

WOMEN'S TRACES

Magazine N°2 - May 2023



PATHS TO EQUALITY AND EMANCIPATION







PATHS TO EQUALITY AND EMANCIPATION

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Editorial

LUIS MORA

Resident Representative of the United Nations Population Fund

Women's right to sexual and reproductive health is closely linked to a number of fundamental rights: The right to education, to respect and non-discrimination, to access to health services, to employment, to political participation and so on. This includes access to information on sexual and reproductive health, contraception, family planning, the right to have children or not, when and how many, free from coercion and violence. It is the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, which is a major determinant of a woman's success in all other areas of her life and in the socio-economic development of her community and country.

When it comes to women's sexual and reproductive health rights, Morocco has undeniably made significant progress. It was the first country in the Arab region to set up a national family planning program in the 1970s, under the aegis of His Late Majesty King Hassan II. This program, carried out in a very sustained and consistent manner, has produced very significant results.

Firstly, there are major results in terms of women's ability to choose the wanted number of children, the spacing of births and the means of contraception. As a result, the risks of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality have been considerably reduced, and contraceptive prevalence is now close to 70%.

These indicators reflect the successful partnership between the Moroccan government and a dynamic and active civil society, particularly when it comes to women's rights. This partnership also has seen a major

turning point in 2021 with the creation of the first consortium for the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls, with the participation of seven civil society organizations and the support of UNFPA. This is a first in the Arab and African region, and reflects the virtuous partnership between the Moroccan government, notably the Ministry of Health, Moroccan civil society and the United Nations system, in particular UNFPA.

The consortium contributes to monitoring the implementation of public health policies in Morocco, in particular the realization of the national sexual and reproductive health strategy 2021-2030. This strategy, that includes for the first time unmarried women as beneficiaries, is part of a new generation of public policies and national strategies that also include the second national health strategy for adolescents and young people 2022-2030, the National Health and Disability Plan 2022-2026, the national health strategy for the elderly and the health of migrants. Adding to this are the efforts made in the fight against child marriage.

That said, there are still major challenges ahead. The Moroccan government is aware of this and is particularly interested in finding solutions adapted to the Moroccan reality and context. In my opinion, the major challenge is to improve the quality of sexual and reproductive health services for women, especially in high-risk cases. Significant progress has been made, but gaps remain between regions and between urban and rural areas. The maternal mortality rate, especially in rural

areas, remains high compared with other countries at the same level of socio-economic development.

It is also important to improve sexual and reproductive health prevention initiatives, particularly among young people, women of reproductive age and girls. These actions will undoubtedly help to prevent unsafe abortions and unwanted pregnancies. Women, especially young girls, are confronted with unwanted pregnancies, sometimes as a result of sexual violence, and many times as a result of ignorance about sexual and reproductive health. It's an issue we'll be focusing on in the years to come. No woman should die in childbirth, and no girl should have to undergo a clandestine, unsafe abortion.

In Morocco, our approach has multiple dimensions. First of all, there's the spirit of UNFPA's cross-disciplinary mandate, affecting a diverse population. Our dimension is linked to understanding the issues, whether in terms of women's rights, health or youth. These relate to societal issues, changes in mentality and behavior, as well as profound changes in the conceptualization and implementation of national policies and strategies.

As part of our multi-sector, multi-factor approach, we have a facilitating and catalytic role to play, and as a United Nations agency, we bring to the table issues that we believe are essential to Morocco's development. Sometimes they are not openly discussed because of perceptions and stereotypes, which do not reflect the maturity of Moroccan society to conduct calm discussions and that of Moroccan institutions that recognize the challenges and difficulties and are



Over the next few years, we will be focusing on young people aged 15-24, especially girls and young people living in rural areas. A high-potential age bracket that could become a real driver of development for the country.

ready to find innovative solutions.

In this context, the issue of menstrual hygiene comes to mind. Three years ago, we proposed the celebration of International Menstrual Hygiene Day for the first time in Morocco. Under the theme «The rights and well-being of adolescent girls and young women in public policy in Morocco», the event was attended by a large number of institutions and partners. Last year, it was civil society, with the support of the CNDH, that carried the torch. This year, it is the Ministry of Solidarity that is celebrating the event. The aim is to break the taboo and give women and girls, especially the most vulnerable, access to information, education and sanitary protection. The aim is also to combat early school leaving and, beyond that, early marriage and motherhood. This initiative demonstrates once again how virtuous our partnership with the Moroccan government is, under the aegis and leadership of Moroccan institutions.

As part of our approach, we have chosen to open up to a variety of key players for example, women's health, that cannot be addressed by the Ministry of Health alone. It is at the heart of our partnership with the Ministry of Employment to carry the subject of the women's health in the workplace. Religious leaders are local players who already play an extraordinary role in their communities. Involving them in these issues such as women's rights, gender-based violence and equality strengthen their role in supporting



Moroccan society as it undergoes profound change. We have signed a partnership agreement with the adouls for the supervision of new couples and we are counting on a partnership with the pharmacists for the transmission of correct and precise health information. We also plan to approach occupational physicians to reach women in the workplace. In fact, each of these different local players makes its own contribution.

We have a virtuous partnership with Global Affairs Canada which has made a commitment to the Women's Agenda in Morocco, and in particular to the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls, by becoming a bilateral donor. This partnership has produced significant results in terms of public policy, work at community level, capacity building for civil society and advocacy, debate and the search for innovative solutions. For us, the future is even more important. We are convinced that Morocco's success in women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights, is the success of the Arab world and Africa. In the current favorable context, with the support of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the

new development model and the government, Morocco is capable of making a historic leap forward in terms of women's rights and becoming a model and beacon for the entire Arab and African region.

Interview

Nell Stewart

Canadian Ambassador to Morocco



For women to be able to fully exercise their rights, they must be able to live free from all forms of violence.

Capacity building in the defense of women's and girls' reproductive rights is part of the "Promotion of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality in Morocco" project funded by Canada. In your opinion, how can promoting these rights ensure women's full participation in society?

First of all, I would like to congratulate UNFPA-Morocco on all the project's achievements as a whole, **for the wealth of its actions and the relevance of its responses to the essential and pressing needs of women and girls in vulnerable situations.**

Inclusive and sustainable economic development and the reduction of inequalities cannot be achieved without the development and full participation of all the living forces of nations, men and women together. **Support for sexual and reproductive rights in particular is important for achieving the sustainable development goals to which Morocco has subscribed. This support is also essential for advancing a number of priorities on the Moroccan government's agenda for equality between women and men.**

By emphasizing the need to work

towards deconstructing discriminatory social norms and promoting equality, as well as the importance of integrating it into public policies, the promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights helps to free women from their constraints, improve their well-being and thus guarantee their full participation as citizens. It is an essential right for women in the same way as all the others, as well as being a symbol of the full emancipation of women, and it is important to maintain efforts and actions to defend and promote these rights.

Morocco has taken important steps in the fight against gender-based violence and child marriage. What are the main contributions of the projects supported by Canada to these significant advances?

For women to be able to fully exercise their rights, they must be able to live free from all forms of violence. If a woman or a girl is not safe in her home, in her workplace, in her city, in the public space, then it will be impossible for her to realize her full potential and contribute to the economic and social development of her country. For her family, the consequences are just as disastrous, and the effects can be felt for generations. That's why we must do everything we can, tirelessly, to free ourselves from this evil that is eating away at our societies, and work as hard as we can to raise awareness and change behavior.

The "Improved prevention and response to violence against women in Morocco" project, which we are supporting and which is being implemented by UN Women, works to prevent violence before it occurs. The project aims to bring about a profound change that will enable women to enjoy their rights, including socio-economic rights, and to

participate fully in society. The project has achieved a great deal, in particular through the hard work of the various partner institutions, including the Directorate General of National Security and the Royal Gendarmerie, in setting up structures dedicated to receiving and caring for victims of gender-based violence.

