society and, consequently, in the workplace, including women, ethnic minorities, single mothers, widows and divorced women. One of the main drivers of social exclusion is the labor market since insecure employment can lead to economic marginalization, which often has a loss of social status consequently. Social exclusion can serve both as a condition and as action that bring to that environment, and it involves external as well as internal factors. The former, or exogenous factors, comprise political and socio-economic conditions that hinder people’s access to basic rights and resources. The latter, endogenous factors, relate to how one may withdraw from society either consciously or unconsciously.²³⁶

Cooperative entrepreneurship respond to these complex challenges promoting social integration. Their purpose of acting both as economic organizations and as spaces for civic engagement, not only helps the improvement of disadvantaged’s living conditions but also support their integration into local communities.²³⁷

²³⁵ A. Ahnach, W. Zouhair & Rachidi L., op. cit., pp.3-4.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

To introduce the topic, in the first part of the interview the participants were asked to answer this question: “Do you feel that you belong to some specific marginalized group? If so, in which way?” They all answered in the same way: “I don’t feel that I belong to any specific marginalized group.” Yasmine was the only participant who decided to argue, mentioning a development of her own positionality.

“I no longer feel that way but people where I grow up are marginalized. They should have the right education but unfortunately, they don’t get to pursue that education for many reasons. First of all, because of the poor situations of the families, second, the lack of awareness about the importance of education and also because of the social structure of the village which entails that a woman should stay at home and grow up as a housewife and a wife.”

These words reflect the situation of rural people, living in marginalized places, with severe difficulties in moving, having access to core resources and the right to study. Yasmine underlined how patriarchy is still deeply embedded in these societies, leaving women to their second-rate role. Bachiri & Bounou define the marginalization of rural people as threefold: geographic, economic, and social²³⁸ although, none of the participants reported to feel this exclusion. The reasons can be found later, when the interview entered in the part focused on the inclusion of marginalized groups.

All women interviewed reported a large percentage of disadvantaged women employed in the cooperatives. The disadvantaged groups mentioned were divorced women and widows. When asking if employment could help marginalized people to become more integrated in the society, the replies were such as: “[...] Having a job can really help

²³⁸ H. Bachiri & S. Bounou, *Entrepreneurship and Traditional Know-How: The Case of Moroccan Rural Women*, in “Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies” (2019), pp. 1-42.

marginalized individuals integrate into society. For example, a divorced woman without a job might feel like a burden because she can't support herself. But if she finds work, she can improve her social situation and become an active member of her community."²³⁹

*"[...] The income they earn helps them improve their economic situation, which in turn helps to some extent in improving their social status. This is precisely the cooperative's role; it provides work opportunities for all categories equally."*²⁴⁰

To conclude this part, the respondents were asked which systems cooperatives imply to assist women who may face societal challenges. The support systems named were: (a) transportation support, addressed to women living far from the workplace; (b) distributing food baskets; (c) sharing annual profits with the employees at the end of the year as assistance; (d) accepting all the applicants who wish to become members of the cooperative, the only criteria for joining the cooperative is *"to be serious about the work"*²⁴¹; (e) offering higher pay to seasonal workers in critical social situations.

These support systems have a pivotal role for women who experience a double burden. Indeed, economic marginalization become even more severe when a second layer of exclusion emerges, a status as social outcast. Berwick L. V. (2017) highlighted how single mothers' job opportunities are highly confined, often forcing them to be exploited or to choose dangerous jobs.²⁴² This treatment is also reserved for widows or divorced women²⁴³ thus, cooperatives can represent a safer workplace for the categories abovementioned to earn a decent living.

²³⁹ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 12 July 2025.

²⁴⁰ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 21 May 2025.

²⁴¹ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 13 May 2025.

