

MOROCCO

Inequity in the economic and private spheres



Morocco has seen some institutional advances in the promotion of the situation of women but there has been no progress in economic or social rights, and there are still great disparities between the urban and rural parts of the country. Equality and autonomy for women must be promoted not only in public life but in the private sphere as well since the traditional role of women has always been restricted to procreation and domestic chores.

Espace Associatif

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In Morocco over the last ten years there has been some improvement in civil, political and cultural rights. Civil rights organizations have been pressuring the Government to recognize and correct the errors of the past. A new Family Code has been promulgated, and this is one of the main victories of women's rights groups. However there has not been any significant progress in the area of economic and social rights in recent years. In fact the country has lost some ground. Proof of this is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index, in which Morocco slipped from the 117th position in 1995 to 126th in 1999, then to 123rd in 2002, and rose to 126th again in 2003.¹

In its 2000-2004 social development strategy to fight against poverty and exclusion the Government promised to make an effort to remedy this,² but results have not met expectations. Urban areas are still better off than rural areas (74% of poor people live in rural areas) and men are better off than women. These inequalities are worsening.

In Moroccan culture the man's traditional role is to provide for the family's economic needs and the women's role has always been limited to woman's procreation and to domestic chores. These gender relations are deeply rooted in social life, so policies, action and mobilizations to promote equality and autonomy have to be geared not only to the professional environment and the job market but also to private life and the family. It is difficult to bring about this kind of change from the political sphere.

Human rights at the crossroads

In 2004 the organization Human Rights Watch published a report entitled *Maroc: droits humains à la croisée des chemins* ("Morocco: Human Rights at the Crossroads") which chronicled what has been achieved in this area but which also stressed that the country has regressed in some areas recently.

1 Espace Associatif and Droit et Démocratie. *Développement démocratique et action associative au Maroc, éléments d'analyse et axes d'intervention*. Canada, 2004.

2 Morocco is a democratic parliamentary monarchy. King Sayyidi Muhammad VI ibn al-Hassan came to the throne in 1999, there has been a bicameral legislative since 1996, and since 2002 Driss Jettou has been Prime Minister.

In the last 10 years a series of political and institutional reforms to improve civil and political rights have been implemented:

- A consultative human rights council was set up in 1990, and was re-structured in 2002.
- A Human Rights Ministry was set up in 1993, but under the last Government it was dissolved.
- Political prisoners were released and people in exile were allowed back into the country in 1991, 1993, 1994 and 1999.
- A bicameral legislature was formed in 1996, and in 1998 an alternating government was established.
- In 2001 the Royal Amazigh (Berber) Cultural Institute was founded.
- Positive discrimination in favour of women has been initiated: 10.8% of elected representatives were women in 2002.
- In 2004 Parliament promulgated the new Family Code.
- In 2004 an Agency of Equity and Reconciliation (IER) was set up to investigate violations of human rights that took place during the so-called Years of Lead.³

In spite of all this, the country has not escaped the worldwide erosion of rights and civil liberties in the name of the fight against terrorism following the attacks of 11 September 2001. Morocco also passed anti-terrorist legislation in the wake of attacks in Casablanca in May 2003.⁴ Human Rights Watch emphasizes the positive aspects of the IER, highlights the errors and excesses committed with impunity under cover of the legislation against terrorism, and recognizes that it is important for the Judiciary to be reformed and independent.

Gender equity ten years after Beijing

In March 1998 the Moroccan Government started work on a plan of action to integrate women into

development. This was in line with its national and international commitments, above all those made at the Platform of Action of the IV World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995. The plan was supported by NGOs, and it was a demonstration of the Government's will to promote women's rights and to bring the most disadvantaged sectors fully into the development process.⁵ However, the very Government which made the plan did not adopt it, and simply ignored pressure from a considerable social movement demanding its implementation.