The Canadian funding granted to UNFPA-Morocco is aimed at strengthening its activities in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. This partnership is based on a shared vision of the importance of advancing the availability of sexual and reproductive health services and promoting the right to access these services without discrimination, violence or coercion. The multidimensional nature of sexual and reproductive health and rights requires a gender-sensitive, rights-based approach. Such a rights-based approach is fundamental because in many cases, access to basic health services is denied for reasons of poverty, culture, social considerations or inequality. Like UNFPA, Canada supports the goal of ensuring that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every girl and woman is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

In terms of women's economic empowerment, the projects we support in the argan, cedar and rosemary, crafts, olive oil and other sectors systematically incorporate gender equality issues and the fight against all forms of violence against women. These projects also offer training in women's leadership, financial management and literacy, with the main aim of building women's capacities and protecting them from any injustice they may



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If a woman or a girl is not safe in her home, in her workplace, in her city, in the public space, then it will be impossible for her to realize her full potential and contribute to the economic and social development of her country.

was undeniable during the COVID period, as well as in the post-COVID period. Could you tell us about the prospects for your involvement in the coming years and the potential themes that are close to your heart?

Our interventions are part of our Feminist International Aid Policy. Our involvement is here to stay, complementing other areas of action such as the fight against climate change and the preservation of biodiversity, food safety, health and education. The primary objective of our development cooperation program is to reduce poverty and support the most vulnerable, especially women and girls. We believe that the best way to combat poverty and marginalization is to strengthen the power, effective representation and empowerment of women. This approach has paid off so far, and there's no reason to pull out when there's still so much to do.

suffer simply because they are women.

How does Global Affairs Canada contribute, through its various interventions, to consolidating the gains made and going further in the fight against gender-based violence and child marriage?

Canada has a long history of promoting women's rights and gender equality. Since the early 2000s, Canadian cooperation has implemented a number of projects and funds in support of gender equality, which have contributed to major advances with our Moroccan partners. Since 2018, our Feminist International Aid Policy has focused our actions and placed emphasis on the rights and empowerment of

women and girls, with several strands including combating violence against women and child marriage. As you can see, our policy and our support are based on continuity, coherence and strengthening the power and well-being of women and girls.

We support all initiatives aimed at defending and preserving the rights and dignity of women and girls. We are doing this in coordination with our Moroccan partners, and I have to say that the political will at the highest level and the great strides Morocco has made in these areas are commendable and open the way to effective and productive collaboration.

The support of Global Affairs Canada, with the backing of UNFPA in Morocco,

KEY FIGURES

Public policy support

For a normative framework based on rights, the Project has continued to support public policies that promote multi-sector synergies to bring about transformative change.

In 2022, the national sexual and reproductive health strategy will become operational, with the establishment of governance bodies, the production of a reference tool and guide, and the finalization of the National Strategy for Adolescent and Youth Health.

Nearly 3 million people reached by awareness campaigns

In order to strengthen the transformative impact on gender at institutional and community level,

8 campaigns were launched by the partners to promote gender equality, deconstruct discriminatory social norms, combat gender-based violence and promote positive masculinity, reaching almost 3 million people.

Innovative approaches to promoting SRH rights and gender equality

By bringing about visible change in the populations concerned, the project has integrated new artistic, digital and community dimensions to achieve the ultimate result of promoting sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality:

- More than **28,000 young people**, 80% of them girls, took part in innovative concrete actions, demonstrating a positive attitude towards eliminating gender-based violence
- Over **10,000 men and boys** have been empowered to change discriminatory attitudes and social norms
- And almost **700 religious leaders**, 25% of them women, have been involved in developing an innovative training program on concepts relating to sexual and reproductive health

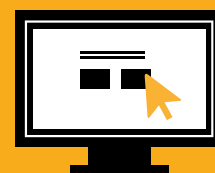
Access to SRH education, information and services

By adopting the principle of leaving no one behind, the project has focused on the most vulnerable populations to ensure access to education, information and quality sexual and reproductive health services.

- Around a **hundred girls and female instructors** have been trained using inclusive community approaches
- More than **3,000 women survivors** of violence have been cared for by partners in the 3 project regions
- And nearly **4,400 inmates** were reached by awareness-raising campaigns on sexual and reproductive health and gender equality in prisons

These concrete achievements are the fruit of close collaboration with various partners, which by 2022 will have added up to

- **9 Studies, policy briefs, memorandums and reports** prepared to inform public decision-making, including through South-South cooperation
- More than **760 associations** involved in advocacy for sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality, and 35 advocacy actions led by civil society organizations
- And more than **400 decision-makers** have been made aware of the issue and mobilized, and 46 pioneering measures have been established in policies, programs and the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, the fight against gender-based violence and comprehensive sex education



Nearly 3 million people

reached by eight awareness campaigns launched by partners in 2022



2 strategies

The National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and the National Strategy for Adolescent and Youth Health.



More than 28,000 young people

80% of them girls, involved in concrete actions against gender-based violence



More than 10,000 men and boys

trained to change discriminatory attitudes and social norms



46 pioneering measures

for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health rights and the fight against gender-based violence



More than 3,000 women survivors of violence cared for in the 3 project regions

Interview

Dr Yahyane Abdelhakim

Population Director

Gender equality: a response to health inequalities in Morocco

Gender differences, whether in diagnosis, access to care or prevention, remain a source of inequality. To combat them, the “health, gender and development” approach is put forward.



The impact of gender on health equity is a reality. What are the causes?

Social patterns linked to gender influence the behavior of healthcare users and providers alike. The connections between gender and health also provide food for thought about the influence of social and cultural determinants on health inequalities between the sexes. As an eloquent illustration, gender is indexed in many diseases, to the disadvantage of men in the case of male osteoporosis, which remains less researched in elderly patients, and in the case of myocardial infarction, which is under-diagnosed in women compared to men.

Several studies show that women are more informed about HIV infection and screening tests, whereas men are

more reserved about testing their serology, thus confirming the social pattern of the “strong man” versus the “weak woman”. Gender relations undoubtedly have a major impact on women’s and men’s perceptions of the disease.

Why does health inequity persist?

Inequalities persist and will develop further in the absence of preventive action. For example, obesity in children, recognized as a risk factor for diabetes, will give rise to inequalities in access to therapeutic resources, particularly in the case of diabetes complications. This shows a lack of vision for development, with all the harmful effects on girls and women, especially if the living, schooling or working environments are restrictive. In fact, the various health

inequalities recorded consolidate the fact that gender depends on a given socio-cultural context and is expressed by the role attributed to men or women according to a representation considered to be the ‘norm’ of the community, thus affecting behavior, expectations and the distribution of power in relationships and access to resources for everyone.

What about reproductive health?

For several decades now, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of reproductive health, with adherence to all the universal initiatives in this field, including the physical, psychological and social aspects of reproductive health, and involving both men and women in reproductive decision-making. Essentially, the results of the ICPD+20 follow-up showed universally accessible, acceptable and high-quality family planning. The indicators for improving maternal and neonatal health also remain in line with our ambitions. Similarly, the levels of success in the early detection of breast and cervical cancers and the fight against sexually transmitted infections, including AIDS, are making steady progress towards achieving the desired objectives. The introduction of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine will also prevent cervical cancer deaths in women. Overall, reproductive health actions, not only those relating to contraception, pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood development,

but also those supporting the well-being of adolescents and young people, women in specific situations and the elderly, are structured around strategic objectives aimed at eliminating preventable diseases.

Can we look forward to a gendered future of healthcare?

Today, following the covid-19 crisis and with the New Development Model adopted by our country, reducing the social gradient of health inequalities is becoming an imperative. Our vision of “health, gender and development” is deliberately based on a cross-sectoral approach, to highlight the need for interaction between sectors of activity.

In line with our country’s commitment to achieving the SDGs by 2030, the plan prioritizes actions in the health sector in particular, as well as those in other sectors, in order to focus more closely on the social determinants of health.

This new approach requires new governance mechanisms to ensure synergy between actions, initiatives and interventions in favor of the “health, gender and development” triad. In concrete terms, the example of the transformation of the Schéma régional de l’Offre de soins (SROS - regional healthcare plan), based on quantitative planning, into a Schema of Territorial Coherence (SCT - regional cohesion plan) taking into account tangible and intangible aspects to reduce inequalities in health, would speak volumes by focusing on the gains to be added to development assets. The SCT could reinforce a local responsibility aimed at making up for a lack of access or awareness of a right. For example, the obstetric emergency service in rural areas, built around the community worker, is not the rule. This is an exceptional measure to reduce the risk of an avoidable death. On the other hand, regular follow-up during the nine months of pregnancy, with home visits for expectant mothers who have been lost to follow-up, would be the proposal behind the effectiveness of the TBS.