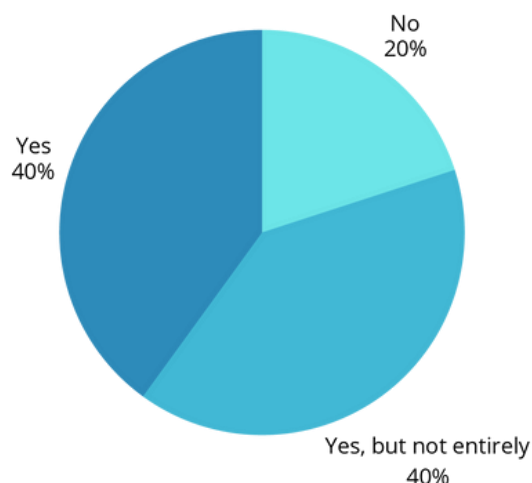
²⁴² L. V. Berwick, *Single mothers in Morocco: Social stigma and struggle for identity*, University of London, London 2017, pp. 1-51.

²⁴³ A. Lenoël, *The "three ages" of left-behind Moroccan wives: Status, decision-making power, and access to resources*, in "Population, space and place", 23(8) (2017), pp. 1-11.

4.3.4 Empowerment Perceptions: how Employment Can Improve Women's Self-esteem.

Even though empowerment definitions have already been given, the research wants to investigate in which ways women in question perceive it. The employment of this method allows to give voice to the participants and examine the nuances of their narratives and experiences. The word “empowerment” was not explicitly mentioned but the questions were centered on some aspects of the daily life which could help in the understanding of the development of empowerment process in their experience. First of all, respondents were asked if they felt more independent since they began to work, the results can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8, Answers to the question "Do you feel more independent in your daily life since you start to work?"



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The participant who declared that she was not more independent gave as justification the fact that now she has many obligations and responsibilities compared to before. To better understand the reasons behind the answer, the author is keen to point out that she is the president of the cooperative. Among women who replied “yes, but not entirely”, Lalla Aisha announced: *“Since 2018, the women and I have started to feel some independence. In the early years, women were not financially independent and covered cooperative expenses from their own money. Recently, they*

*have gradually begun to feel more independent. Although there isn't a stable income yet, I would estimate my sense of independence at about 80%.”*²⁴⁴

As for the women who answered yes, Yasmine declared: *“100%, [...] my parents respect me a lot more, I feel stronger, basically empowered, and I can take care of myself without seeking for help. I am more able to help my family. [...] I am very grateful that I got the chance to study and work, and that (was) thanks to them, because if they followed the structure of my society I wouldn't be able to be there.”*²⁴⁵

Regarding self-esteem the streak changes, all participants stated that the latter has increased since they started working in the cooperative.

*“I used to be very shy before joining the cooperative, but through various leadership and women's empowerment programs, offered by organizations such as the Interprofessional Federation of the Argan Sector, I have developed myself and strengthened my self-confidence.”*²⁴⁶

*“I don't know how to define it, but I feel like a different person, truly different. Before I was not even able to speak in front of people, I felt worthless but now I have my job, my studies, my own cooperative and I feel so much confident.”*²⁴⁷

*“I can say that after joining the cooperative, my self-confidence increased and I became more resilient, thanks to the training courses we receive and the various meetings with people that have helped strengthen my confidence.”*²⁴⁸

The programs and training courses mentioned appear to help women with the development of their soft skills and capacities as well. The results are

²⁴⁴ Even if the question had not been conceived as an indicator of economic independence only, the author preferred to not clarify it to maintain the conversation as free as possible. To obtain the most sincere and natural answers as possible, the tone of the conversation has always been friendly so as to put the participants at ease.

²⁴⁵ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 28 May 2025.

²⁴⁶ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 21 May 2025.

²⁴⁷ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 28 May 2025.

²⁴⁸ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 13 May 2025.

in agreement with what scholars such as Ahnach et al. (2025), Merroun (2025) and Benaissa (2025) found in their research. For example, the latter stated: “Women’s technical training, organization, awareness, and networks help them to promote their capacity building and financial support.”²⁴⁹ Furthermore, in small villages, women are more prompt to raise one another’s awareness about the importance of economic empowerment,²⁵⁰ playing a fundamental role in the formation of the new generations. The participants understand their role within the society and recognize how this can affect others and their words bear witness to this.