Nevertheless, some changes have come about thanks to the Platform of Action that was set at the Beijing Conference:

- A Secretariat of State for the Family, Women, Children and the Disabled was created, dependent on the Ministry of Social Development. Its main function is to promote and coordinate policies and interventions directed at women. This objective corresponds to Paragraph 201 of the Beijing Platform.
- The main ministerial departments have now included a gender approach in their agenda with the aim to guarantee sectorial follow-up of policies directed at women.
- A project was set in motion to bring the gender perspective into the various statistical indicators produced by the Statistics Board, in accordance with UNDP and United Nations Development Fund for Women guidelines.
- A Faculty of Women and Development has been set up at the University of Mohammed V in Rabat, and doctorate courses are offered in this subject.
- On the national lists of candidates for elections to the legislature, 10% of the places are reserved for women.
- The makeup of the Consultative Council for Human Rights was modified after 14 NGOs were admitted: it was widened to include 47 members, and instead of only one woman there are now seven.
- In January 2004 the two parliamentary chambers passed a new Family Code which amounted to some measure of progress as

3 A period of political and social repression that began at the start of the 1970s after an upsurge of students' movements, workers' strikes and various attempted military coups. King Hassan II put an end to this in 1975 with the so-called Green March to occupy a sector of the Sahara that was still in the hands of Spanish colonialists, thus silencing the forces of the left.

4 Human Rights Watch, *op cit*.

5 Moroccan Democratic Women's Association (ADFM). *Convention CEDAW, Rapport parallèle*. 2003.

regards the principles of equality between men and women, polygamy, justice, and the protection of the rights of children.⁶

- Morocco (along with Cambodia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Peru) was chosen as a pilot country for the 2005 report on the introduction of a gender perspective into the evaluation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Women's rights associations and other organizations in Moroccan civil society have taken initiatives to improve conditions for women and to strengthen their position in society, with special attention to the most vulnerable women.⁷ This has yielded some positive results including the following:

- Various centres giving legal information and guidance for women have been inaugurated.
- Campaigns have been run to raise awareness about equality, combat violence and promote human rights, tolerance and citizenship.
- There were contributions for follow-up on the application of the new Family Code.
- Evaluation of the impact of reforms and action to improve women's civil rights and to fight against the feminization of poverty and precarious living conditions.
- There was a debate about the institutionalization of quotas for women in political participation.
- Progress was made in eliminating ambiguities between the role of the State and that of NGOs in satisfying women's rights.
- Consensus has been reached on the need to bring women into the development process as a whole, creating a democratic perspective not only of economic and social rights but also of human rights in general.

The feminization of poverty and vulnerability

In recent years the Government, working alongside international financial bodies, has announced diverse programmes for development and to combat poverty.⁸ It also reaffirmed that 55% of the 2005 State budget would go to social projects.⁹ Nevertheless, poverty in Morocco is still more widespread and serious than in other countries with a similar level of income.

Until the results from the September 2004 census carried out by the High Commissioner for Planning (ACP) are released, the latest available data about poverty are from the 1998-1999 Household National Living Standard Survey (ENNVH).¹⁰ In June

2004 the ACP published a letter about poverty that was written jointly with the World Bank.¹¹

There is more poverty in rural areas.¹² In 1990-1991 the percentage of poor people in the rural areas was much higher than in urban areas (12% to 7.6% respectively), and in 1998-1999 the figures were 27% to 18% respectively.

The relative poverty thresholds used for the 1998-1999¹³ ENNVH survey are defined as an annual income of MAD 3,922 (USD 451) in urban areas and MAD 3,037 (USD 349) in the rural areas.

Morocco has 30 million inhabitants, of these 6 million are poor, and 74% of the poor live in rural areas. Added to this, a significant number of people are living on incomes below MAD 4,500 (USD 517) per year, which means they are vulnerable and they could sink into poverty and a precarious situation at any time. This sector represents 43% of the total population and includes 33% of urban inhabitants and 55% of those in rural areas. This general situation should be borne in mind when analyzing the feminization of poverty and when designing policies to prevent it and to reduce social inequality.¹⁴

About half of Morocco's population are illiterate and more than 65% of this total are women. In rural areas 73% of women are illiterate, and the figure for urban areas is 46%. The percentage of people over 10 years of age who cannot read or write increased from 45.3% in 1994 to 51.7% in 1998.