The stakes for women’s health

Hundreds of women are still dying because they are women. If they are not treated on an equal footing with men, their chances of a better life are greatly reduced.

“In rural, remote and mountainous areas, a pregnant woman may die because the family has no means of transport or financial means to get to the nearest health center or hospital,” explains a midwife. Some men even refuse to allow their wives to be treated by a male doctor or nurse. The impact of violence on women’s health can also be very serious, long-lasting and even fatal.

Aware of the challenges facing women’s health, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and UNFPA have entered into a partnership to promote reproductive rights, with the support of Global Affairs Canada.

In strategic terms, this partnership covers support for the new Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy 2021-2030, the second National Strategy for Adolescent and Youth Health 2022-2030 the new National Health and Disability Plan 2022-2026, the National Health Strategy for the Elderly and support for universal health coverage.

On an operational level, the partnership aims to support the provision of quality care, modeling and digitization of essential reproductive health services. In addition, there is the promotion of long-term contraception, the prevention of female cancers, the setting up of a minimum emergency sexual and reproductive health program (MISP/RH) and support for the national public health program for women and girls who are victims of violence. We have also set up integrated care units for women and children who are victims of violence in public hospitals.

«I joined the first pilot unit in 2006 at the Ibn Zohr hospital in Marrakesh as a forensic pathologist, and for 17 years this unit has been providing forensic care for victims of violence. Social workers welcome victims, listen to them and identify their needs. Once they have been examined, they are referred if necessary to other specialties or those involved in the care of victims of violence”, says Dr Meriam ElKhalil, Head of the Integrated Care Unit for Women and Children Victims of Violence at Ibn Zohr Hospital.

Dr Meriam ElKhalil also acknowledges that these units have made a difference to physical and sexual violence, but much remains to be done. These include raising families’ awareness of violence prevention, training health professionals to receive and care for victims of violence, and institutionalizing integrated medical, psychosocial and forensic care.

Egalitarian dreams and the fight against gender-based violence

A new approach is being taken to promoting rights, equality and strengthening family resilience by the Ministry of Solidarity, with the support of UNFPA and Global Affairs Canada.

Morocco has come a long way in the fight against violence against women and girls, but gender-based violence, stereotypes and discrimination persist. It's a complex, multi-dimensional issue, involving social, cultural, educational, legal and economic aspects. To combat this phenomenon and deconstruct discriminatory norms, a series of large-scale campaigns have been organized by the Ministry of Solidarity, Integration and the Family, in partnership with UNFPA and with the support of Global Affairs Canada. Throughout the 16 days of activism each year, awareness-raising caravans are being organized in several regions of the Kingdom, as well as a series of events

run by national institutions, civil society organizations, the media and the private sector to draw attention to violence against women and girls, and to share knowledge and innovative approaches in this area.

#Mansektouch against cyberviolence

The increase in cyberviolence, which disproportionately affects women and girls, is also a matter of concern for policy-makers and the general public. This takes various forms, such as harassment, threats of rape, sexual assault or murder on the Internet, particularly on social networks, and

can cause psychological trauma for victims.

Ms Awatif Hayar, Minister for Solidarity, Social Integration and the Family, also called for stiffer penalties for cyberviolence at the launch of the 20th national awareness campaign against violence against women and girls. This was marked by the launch of an official teaser and spot on social networks using the hashtag #Mansektouch, to raise awareness among young people of digital violence and its physical and psychological consequences, which can shatter lives. Awareness-raising messages were broadcast on bus screens in the Rabat Salé region, in



addition to illuminating the IAM building and displaying the campaign slogan. In addition, hundreds of activities have been organized in the various regions, including conferences, plays and various training courses on digital violence and its impact on women, families and society.

“The virtual space is now codified with laws and provisions, and in Morocco we need to toughen up the penalties for digital violence against women and girls, and work together to combat this phenomenon”, stressed the Minister during one of her speeches. Digital violence has affected 1.5 million women and girls according to the HCP’s national survey (2019) and has increased significantly since the spread of the coronavirus and containment, rising from 35% in 2011 to 84.1% in 2020. The Ministry is also supported by UNFPA to ensure that the digital space is a responsible and safe space for women and girls in Morocco.

Strengthening care for survivors of violence

The Ministry of Solidarity, Social Integration and the Family has launched a number of initiatives, including the support program for legal advice and counseling centers for women victims of violence, and the setting up and support of the “Kolona Maak” platform for advice,

support and counseling launched by the National Union of Moroccan Women. This platform is intended for women and girls in vulnerable situations, to receive their complaints and grievances and direct them to the players who offer care services, such as the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the National Security services, the Royal Gendarmerie, the multifunctional establishments for women and the reception centers of the National Union of Moroccan Women. This platform operates 24/7 via a direct telephone line (8350) to help women. It can also be accessed via a mobile application to provide help in urgent cases, using geolocation. To this day, it has prevented serious cases of violence against women in various forms, and has played an important role during the period of health confinement, by offering its services to women victims of violence in particular, including Moroccan women living abroad.

Green Inclusive Smart Social Regeneration Strategy (GISSR) 2022-2026 and UNFPA

As part of the Green Inclusive Smart Social Regeneration (GISSR) 2022-2026 strategy, the focus is on innovation in social services by promoting digitalization, improving

targeting mechanisms and enhancing the quality of social services. The joint work with UNFPA is aimed at promoting rights and equality and strengthening family resilience in the face of social risks. The partnership also focuses on supporting local and regional authorities in meeting the social challenge and deploying a Task Force to drive change, ensure convergence and strengthen the partnership with all stakeholders.

➤ AT A GLANCE ◀

Innovative approaches to combating violence against women and girls

The national policy to combat violence against women and girls by 2030 is based on the four internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, care and prosecution,” explained Awatif Hayar, Minister for Solidarity, Social Integration and the Family, at the launch of the 20th national awareness campaign to combat violence against women and girls in 2022. According to the Minister, this policy aims to facilitate immediate access to all services, to contribute to the protection and empowerment of women in difficult situations and to help change social and cultural norms marked by violence and stereotypes. To identify this phenomenon, the Ministry is focusing on various programs, including digitization to obtain scientific and accurate data, expanding the database of beneficiaries and improving targeting mechanisms for greater efficiency. The new «GISR» concept is also being launched, with social centers being upgraded to improve care services, and collaboration between the various players being strengthened as part of efficient and effective social engineering.

Advancing sexual and reproductive health rights

Sexual and reproductive health rights and the strengthening of advocacy to combat the practice of child marriage are at the heart of the partnership between the CNDH and UNFPA-Morocco, with the support of Canadian Global Affairs.

The partnership sealed between CNDH and UNFPA, with the support of Canadian Global Affairs, focuses on strengthening advocacy to combat the practice of child marriage and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights. Among other things, the aim is to facilitate access to information and care services, and to make victims of violence aware of their rights and the remedies available.

Unequal access to healthcare for women and girls

Enabling women and girls to take control of their own destiny means, among other things, empowering them and developing them in a more inclusive way so that they can reach their full potential, as well as providing them with access to healthcare, particularly with regard to their right to sexual and reproductive health. This includes access to menstrual hygiene, obstetric health care, contraception and treatment for sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS. Inequalities in access to healthcare for women and girls expose them to sexually transmitted infections, clandestine abortions and unwanted and high-risk early pregnancies. “The response must be not only political and legislative, but also cultural, educational and social in order to guarantee its effectiveness,” said Amina Bouayach, President of the CNDH, at one of the conferences organized in partnership with UNFAP-Morocco. It goes on to say that mobilizing the various players, building their capacities

and adopting holistic approaches to strengthening the effectiveness of rights will make it possible to tackle these inequalities and, beyond that, ensure rights and choices for all. A series of training courses on the right to sexual and reproductive health has been organized for regional human rights commissions, associations and NGOs, and on analyzing sexual and reproductive health issues from a rights and gender perspective. In addition, there are awareness-raising video clips that are widely distributed on social networks. In this context, it is worth highlighting, among other things, the now annual celebration of World Menstrual Hygiene Day since 2021 in Morocco. It focuses more than ever on the rights of the most vulnerable women and girls, and on the difficulties surrounding menstruation in the face of preconceived ideas, lack of access to sanitary protection and the absence of clean, private sanitary facilities in schools, which often lead to girls dropping out of school and being exposed to early marriage and pregnancy.