*“I now feel I play an important role, both in the cooperative and in society. At the cooperative, I am responsible for sales; if I am absent, no sales take place, and there is no stable income, which in turn affects employment opportunities for the women. In society I have empowered women, (for example by teaching) public speaking. [...] Other cooperatives now seek me out to benefit from my experience and receive my support.”*²⁵¹

*“I don’t feel that my role in the cooperative has changed my social standing, but it has allowed me to interact with people from different nationalities and communicate in various languages. So, I would say it has changed how I see myself.”*²⁵²

*“I feel like I am doing work that not everyone can do. I feel proud to help women improve their economic and social conditions and to help them come out of their shells and open up to society by teaching them how to express their ideas and opinions publicly. They have also learned how to save their income and become more practical than before.”*²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Benaissa, H., op. cit., p.86.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 28 June 2025.

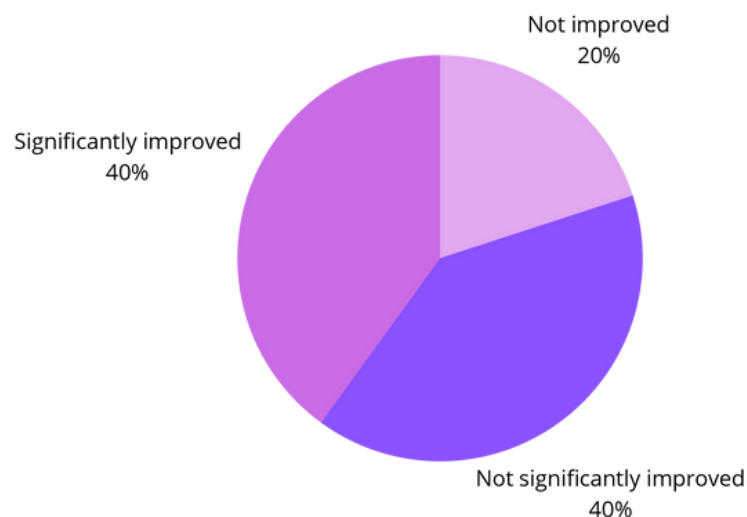
²⁵² Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 12 July 2025.

²⁵³ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 21 May 2025.

4.3.5 Towards Greater Financial Independence: Argan Oil Cooperatives as a Rare Alternative for Rural Women.

The cooperative model not only reinforce social and political agency but promote economic empowerment too.²⁵⁴ The work in question has as its main objective to verify if the argan oil cooperatives can lead the women who work there to obtain financial independence. The first step was asking the participants in which way their income level changed since joining the cooperative (see results in Table 9).

Table 9, Income changes since joining the cooperative



Source: author's own elaboration.

The women who represent the 20% in the table is Yasmine, the girl which is currently waiting for the documents needed to open the cooperative. Reading the full answer will certainly provide more useful information than the single data represented above:

“The project is still stagnant; we are just at the beginning and it’s not easy because [...] Argan is very expensive; we are trying to make it marketed but maybe we haven’t found the right audience yet. (We are using) mainly [...] Instagram but most of the people that bought it from us are people

²⁵⁴ A. Ibourek & S. Hninou, *Empowering women through agricultural cooperatives: a multilevel analysis in Morocco’s Marrakech-Safi region*, in “Discover Sustainability”, 6(1) (2025), pp. 1-22.

that we know, our contacts. The income has not changed, (the project) is still taking from us, not giving to us yet but we have the faith because we didn't create this for money but to make an impact, to support girls of our society both educationally and financially. Just the fact that we brought out this project is something to be proud of because it is not so common."²⁵⁵

Apart from this case, other two women mentioned that the salary is not fixed. Perry et al. (2019) discovered that, even if argan cooperatives were useful for the jobs offered to local women, most employees revealed that the profits were moderate. This is due to several factors: argan production is seasonal, work hours and pay are irregular, and many women have limited literacy and numeracy skills. Notwithstanding that, any income seems to make the difference for these women.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, Lalla Amina showed another common point with Yasmine, the prioritization of other gains rather than the simple income. *"I can say that the moral and emotional value I have gained, and continue to gain, is far greater than the financial income. Initially, I joined the cooperative with a moral goal: to help the women working there."*²⁵⁷