In the area of health services, again there are great differences between rural and urban areas. Morocco has 46 doctors per 100,000 people but 44% of these live in just two cities: Casablanca and Rabat. In the countryside the rate of maternal mortality is 307 per 100,000 live births but in urban centres it is 125 per 100,000 live births, and the differences between the rural and urban rates of infant and child mortality are also very great.

According to the latest ACP report, unemployment increased from 11.9% in 2003 to 12.5% in 2004. In the countryside the rise was from 3.2% to 4.1%, and in cities from 19.6% to 19.8%. Overall there was a slight decrease in the number of unemployed men, but the percentage of women out of work rose from 12.2% to 14.2%. In the country as a whole unemployment among the active female population increased from 28.4% to 33.2%, therefore the growth in unemployment among the active population (85.3%) is explained by the increase in unemployment among women.¹⁵

A survey carried out by the Statistics Board in 2001¹⁶ showed that about 52.9% of people over 15 years of age are economically active, and of these some three quarters are men and one-quarter women. Women tend to work in jobs that are lower paid, and this makes them more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.

The inequalities between men and women in the area of poverty can be approached from two angles: on the one hand there is monetary inequality (differences in income or expenses), and on the other hand there is the satisfaction of basic needs - food, housing, health and education - which is a qualitative concept of poverty.

The monetary focus, and data from the 1998-1999 ENNVH survey, suggest that poverty affects men and women almost to the same extent: 18.9% of men are poor and 19.1% of women are poor. In rural areas 27.1% of men and 27.2% of women are poor. These data would seem to indicate that, when it comes to poverty, there are no noteworthy differences between men and women. However, this panorama changes when age and marital status are taken into account because when these two variables are included in the calculations it emerges that the likelihood of being poor and of remaining poor is far greater for women than for men. In the 35 to 44 age bracket there are far more females who are poor, and this applies particularly to women who are single, widowed or divorced. In many cases these women did not work before becoming divorced or widowed, and they suddenly find themselves in a precarious situation. Sometimes a woman is forced to leave the family home and hand it over to her husband's relatives, who are his heirs.

Differences also appear when poverty is analyzed according to the sex of the head of the household: in urban areas 16.9% of poor households have female heads but in rural areas the figure is only 5% because, outside the cities, there are still networks of solidarity and support. Poor households with female heads tend to be big (five to eight children) compared to those in which the head is a man. Under these circumstances women are unable to provide adequate schooling, health services, food or housing for their children, and thus poverty is passed on to the next generation and they are obliged into work in the informal sector.

Employment legislation offers men and women the same possibilities in employment and an increasing number of women are entering into the labour market. In spite of this the market is still dominated by men, and in all the different categories women's unemployment is higher. What is needed is action on a worldwide scale to bring about a general improvement in the situation of women, particularly in the job market, so as to be able to fight against the stereotyped roles that are assigned to men and women in society as a whole. ■

5 Moroccan Democratic Women's Association (ADFM). *Convention CEDAW, Rapport parallèle*. 2003.

6 United Nations Development Programme. *Rapport de développement humain dans le monde arabe*. 2004.

7 ADFM, *op cit*.

8 *Rapport national sur les Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement*. 2003.

9 Presentation of the "Plan for Social and Territorial Development", Rabat, April 2005.

10 Statistics Board. *National Survey of the Level of Life in Households 1998-1999*.

11 High Commission for Planning. *La carte de la pauvreté communale*, June 2004.

12 World Bank. *Rapport sur la pauvreté: comprendre les dimensions géographiques de la pauvreté pour en améliorer l'appréhension à travers les politiques publiques*. 2004.

13 Statistics Board, *op cit*.

14 Statistics Board. *Rapport de l'atelier: Femmes et hommes au Maroc: Analyse de la situation et évolution des écarts dans une perspective du genre*. March 2003.

15 Higher Committee for Population. *Population et Développement au Maroc: dix ans après la Conférence Internationale sur la Population et le Développement (Cairo, 1994)*. 2004.

16 Statistics Board. *Annuaire Statistique 2001*.