Guide to SRH rights in Moroccan dialects and other languages

One of the CNDH’s key initiatives in its partnership with UNFPA is the production of a guide on the right to sexual and reproductive health, developed by the CNDH and UNFPA and available in Arabic, Darija, Amazigh, sign language and French. This guide is a practical tool providing stakeholders and the general public

with precise information on sexual and reproductive health. On the one hand, it enables us to understand the various issues so that we can take action, and on the other, it shows the importance of including women and young girls, who are often less well cared for, in the physical and psychological aspects of health care.

Legal justifications for early marriage

The study on judicial justifications for the marriage of underage girls, **carried out by the CNDH in partnership with UNFPA** and presented on the occasion of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in December 2022, puts the spotlight on Article 20 and Article 16 of the Moudawana (Family Code), which exceptionally grant family judges the right to authorize the marriage of underage girls. A derogation that has gone “from an exception to a rule due to the conditions under which the courts grant authorizations.” The reasons put forward by magistrates are issues linked to morals and difficult economic and social conditions, as well as to avoid sexual relations outside marriage. These marriages are also authorized in the case of minors married to their rapists with the consent of their parents and guardians. The study also revealed that, with regard to the medical examination, 76% of those questioned considered that the medical certificate was sufficient to decide on the girl’s suitability for marriage, while 24% said that they required a detailed report. Another striking fact is that 58% of participants said that the



response to marriage applications from minors is obtained on the same day, while 11% said that the procedure can take more than a week. Also, due to a lack of financial resources, 47% of legal guardians prefer to submit a new application instead of appealing against the decision to the Court of Appeal if their request for authorization is refused. 76% of participants stated that the social inquiry, a procedure required by law before authorizing

the marriage of minors, takes place within the court itself, compared with 23% who said that it takes place outside the court. According to the study, these investigations are generally carried out by judges (53%), compared with 32% of investigations carried out by social workers. At the end of this study, the CNDH calls for the abolition of the exception authorizing the marriage of minors and recommends the revision of the law organizing the profession of

social worker and the family code, as well as the development of a unified concept of the best interests of the child, so that its representation is uniform between all judges.

➤ AT A GLANCE ◀

Participatory approach of young Moroccans in the Universal Periodic

As part of a participatory approach by young people in Morocco to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the CNDH organized, in partnership with UNFPA UPR Info and the Prometheus Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, and with the financial support of the Canadian Embassy in Morocco, a series of training sessions for young human rights defenders from the 12 different regions of the Kingdom. This training has helped to build their capacity and knowledge of the Universal Periodic Review process and to support them in drafting a joint shadow report on the rights of women and girls. The network known as the “Union associative de la jeunesse marocaine pour la protection des droits de l’Homme” (Moroccan youth association for the protection of human rights), which was set up following this training, also submitted the CNDH’s parallel UPR report as part of the 4th cycle of the UPR. It should be noted that this group of young people has been selected by UPR Info to discuss the human rights situation in Morocco with the Member States of the United Nations on August 31 in Geneva, as part of the 41st pre-session of the UPR. As a reminder, the Kingdom of Morocco has been examined four times under the UPR in 2008, 2012, 2017 and 2022. The Universal Periodic Review is a mechanism for reviewing States’ achievements and commitments in the field of human rights.

Eradicating early marriage requires convergent, multi-sectoral action

Interview

Mr El Hassan El Mansouri

Secretary General of the National Human Development Observatory (ONDH)

Early marriage continues to plague Moroccan society, shattering the destinies of thousands of young girls and mortgaging their future and that of future generations.



Underage marriage is a complex phenomenon that occurs frequently in Moroccan society. What does the recent ONDH study show?

ONDH launched the study on underage marriage in 2012. It is renewed annually and enables a certain amount of data to be collected, monitored and dynamically analyzed. From there, we found that underage marriage persists, despite legal texts, awareness campaigns and the efforts of all those involved. Early marriage is no longer just a rural phenomenon. It is now affecting the major cities, particularly on the outskirts, with a high rate in the regions of Marrakesh,

Azilal and Casablanca.

In terms of standard of living, the study reveals that underage marriage is widespread among poor and disadvantaged families, whose heads work mainly in the informal sector. It is also common among families whose parents come from rural areas and have a relatively low level of education. The study reveals that the percentage of girls married before the age of 18 tends to fall with the level of education.

The consequences of early marriage have a serious impact on the life of the young girl: on her health, on maternal health, on infant and maternal

mortality, but also on the lives of her children, who in turn have a modest level of education. Early marriage therefore tends to reinforce the cycle of poverty and ignorance.

Do children reproduce the same pattern as their parents?

We have the impression that children tend to have standards of living comparable to those of their parents. Early marriage is one of the main obstacles to breaking the vicious cycle of exclusion and poverty. Analysis of the data from the qualitative survey of women married before the age of 18, women married after the age of 18 and girls likely to be married before the age of 18 reveals that almost all married women under the age of 18 regret their early marriage. Life is generally hard for the girl when she joins her in-laws, with no real means of defending herself. These women-children also say that they are unable to follow their children in their studies and that they are unable to help them succeed.

How do parents explain their daughters' early marriage?

Several economic, social and cultural factors are behind underage marriage. Parents generally give three reasons. They say they are unable to send the girl to school because of the distance and promiscuity, among other reasons. They don't accept their daughter's association with other students, especially when she reaches puberty. The second reason is societal. The parents, mainly from rural areas, think that the daughter should get married as soon as possible, at the risk of remaining unmarried, which they particularly dread. The third reason, linked to the previous ones, is that parents seek to marry off their daughters as quickly as possible, for

fear that their behavior, particularly in adolescence, could damage the family's reputation.

What about the legal framework?

Morocco has introduced a number of reforms (Constitution, Family Code) to promote gender equality and improve women's rights within the family unit. As part of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG5 on women, it has committed to do more to tackle this practice of marriage between the ages of 15 and 18. However, the prevalence of this phenomenon remains pronounced due to the gap between the laws and the reality of part of Moroccan society, which retains a certain archaism in this respect. The derogations permitted by article 20 of the Family Code have thus become something of a rule.

The underage girl may appear before the judge pregnant or having already had a child. With her parents or prospective fiancé, she seeks to regularize the matrimonial situation.

In fact, eradicating underage marriage requires convergent, multi-sectoral actions that act on both prevention and intervention, and a public policy specifically dedicated to combating this form of marriage.

What are the proposed solutions?

The solutions that emerged from the study were formulated with a view to acting on the many factors that encourage underage marriage, in particular:

- Revising the Family Code, by abolishing the legal provisions permitting the marriage of minors, and introducing sanctions against judicial authorities that do not comply with the provisions of the law;
- Extending the provision of basic social services and infrastructure to enable the most vulnerable girls to access their fundamental rights;
- Making education compulsory up to the age of 18, while at the same time extending vocational training and non-formal education opportunities to the rural world.
- Raising awareness in traditional communities of the risks and dangers inherent in underage marriage, through community action or the peer approach, by calling on influential people in the communities.

How important is this issue to your partnership with UNFPA?

We have placed this issue, and the broader issue of protecting girls and women, at the heart of our joint concerns.

UNFPA provides support by encouraging texts and programs aimed at putting an end to underage marriage. It also provides support for young married women, particularly in terms of family planning and maternal health. The partnership between our two institutions is exemplary.

How do you see the prospects for this partnership in the future?

UNFPA is one of our strategic partners, with whom we share a global vision of human development. Morocco, in the final stages of its demographic transition, is experiencing its first demographic dividend. This represents a real opportunity in terms of wealth creation and the well-being of the population, but also a challenge linked essentially to employment. It is therefore essential to take advantage of this demographic window of opportunity to continue working on the issue of young people, their real needs and priorities today, and their expectations, taking into account the gender dimension.