Four out of five women declared to be free to manage their earnings, specifying how they can act how they prefer regardless of everything and everyone. The remaining declared to share the administration of money with her husband. Two out of four²⁵⁸ revealed to split almost equally the major household expenses with their partner. The other two declared to contribute to minor expenses, leaving the rest to their husband. Merroun (2025) highlighted how financial contribution can lead to increasing control over household choices (e.g., children's education). This dynamic

²⁵⁵ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 28 May 2025.

²⁵⁶ W. Perry, O. Rappe, A. Boulhaoua, L. Hassan Loux, Y. Elhouss, H. Ait Ahssain, Z. Ait Barich, H. Akhiyat, T. A. Aznague & S. Hraïd, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁵⁷ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 13 May 2025.

²⁵⁸ One woman has not been included as she is not married and has no children.

is in accordance with the theory of intra-household bargaining power which argues that increasing an individual's economic resources improves their bargaining power within the household.²⁵⁹ Also, it is interesting that two women reported to manage their finances, even mentioning a wiser inspection of expenditures thanks to financial management training organized by the cooperative. These data are important because it has been proved the connection between women's participation in household decisions and increasing financing in education for children.²⁶⁰

4.4 Challenges and additional support.

Despite their positive effects, women's cooperatives in Morocco face significant barriers that limit their propensity to empower women.

Merroun (2025) listed access to finance as one of the main difficulties for women's cooperatives.²⁶¹ Indeed, Lalla Aisha and Yasmine both mentioned lack of capital as one of the biggest barriers they had to face when trying to establish their cooperative. Many traditional financial institutions are reluctant to give money to rural women, using as an excuse limited credit histories and a perception of high risk.²⁶² When loans are approved, they are generally low and internal financing cannot be allocated by the majority of cooperatives.²⁶³ At the same time, other studies found the exact opposite, Riding and Swift (1990) found no discrimination between gender when dealing with financial institutions.²⁶⁴ However, the establishment of a dedicated fund to support cooperatives should be considered as a possible way to alleviate the problem of

²⁵⁹ M. A. Merroun, op. cit., p.856.

²⁶⁰ O. Aboukhsaiwan, *Measuring the Impact of Income-Generating Projects on Women's Empowerment Outcomes: Evidence from Rural Morocco*, The Wharton School University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania 2014, pp. 1-25.

²⁶¹ M. A. Merroun, op. cit., p.858

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ W. Tribak, S. Rguig, *Women's rural cooperatives in Morocco: Challenges and collapses*, in "International Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies", 2(1) (2021), pp. 85-103.

²⁶⁴ H. Bouzekraoui & D. Ferhane, *An exploratory study of women's entrepreneurship in Morocco*, in "Journal of Entrepreneurship: Research & Practice" 2017 (2017), pp. 1-19.

financing. Such a mechanism would facilitate a progressive deviation from the welfare-based approach that has prevailed so far.²⁶⁵

Deeply rooted cultural norms continue to hinder women empowerment through imposed limitations in their participation in economic life. These limitations are further worsened by discriminatory practices related to inheritance and land ownership.²⁶⁶ Furthermore, the prioritization of private-public partnerships (PPPs) contributed to support land management and privatization by private companies and Multinational Enterprises.²⁶⁷ Addressing these problems require a comprehensive approach aimed at raising awareness both for men and women.²⁶⁸ As abovementioned, the sole example of women employed in these activities can raise awareness of their fellows, contributing to the questioning of gender rules. Although, this is just a first step that should be accompanied by state policies. Figure 16 shows a summary of the actions to be taken to reduce cultural constraints.²⁶⁹

Figure 16, Recommendations for a population aware of the benefits of equality and committed to social change.



²⁶⁵ Y. M. Alaoui & M. Zouiten, op. cit., p.189.

²⁶⁶ M. A. Merroun, op. cit., p.858.

²⁶⁷ B. Montanari, M. Handaine & J. Id Bourrous, *Argan oil trade and access to benefit sharing: a matter of economic survival for rural women of the Souss Massa, Morocco*, in “Human Ecology”, 51(5) (2023), p. 1003.

²⁶⁸ M. A. Merroun, op. cit., p.858.

²⁶⁹ OCDE, *L'autonomisation économique des femmes au Maroc, de l'engagement à la mise en œuvre*, Éditions OCDE, Paris 2024, pp.1-165.

Source: OCDE (2024).

Most women's cooperatives work in handicrafts and production of regional products, risking incurring in market volatility, external shocks and rising competition. The case of argan oil cooperatives is further exacerbated by the seasonality of the product. Compared to other cooperatives, argan oil is advantaged by the developing of its high value and by the high national and international demand. At the same time, this plus made it more vulnerable to competition. In this case, collaboration between cooperatives and other actors across the value chain can improve market access and reinforce their bargaining position.²⁷⁰ Training in diverse fields can help too in enhancing production and productivity. To improve competitiveness of cooperative products all aspects of marketing need to be carefully considered.²⁷¹

All the respondents introduced the issue of marketing when speaking of additional support which would help them raising their level of financial independence. "Marketing is about commercializing the product to costumers; it is a social process through which individuals connect to attain their needs and desires."²⁷² Successful marketing is highly connected with solid management; however, most of rural women face serious barriers to accessing markets and establish a fair price due to limited education and the absence of good marketing strategies. As a result, their products are frequently sold at low prices to intermediaries, who benefit disproportionately from this imbalance.²⁷³ Marketing and distribution systems are often outdated, such as specialized exhibitions and fairs.²⁷⁴ Addressing marketing education should be a priority for

²⁷⁰ M. A. Merroun, op. cit., p.859.

²⁷¹ B. Bennani, op. cit., p. 182.

²⁷² W. Tribak, S. Rguig, op. cit., p.98.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ K. Didi, K & H. Attouch, *Dynamique Coopérative au Maroc et Nouveau Modèle de Développement*, In "International Journal of Financial Accountability, Economics, Management, and Auditing", 4(2) (2022), pp. 205-223.

policymakers when trying to support women empowerment in Morocco.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, the digital revolution can open women's cooperatives to new opportunities.²⁷⁶ All the respondents had either an Instagram or Facebook page but none of them mentioned any actual usefulness of these. Technical lessons on topics such as online retail, virtual assistance and digital content creation could help to improve the situation of these cooperatives.²⁷⁷

Women's status within cooperatives remains to a great extent deregulated, without receiving social security coverage or social assistance.²⁷⁸ The fact that cooperatives do not fall within the main taxation categories, bring to the lack of legal recognition as salaried employment. As a result, employees' ability to translate work and expertise into lasting economic security is limited.²⁷⁹ To address these hindrances, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (EESC) has advanced some recommendations for policymakers (see Figure 17). Although, situation seems not to have changed, for example Angade (2024) found that in 2022 only 6 out of 105 cooperatives had social coverage.²⁸⁰ The government should mandate cooperatives to register cooperatives workers with CNSS or at least an adjusted program for cooperatives. Also, modifying the requisites to access public funding such as INDH could improve the current situation. It is recommended adding proofs of social security enrollment for women workers as a condition to obtain these funds.

²⁷⁵ W. Tribak, S. Rguig, op. cit., p.99.

²⁷⁶ F. Z. Abidi & Y. Samihi, op. cit., p.11.