AT A GLANCE

Through a dynamic analysis of two groups (those married before and after the age of 18), the study on underage marriage sheds light on this complex phenomenon and contributes to the public debate on the issue. This study is based on a mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. It enables data to be collected from a panel of households monitored since 2012 to understand how girls and women are evolving, depending on their level of education and their marital and economic situation. It enables comparisons to be made between the profile of women married before or after the age of 18, with a view to providing targeted responses in terms of prevention and empowerment, particularly for girls in rural areas. In 2022, the study on underage marriage conducted by the ONDH was carried out in partnership with UNFPA, with the support of Global Affairs Canada, UNICEF and UN Women.

Relying on future religious leaders to combat gender stereotypes and violence

Interview

Dr. Ahmed El Khamlichi

Director, Etablissement Dar El Hadith El Hassania



Does the image reflected by Dar El Hadith El Hassania meet your expectations? Dar El Hadith El Hassania offers specific multi-disciplinary teaching, enabling graduates to deepen their knowledge of the sciences of Sharia, Islamic thought and history, the humanities and social sciences and comparative religions, with a mastery of languages and the tools of modern methodological thinking to better grasp today's realities and developments in science and knowledge.

There is still room for improvement, particularly in terms of opening up our students, future ulamas and religious leaders to different currents of thought, so as to be more in tune with the realities and developments of society. We are satisfied with the quality and richness of the teaching and the institution's openness to its environment, while remaining faithful to the spirit of the reference texts in dealing with the various issues facing Muslims in

contemporary times.

What about the role of women religious leaders?

Dar El Hadith El Hassania opens its doors to everyone without distinction or discrimination. Women have a strong presence in both teaching and administrative positions. Our award-winning women leaders are also very active in social and public life and carry out their duties with great drive.

What is the motivation behind the UNFPA and Dar Al Hadith Al Hassania cooperation?

The aim of this cooperation program is to build the capacity of young people to keep pace with new changes and developments in society and the world. It is in line with our vision of training young leaders who are better educated and more open to their environment.

Students at the Dar El Hadith El Hassania (EDHH) school are able to experience life changing experiences, thanks to the theater, photography and cartoon workshops, which are part of a drive to raise awareness among young people and women in vulnerable situations.

As part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, the interactive workshops on the role of university religious education institutions and religious leaders in mentoring young people and caring for vulnerable people mark the start of a first-of-its-kind partnership in the Arab world between UNFPA and the Etablissement Dar El Hadith EL Hassania (EDHH), with the support of Canadian Global Affairs. These workshops, launched in 2021, have immersed the students in the world of expressive arts: theater, photography and caricatures to initiate innovative approaches among these future religious leaders in their support for people in vulnerable situations.

Planting seeds..

It's a very enlightening experience. The drama workshop has enabled me to express myself on social issues and put them on stage. It reconnected me to my childhood, but with the personality I have today and the knowledge I've developed, and enabled me to project myself into the future,» confides Asmaa Benabdellah, a student at EDHH.

Another student, Hajer Ghamri, says she has discovered the power of images and caricatures as tools for expression and awareness-raising, despite the fact that they are often used to mock and criticize on

networks. "I helped produce a cartoon about underage marriage with a drawing of a pregnant child-mother with a bottle in her hand, looking longingly at other children on their way to school. This cartoon speaks for itself," she explains. Cartooning also appealed to Sanae Chalhi. "It's a universal way of conveying messages, and you don't need to be able to read or write to understand it."

Chaimaa Serraj and Hafsa Bourkadi say that these workshops are life changing. These concepts have awakened our creativity in relation to reality. And they have raised awareness of some of society's most pressing issues.

Supporting and promoting positive social norms

As part of the cooperation between UNFPA and EDHH, more than 200 students have been trained in intervention and support models for young people in difficult situations and in promoting positive social norms. Around forty of them are trained to mentor their peers in interactive, fun workshops (drama, cartooning and photography). Didactic and pedagogical guides on peer education have been designed in the wake of this, in addition to kits containing guides to online events and fun workshops.

"The aim of these workshops was to build the capacity of our students in the fields of social intervention, and to raise their awareness of the importance of exploiting the knowledge they have acquired within the institution and nurturing it with

innovative approaches to improve their work with the vulnerable," explains Dr Achouk, Deputy Director responsible for the partnership. And he points out that religious leaders who are well trained in communications and digital media can better serve their communities and help resolve problems and conflicts. And beyond that, to correct concepts and stereotypes about Islam, Muslims and religious institutions in order to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialog.

Dr Bouchra Chakir, professor at EDHH and coordinator of the program, emphasizes the positive change in students' attitudes. The majority of the girls at EDHH are very enthusiastic. The interactive workshops unleashed their potential in the fields of theater, photography and cartooning, and highlighted innovative approaches to easily reaching a vulnerable population.

"I have a doctorate in cultural products and society and at the age of 20 I was lucky enough to do a work placement in Paris at the La Cartoucherie theater under the direction of director Ariane Mnouchkine, which left a lasting impression on me. In fact, I know the value of theater, the art of life, and I've already introduced my students to it. But the experience with UNFPA really was a turning point for them, especially after performing on a real theater stage and speaking in public about societal issues such as the situation of women and young girls, violence, drugs and rape," confides Dr Bouchra Chakir.

For her, the changing role of the religious leader in society is no longer a choice, but a historical, economic and political necessity. "Our students need to get out into the field through local actions. Women religious leaders also have an important role to play with women, especially when it comes to taboo subjects," she adds.

Another highlight was the opening up of the EDHH's young religious leaders to their environment through meetings with future actors trained at the Institut National de l'Action Sociale and visits to the Oukacha Rehabilitation Center and the Mohammed VI Center for the Disabled. For Dr Bouchra Chakir, these actions, which are at the heart of the cooperation with UNFPA, are in line with the philosophy of EDHH, which is increasingly open to the surrounding socio-cultural world and aware of the role of religion in raising awareness, supporting vulnerable populations and combating all forms of violence against women and girls.



Commitments to promoting sexual and reproductive health rights

With the support of UNFPA, AMPF is stepping up its efforts to promote the sexual and reproductive health rights of vulnerable women and girls.

At the Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale (Moroccan Family Planning Association, AMPF) center in Takadoum, Rabat, the daily routine is one of awareness-raising meetings, taking care of vulnerable people, gynecological consultations and counseling so that women can choose the contraceptive method that suits them best. Many women visit the center for follow-up or information, especially when it comes to pregnancy, prenatal check-ups, contraception, screening and even gender-based violence, as is the case in over twenty centers run by the association.

Breaking taboos..

AMPF is stepping up its advocacy work, in particular with the support of UNFPA, for the widespread provision of sexual and reproductive health services, access to contraception, the fight against unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion, and issues relating to gender, young people, HIV/AIDS and advocacy. This work is supported as part of the “Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Gender Equality in Morocco” project, implemented with financial support from Global Affairs Canada since 2018.

«Counselors raise awareness among beneficiaries about issues such as early pregnancies, which force girls to drop out of school to become child mothers,” explains Dr Latifa Mokhtar Jamaï, Deputy Chair of the AMPF. This obstetrician-gynecologist knows all too well how unwanted and early pregnancies can shatter lives, not to mention clandestine abortion, the leading cause of death among teenagers.

Young people and the right to comprehensive sex education

The issue of young people and comprehensive sex education is also at the heart of this partnership. The aim is to promote young people’s access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, enabling them to make informed choices about their bodies and their future.

“Young people are turning to the Internet, where they lack the right training and run the risk of being manipulated and exploited by dangerous people,” explains Dr Jamaï. She points out that the strategic partnership with UNFPA consolidates various initiatives targeting young people, such as the creation of sexual and reproductive health clubs in schools and youth centers aimed at improving access to information, education and services in this area.

Imams and morchidates to bring sexual and reproductive health out of the shadows

The AMPF’s experience with Morchidates (female preachers) and imams has been instructive. They have been involved in reproductive and sexual health training to reach young girls, boys, parents and families. “Men are more receptive to the words of clerics, while women easily approach Morchidates to ask them questions about religion and married life,” explains Dr Latifa Jamaï. That said, advocacy for sexual and reproductive health rights remains AMPF’s main focus.