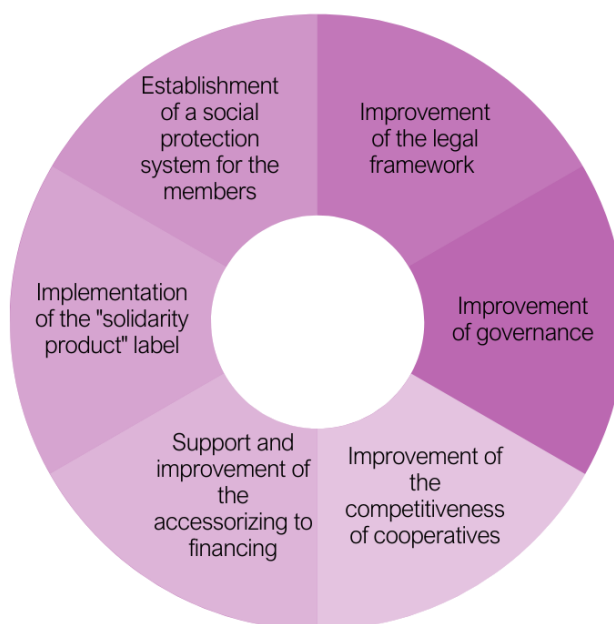
²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ K. Angade, op. cit., p.24.

²⁷⁹ W. Tribak, S. Rguig, op.cit., p. 90.

²⁸⁰ K. Angade (2024), op. cit., p.24.

Figure 17, The action measures proposed by the EESC (2015)



Source: Author's translation from Didi & Attouch (2022).

More than that, one of the respondents denounced a serious situation:

“A lot of cooperatives are business acting as a cooperative just to gain more support from INDH. These cooperatives are lead from family members and most of them are widowed women, a lot of women who need help and don't have financial support. My grandmother is one of the women that work in these cooperatives. [...] They don't respect the laws of the cooperative, they take over the money, the incomes, and they basically exploit these women. A lot of times you will find the president with a brand-new car, very nice clothes while the employees are cracking the argan nuts. The situation is not very good, and these women were paid basically nothing, sometimes they don't even get paid.”²⁸¹

Accordingly, Perry et al. found that women working in argan oil cooperatives were often exposed to exploitation, especially when

²⁸¹ Chiara Porcheri, personal interview, 28 May 2025.

managers lacked basic skills and experience.²⁸² While according to other authors the benefits are clear, particularly in improved access to food, healthcare, clean water and education, as well as greater financial autonomy.²⁸³

To overcome these problems, cooperatives should be subjected to careful checks to verify the absence of any possible exploitation of employees. Furthermore, as Montanari et al. (2023) proposed, the adoption by the government of mechanisms that guarantee women receive financial access-and-benefit-sharing contributions in the recognition of the traditional knowledge associated with the early stages of argan oil production.²⁸⁴ Working in cooperatives is an important source of income for rural women, and thus households. These circumstances, involving exploitation, in addition to harming the women who suffer them firsthand, can profoundly harm the cooperative system and must be stopped as soon as possible.

Conclusion.

The analysis conducted in this thesis show how female empowerment in Morocco is a complex and gradual process, highly influenced by socio-cultural factors. Despite the progress recorded, women continue to experience forms of exclusion that limit their access to education, employment and consequently economic independence. The protectorate period has certainly brought various changes in Moroccan society, of particular importance for the topic covered is the loosening of the dichotomy public vs. private space, which has allowed women to

²⁸² W. Perry, O. Rappe, A. Boulhaoua, L. Hassan Loux, Y. Elhouss, H. Ait Ahssain, Z. Ait Barich, H. Akhiyat, T. A. Aznague & S. Hraïd, op. cit., p.11.

²⁸³ A. Santoro, V. Ongoma, M. Ait el Kadi, F. Piras, B. Fiore, A. Bazzurro, F. Romano, B. Meskour, M. Hssaisoune, A. Labbaci, A. Tairi, T. Chfadi & L. Bouchaou, *Innovation of argan (Argania spinosa (L.) Skeels) products and byproducts for sustainable development of rural communities in Morocco. A systematic literature review*, in “Biodiversity and Conservation”, 34(9) (2025), pp. 3211-3239.

²⁸⁴ B. Montanari, M. Handaine & J. Id Bourrous, op.cit., p.1004.

increasingly entering the labor market. More importantly, this brought to increasing women's interest in bargaining power, arriving at the creation of the firsts women's rights movements in the country. The battles of these women led, among many achievements, to the change of the Moroccan Constitution in 2011, where the principles of equality and non-discrimination among genders were introduced. Furthermore, the King declared Tamazight the official language of Morocco alongside Arabic. Although the country's progress is undeniable, many serious problems remain, especially in rural areas which often lack of significant infrastructures. Furthermore, until the State ensures greater participation of women in decision-making processes, a structural weakness persist within the system.

Analyzing the topic of education, a significant growth in the enrollment of children is visible. Although, this index alone has a little significance when taking into account the quality of education. In Morocco, problems such as early dropout, female illiteracy (especially in rural areas), inequality of opportunity and scarcity of pre-schools persists notwithstanding the policies implemented. Cultural norms continue hindering women's access both in education and workplace, mainly related to the traditional association of women and house care. Other barriers observed involved the presence of stereotypes in the textbooks and the underrepresentation of the female gender in higher positions (e.g., school principal). These obstacles get worse in rural areas, where the former add to lack of infrastructures, linguistic problems (lessons are taught in Arabic rather than local language), and the prioritization of men's education against that of women. Even if educational attainment alone does not mean increased access in the labor market, it still influences it to some extent. Limited access to higher education often translates in women's lack of specific skills, hindering their access to high-pay jobs. Consequently, women are mainly employed in sectors such as care work, agriculture and services,

leading to increasing occupational segregation of the gender. For this reason, access to education and its quality can be considered a catalyst for women economic independence and must be improved.

Women's participation rates in the labor market are worrying low and further decreasing and this indicator himself cannot incorporate the multifaceted reality of women's struggles in accessing the job market. As mentioned before, women experience unequal access to employment opportunities and when they manage to find employment, it often is in the usual few sectors. Occupational segregation brings with it the vulnerability of this employment, low wages and major subjection to external contingencies. As in the education field, socio-cultural norms are proven to be one of the major causes preventing women accessing the job market. Social expectations frequently position women as housewives and mothers, relegating them to these roles without recognizing that this is unpaid work. To address this imbalance, ILO has recently advocated for the remuneration of care work, as well as for the representation of care workers in social dialogue with employers and the State. Additional policies include gender budgeting, the enlargement of childcare facilities and the promotion of flexible working arrangements.

Within this framework, argan oil cooperatives represent a significant opportunity for women. Those cooperatives are ideally established and managed by women, members frequently hold voting rights, receive a wage (usually not fixed) as well as a share of the cooperative's profit. Theoretically, cooperatives should also provide literacy programs and childcare services but unfortunately it is rare to find these facilities. Although, evidence show that sometimes literacy programs existed but were interrupted due to lack of interest of the participants.

The results emerged from both theoretical analysis and interviews, show that employment in cooperatives contribute to improving general living conditions of the women involved. Among the main benefits the

participants mentioned a source of income which allow them to participate to major household expenses, opportunities for socialization and, in some cases, access to literacy and training programs. Notwithstanding those positive effects were found, full financial independence cannot always be achieved. The mere fact that salary is not fixed represents a problem, but the main difficulty shared by all the research participants was marketing. At the same time, employment in cooperatives goes beyond the economic dimensions, especially when looking from an empowerment perspective. The respondents demonstrated growing self-esteem, improving management funds and a general feeling of satisfaction. Many have shown awareness of the role they play within society, particularly evaluating their pride in owning a cooperative and the outcomes it brings with that. They are proud to be able to help other women in turn and to be an example for future generations.

However, many lacks emerged, such as limited presence of childcare services and, more importantly, existence of women exploitation, low wages and lack of regulation and medical coverage. These conditions not only undermine women's income security but also reinforce cycles of vulnerability and dependence. Yet these challenges also highlight an important opportunity. When properly regulated women's cooperatives can go beyond their role as income-generating activities and be key agents of women empowerment. By introducing a comprehensive approach which involves expanding access to education, legal protection, healthcare coverage and childcare facilities cooperatives can increase women social and economic recognition.

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