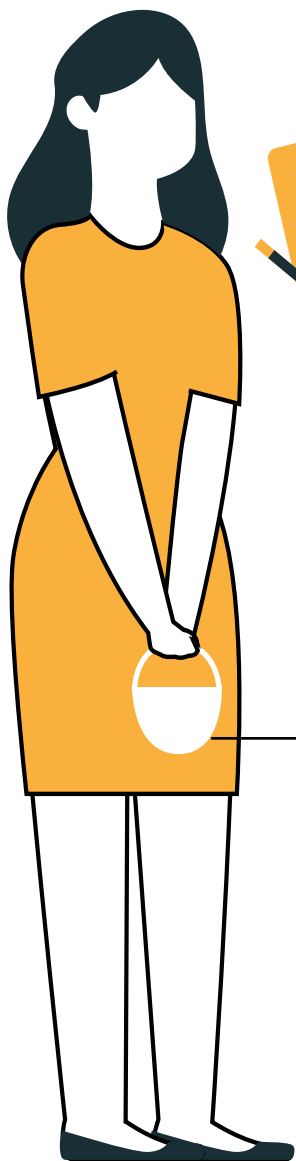


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Young people fall back on the internet where they do not have the correct training and where they run the risk of being manipulated and exploited by dangerous people.



Dr Latifa Mokhtar Jamai,
Deputy Chair of the AMPF



➤ AT A GLANCE ◀

When adouls get involved in enabling young people to marry

The program to prepare young people for marriage is a first in Morocco. The result of collaboration between the AMPF, UNFPA, the Ordre National des Adouls and the Conseils régionaux des Adouls, this program aims to reduce the risks associated with sexual and reproductive health, which can damage health and lead to divorce and family breakdown. It includes training courses for adouls on sexual and reproductive health rights and domestic violence, the development of an information and awareness-raising booklet for newlyweds and a marriage empowerment mooc with courses open to anonymous visitors to better prepare for married life.

“The act of marriage is the starting point for a life together, which should be based on the ability to start a family, financial and psychological stability, peace of mind and respect for reproductive and sexual health rights. The involvement of adouls in this area can help avoid many problems for couples,” stresses Dr Youssef Ait Lhou, adoul and President of the Rabat Regional Council of Adouls. In addition to awareness-raising campaigns, particularly in rural areas, some speakers went further, proposing compulsory medical tests for future brides and grooms, to be paid for by the State, and the creation of training centers for marriage accreditation.

Empowerment and the relationship between men and women

When the marriage is sealed, questions about marital capacity, physical and psychological health and sexual and reproductive health rights are rarely addressed. “Families don’t like to talk about these issues at a wedding, which are often synonymous with celebrations and gifts,” explains Dr Nadia Cherkaoui, one of the first female adouls at the Rabat Court of First Instance. For her, the rapid changes in Moroccan society call for in-depth analysis, particularly of how to build a solid couple and found a family free from violence, social problems and drama.

“I work in a region of Rabat with a high illiteracy rate and great poverty, where marriage is seen as a destiny for girls. Girls themselves sometimes look to get married quickly, especially after a relationship via social networks,” she says.

“People get married to please their parents, to make up for a mistake, a rape, etc. I sometimes officiate at the wedding of a young couple and a month later they turn up for a divorce. The empowerment program is important because the adoul, who witnesses the beginnings and endings of marriages, is equipped with the mechanisms needed to raise young people’s awareness and can change life trajectories,” she explains.

Community actors and the right to sexual and reproductive health and gender equality

Associations, social workers, healthcare professionals and, more recently, local players such as adouls, are some of the key players confronted in their day-to-day work with the violation of women's rights to freedom of choice, reproductive and sexual health and the right to a dignified life free from violence.



“ The Ministry of Health is focusing on issues such as SRH, which have been addressed for years by AMPF in partnership with UNFPA. It's a quiet revolution that's yielding convincing results

Pr Maamri Abdellatif, Executive Director AMPF / Rabat

AMPF's big turning point came when it opened up on topical issues, in particular sexual and reproductive health, according to its Executive Director, Pr Maamri Abdellatif. “Working on taboo subjects has enabled us to move from a concept more focused on family planning and contraceptive methods to a broader concept of sexual and reproductive health, particularly in partnership with UNFPA and with the support of Canada's Department of Global Affairs,” he explains. For this university professor and former senior public health official, AMPF, with the support of its partners, is carrying out its mission of promoting sexual and reproductive health rights, offering sexual and reproductive health services and facilitating access to sexual and reproductive health services for vulnerable groups, particularly young people, adolescents, women and girls. It also carries out research, studies and field surveys, the results of which form the basis of its advocacy work on reproductive and sexual health. AMPF and UNFPA also have a strategic partnership to promote sexual and reproductive health rights, supporting advocacy for access by adolescents and young people to comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health information and services, tailored to their needs, and to make informed and enlightened choices.



“ The adouls’ contribution to raising awareness of SRH, violence against women and child marriage reflects the evolution of the adoul’s mission

Dr Nadia Cherkaoui, one of the first female adouls/ Rabat

Dr Nadia Cherkaoui is a doctor and specialist in comparative religions, with a number of articles and studies to her credit on women in Islam at Mohamed V University in Rabat. She chose to become an adoul, a profession exclusive to men until it was officially authorized for women following a historic royal decision. “Women are the most reassured by our presence, especially those from rural areas. Communication has become easier and more fluid on issues such as marriage, rights and religion, and for some months now we’ve been talking about enabling people to marry and reproductive health,” she explains. Through her work in the field, her actions and interactions with local people, she has discovered other facets of society and its ills, including intimidation of women, harassment, family disintegration and poverty, and above all the glaring lack of information about marriage, responsibilities, rights and sexual and reproductive health.



“ The most striking cases in my 17 years of work as a forensic pathologist are children who have been sexually assaulted and victims of incest. There are also women who have no resources and who suffer repeated violence at the hands of their husbands because they have nowhere to go and abandon their children.



Dr Meriam ELKhalil, forensic pathologist in charge of the Head of the Integrated Care Unit for Women and Children Victims of Violence/ Ibn Zohr Hospital Marrakesh

The first integrated care unit for women and children who are victims of violence was set up in 2006 at the Ibn Zohr Hospital in Marrakesh. “I was the first practitioner to join this pilot hospital unit. I remember that right from the start, we received equipment with the support of UNFPA, which has continued over the last few years to provide us with the emergency pill,” says Dr Meriam ElKhalil. In 2008, a ministerial circular extended the number of reception units for women and children who are victims of violence to all regional or prefectural hospitals, and there are now almost 118 nationwide.

“In our unit, two social workers welcome, listen to and identify the needs of victims of violence, whether for medical or gynecological care, or to obtain a medical certificate after an examination. They are either referred to the unit by associations or other services such as the court of first instance unit, the police headquarters and associations and NGOs,” she explains.

These are often people who are experiencing psychological and physical trauma. “That’s why it’s important to enrich the unit with the presence of a psychologist or psychiatrist at least 2-3 times a week. The victims are often in a serious mental state and require urgent psychological treatment,” explains Dr ElKhalil.

Peer education for a more egalitarian society

The “Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Gender Equality” project, launched with the support of UNFPA Morocco and Global Affairs Canada, demonstrates that peer education offers an opportunity to rethink prevention for young people.



“Peer education to promote reproductive and sexual health rights has changed my life. It has enabled me to speak out and help other young people to do the same about a taboo subject that I didn’t dare broach before,” says Zakia Berradi, peer educator at Y-PEER PETRI Morocco. Like her, Kawtar Mchichou, Dirar and Rachad, young peer educators with diverse backgrounds, found themselves transformed by both the approaches and the topics related to sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and discrimination based on gender carried out as part of the “Promotion of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Women and Girls and Gender Equality in Morocco” project implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund office in Morocco, with financial support from Global Affairs Canada.

They reveal that through the training courses, meetings, workshops, campaigns and awareness caravans included in this program, they have learned patience, observation and listening skills to understand, learn

to pass on, break down barriers and build bridges with young boys and girls of their own age. “At each stage, we have the feeling that we’ve won small victories by raising awareness among other young people about comprehensive sex education and the sexual and reproductive health rights of young people, and by warning them about the risks,” says Zakia. Kawtar, for her part, confides that she is no longer apprehensive about talking about these subjects, particularly within her family, with her friends and even on social networks.

Talking openly about reproductive and sexual health and rights also required innovative approaches, both in the basic training courses on sexual health and in the additional training courses, including the Community Relays on community involvement and combating harmful practices against young girls and women in Morocco, as well as positive masculinity. The aim is to provide young people with the appropriate information, raise their awareness and equip them with the soft skills they

need to be effective peer educators.

“Involving them in their learning means enabling them to become aware of their ability to act as a link in the chain of promoting sexual and reproductive health rights, gender equality and the fight against discriminatory social norms, which are at the heart of the program run by UNFPA with the support of Global Affairs Canada,” explains Zouhir Adaoui, President of the Y-PEER Peer Education Training and Research Institute (PETRI) Morocco. In his view, all the activities undertaken since 2018, including the Consortium for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Gender Equality, launched with the support of UNFPA Morocco, demonstrate that peer education in the area of health offers an opportunity to rethink prevention aimed at young people.

Peer2Peer- He For She or when men defend women's rights

The “Peer2Peer He for She” project launched by Y-PEER Morocco with technical and financial support from UNFPA Morocco has reinforced the association’s ambition to create a men’s movement for women’s and girls’ rights, notably access to information and services related to sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, the fight against child marriage and discriminatory norms. “Generally speaking, it’s women who defend women’s rights. As part of this project, we wanted to mobilize boys to defend women’s rights, with the aim of spreading positive masculinity,” explains Zouhir. The project, piloted in the Tangier-Tetouan and Hoceima region, took the form of debate workshops on the “Peer2peer & He4She” movement, involving young girls and boys aged 19 to 24. The messages were shared on social networks, along with cartoon posters on discriminatory social norms. The digital campaign reached over 10,000 people and highlighted issues such as marital rape, gender-based



Zouhir Adaoui,
Founder of Y-PEER PETRI Morocco

violence and underage marriage.

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Innovative and interactive approaches

Y-PEER Morocco, with the support of UNFPA and Global Affairs Canada, is exploring various means of expression: theater, drawing workshops, awareness caravans, motion design videos, and so on. The aim is to highlight the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls, gender equality in Morocco and the fight against discriminatory social norms. “All expressive and theatrical techniques are used to dramatize a story and characters that we all encounter in everyday life,” says Zouhir. This involves creating scenarios, role-playing and adapting messages to a young audience. It’s a production based on peer education, awareness-raising, empowerment and the ambition to transform society.



Local players and social issues

Thanks to their proximity to the field and their ability to mobilize, the social partners have a better grasp of social issues. Portraits of young people taking up the cause of human rights and a life without violence.

Zouhir ADAOUI

Chairman of Y-PEER (PETRI) Morocco (2018–2023)

The peer education approach is a philosophy of life for Zouhir Adaoui. He discovered the concept at secondary school in the town of Khénifra in the heart of the Middle Atlas Mountains, thanks to a training program for peer educators in the field of sexual and reproductive health and the fight against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections launched by the Ministry of Education in partnership with UNFPA. Since then, he has worked as a peer educator in associations and youth movements at university, before joining the Y-PEER network to become a trainer of trainers and the network's national coordinator. "In 2018 we decided to create our Y-PEER association independently of the network and in February 2019 we signed our first working plan with UNFPA Morocco, and a second in 2020. We opened up to other partners with social intervention approaches including peer education, interactive theater and communication for development," explains Zouhir.

The association has also strengthened its online presence through its website and social networks to reach a wider audience and highlight its various projects, meetings, workshops, awareness campaigns, guides and educational and communication materials. "With 300 peer educators, we are taking a preventive approach to young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information, unprotected sexual behavior, violent attitudes and child marriage, with the support of our partner UNFPA and Global Affairs Canada," Y-PEER is also working to advocate the inclusion of comprehensive sex education in school curricula and the abolition of Article 20 of the Family Code, and is relying on peer education to make young people's voices heard and promote their involvement as resource people.



Zakia Berradi

Peer educator–French language teacher

Zakia has been involved in the voluntary sector in her home town of Salé since the age of 10. While surfing social networks, she came across an advert from Y-PEER for training courses in peer education. "I discovered an exceptional approach to 100% young people and I felt that I had found my vocation." Zakia reveals that over the course of her training, she has become more mature and deeper. "I was only 20 at the time, but peer education enabled me to grow up and look at life differently. And as I was already involved in theater, I found myself drawn to this approach, which combines interactive theater, awareness-raising, respect, tolerance and the transmission of messages to young people." This French

language teacher was also won over by the simple, fluid way in which sensitive subjects were dealt with. "When we talk about sex education, we take a jigsaw approach to constructing ideas. Its effectiveness has been proven in sensitive areas involving young people." For Zakia, peer education has become a philosophy of life, and she even uses it in her work as a teacher in the Kenitra region, in associations and even in her own circle of friends.





Kaoutar Ait Malek

Coordinator and facilitator Project Soar

Kaoutar Ait Malek joined the Soar project at the age of 19 as a volunteer. “I had just moved to Marrakesh after graduating from high school. I continued my studies at university while working in a school to support myself. But I wanted to get involved in an association and feel useful.” Over the months, Kaoutar took part in activities on Sundays at the association’s headquarters in Douar Laadam, a few kilometers from Marrakesh, and discovered how the Soar project enables teenage girls living in difficult situations to become the leaders of tomorrow. **“The project allows them to know their value, their voice, their body, their rights and the path to follow. I keep telling them that they are lucky to be building on solid foundations”**. Brought up in the village of Amzmiz in the heart of the Alhaouz region, the Soar project is a big leap for her towards things she didn’t know and that nobody taught her as a child or teenager. **“I was brought up by my paternal grandmother from the time I was a baby because of my parents’ divorce. She tried to fill the void left by her mother, but deep inside me there was a missing link”**, confides Kaoutar. After a few months as a volunteer, she signed an employment contract with Soar the same year as regional coordinator. “The UNFPA project that I supervised in the town of Ouarzazate was very beneficial for me as well as for the beneficiaries, supervisors and facilitators, because it tackled the subject of menstruation, which everyone avoids. The project has freed up girls’ voices on this subject, as well as on reproductive health and underage marriage, which is mortgaging the future of thousands of Moroccan girls,” she adds. For Kaoutar, Soar and UNFPA have been life changing. **“Over the past 3 years, I have lived through almost every stage of the Soar project, including that of UNFPA, and this has given me strength and enabled me to learn many life lessons from the difficult but inspiring life stories of the beneficiaries”**.



Ikhlas Zamzoum

Coach in charge of the center for youth emancipation through soccer and TIBU Africa Girls CAN Ambassador

A soccer fan since childhood, Ikhlass Zamzoum dreamed of becoming a professional player. But with no women’s football school in her home town of Fez, her father enrolled her at the age of 10 in 2006 at the **nearest taekwondo club in her neighborhood. Since then, the competitions and gold medals have come one after the other.** “I was a member of the Moroccan national team in 2017, Throne Cup champion and 9-time Moroccan champion since 2008,” she says. A bout of depression kept her off the mat. **“After a period of emptiness, I became a taekwondo coach for children in Casablanca. But I only got my taste for life back when I joined the girls CAN Initiative with TIBU”**, she explains. From being a beneficiary for several months, Ikhlas became responsible for a center for the emancipation of young people through soccer. “It rekindled my passion for soccer. I also found out about the “Promotion of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Women and Girls and Gender Equality in Morocco” project, implemented in partnership with UNFPA, and the importance of talking about sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence, especially as we work with teenage girls from very disadvantaged backgrounds who have been badly affected by life,” says Ikhlas. And sport is the best way for girls to become aware of **their bodies, their health and, above all, their inner strength. Ikhlas often talks to them about her career, her successes and failures, and above all how the sporting spirit encourages people to give their best and overcome the most difficult problems.** “It’s important for me, now aged 26, to share my sporting and personal experience and show girls in difficulty that it’s still possible to come out of it,” she adds.

Empowering young girls and combating child marriage

Despite significant advances in the rights and empowerment of women and girls in Morocco, many adolescent girls are still at risk of early marriage and motherhood. Faced with this situation, the “Promotion of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Women and Girls and Gender Equality in Morocco” project, implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund office in Morocco, with the financial support of Global Affairs Canada, is supporting the “SOAR” project to enable these young girls to stay in school and become confident leaders.



Maryam Montague,
Founder and Executive Director of
Project SOAR

Faced with major challenges in gaining access to education and staying in school, many teenage girls are subjected to a great deal of pressure, leading them to marry too young, drop out of school and become child mothers, thus reproducing the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Sensitive to this issue, the joint project is working to ensure that teenage girls, who are often deprived of an education and exposed to early marriage and motherhood, can stay in school longer, learn about their rights and realize their full potential.

SOAR, which stands for “Take Flight”, provides innovative programs and solutions for teenage girls, often from disadvantaged backgrounds and rural villages. “We started in Douar Laadem in the Marrakesh region in 2015 because we realized that girls were excluded from public spaces. Initially, I wanted an activity based around art and sport, but by listening to the girls and their parents, we developed the Project SOAR concept to help teenage girls take flight,” says Maryam Montague, founder and executive director of Project SOAR, a not-for-profit organization.

She also highlights a problem that remains invisible, explaining that girls in rural areas generally live on less than MAD 10 a day and, faced with a lack of menstrual hygiene products, do not go to school for at least 3 days a month during their menstrual cycle. Also, the lack of healthy and private sanitary facilities in schools often leads parents to deprive their daughters of schooling and marry them off to the first people who come along.

“SOAR girls have been receiving sustainable menstrual kits for 3 years of menstrual hygiene management since 2017. This is our solution for overcoming the measurement barrier

that marks the daily lives of women and girls. I come from a family that used to work in the humanitarian field, and I’ve had a career in it myself, so I know that we rarely think about this aspect,” adds Maryam Montague.

The “SOAR” project works on girls’ autonomy in workshops run by female facilitators. Each squad is made up of 20 girls and 2 local facilitators. The SOAR Club, run by and for girls, is helping to encourage girls to form study groups to find solutions to their problems and to establish an ongoing network of SOAR Girls in their community. The aim, according to Maryam Montague, is to enable girls to know their value, their voice, their body, their rights and their pathway to becoming confident leaders and developing advocacy skills. SOAR now covers 28 locations, and more and more girls are benefiting.

Chaimaa is one of the first girls to join the SOAR project. “I was 13 when I had the opportunity to take part in artistic and sporting activities with Project SOAR. It enabled me to excel in my studies, discover my passion for sports and take part in national competitions. I’m now a university student and a facilitator. I know my worth and I’m defending my rights and those of my fellow human beings for a better future,” says Chaimaa. SOAR has changed her destiny and that of hundreds of girls who are often confused and embarrassed by the way society looks at them.

Emphasizing the dignity of girls by taking action on menstrual health

Thanks to a partnership with UNFPA and the support of Global Affairs Canada, the SOAR project has taken on a new dimension, focusing on the full realization of the rights of adolescent girls and young women in Morocco. It also includes access to education and health services, including menstrual hygiene products and care. “Sustainable menstrual kits have been improved and the number of beneficiaries increased. Our scope of action has been extended to three pilot regions: Ouarzazate, El Hajeb-Fès and Marrakech-Safi, mainly in Dars Taliba, youth centers or in partnership with local associations. Facilitators are also better equipped to empower teenage ‘squads,’” explains Kawtar Ait Malek, coordinator and facilitator at Project SOAR.

UNFPA is also supporting the training of master facilitators to train other facilitators and extend the momentum of the SOAR project to other regions. “We want to prevent teenage girls from leaving school at puberty and being forced into early marriage. It’s an intolerable form of violence,” says Maryam Montague. Getting girls into school is vital if we are to put an end to early marriage and broken lives. The issue also concerns Morocco’s nearly 3 million teenage girls.



➤ AT A GLANCE ◀

Spotlight on menstruation

UNFPA's support has the merit of putting the spotlight on the rights of adolescent girls and young women, as well as on menstruation, which is surrounded by stereotypes, by celebrating World Menstrual Hygiene Day and making it an annual event to discuss the rights of young girls in the light of access to information on menstrual hygiene, education and health services, including menstrual hygiene products and care to protect their health, dignity and well-being

25.000 hygiene kits distributed

Awareness-raising sessions organized for vulnerable teenage girls and a digital campaign launched on social networks to dispel misconceptions about menstruation. The campaign, which reached 1 million people, involved the production of more than 30 graphics for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as a short animated film in Arabic and French. At the same time, more than 25,000 hygiene kits have been made available to the most vulnerable girls in orphanages, Dar Taliba and prisons.

Leadership and resilience through sport

Through sport, the “Girls CAN” initiative supports the empowerment of hundreds of young women and girls in difficulty and fosters their resilience.

Sport has great power in the lives of women and girls. When they stick with it and confront gender stereotypes, they gain in autonomy, self-confidence and resilience. Ikhlaz Zamzoum knows all about the power of sport. She is a 9-time Moroccan Taekwondo champion which she began at the age of 10 in her hometown of Fez. After the glory days, a bout of depression kept her away from the mats before she found her way back to life thanks to the “Girls CAN Initiative” project, which aims to build the capacities of young women and girls and help them integrate into society through sport. She talks frankly about her journey through the desert, but also about her passion for football and how the Girls CAN Initiative has helped her to build up her resilience and become the coach responsible for a center for the emancipation of young people through soccer, as well as an ambassador for the TIBU Africa association.

Young people’s access to information on sexual and reproductive health through sport

The Girls CAN initiative, the fruit of a partnership between Tibu and the United Nations Population Fund in Morocco, is one of the innovative initiatives included in the “Promotion of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Women and Girls and Gender Equality in Morocco” project,

implemented with the support of Global Affairs Canada.

Through sport, the concept focuses on giving vulnerable adolescents and young people access to information on sexual and reproductive health, healthy growth, prevention of sexually transmitted infections and gender equality. In addition, we have trained health and sport facilitators, empowering hundreds of young girls for social and economic inclusion and encouraging them to embrace the values and leadership of sport, as well as organizing the 1st Summit on Education through Sport in Africa.

The beneficiaries are often young girls in difficulty or living in difficult situations. They all want to learn soccer, shine on the pitch, become professionals and make their dreams come true.

Khadija, an avid soccer fan, joined Girls CAN after discovering the advert on social media. **“I quickly got involved in the program, knowing that at the time I was in my third year at the Institut Supérieur des Sports in Settat, not far from Casablanca. But I could walk for miles just to make sure I didn’t miss a session. As well as improving my soccer skills, I’ve developed my soft skills and learned to overcome my shyness”**, says the 22-year-old from Sidi Moumen, one of Casablanca’s most popular neighborhoods. Thanks to Girls CAN, she recognizes that she no longer lets gender discrimination and stereotypes get her down.

«Soccer saved me from drifting and psychological problems», she explains. The beneficiaries of the program are more successful in their studies and their attitudes are better.

After a turbulent adolescence, Khadija is now a Sports Education graduate and is well equipped thanks to the Girls CAN initiative, preparing to become a coach and moving towards realizing her dream of becoming a physical trainer at a soccer club.

The Girls CAN initiative has also opened up new perspectives for Hiba and changed her life trajectory. **“I started playing soccer in high school and dreamed of turning professional, but my father told me it was too late for my age. I continued to play in high school until I stopped studying after failing my school-leaving exams”**, she recounts.

Determined to see her dream through to the end, Hiba joined a soccer association to get back on the pitch, train and play. **“I knew it was difficult to become a professional, but I wanted to play soccer and resist the feeling of failure. One day my coach suggested I join TIBU through the Girls CAN program to become a coach, and I didn’t hesitate to take part in the experience, which enabled me to learn sports techniques, languages, essential health issues for girls and life skills”**. Hiba dreams of coaching a women’s soccer team. She also wants to take her school-leaving exams again and go as far as she can in both her studies and soccer.

In addition to awareness-raising and capacity-building activities on reproductive and sexual health, gender-based violence and stereotypes, the Girls CAN initiative enables hundreds of young girls in difficulty, exposed to traumatic events, failing at school or simply battered by life, to rebuild their lives, emancipate themselves and pursue a career in sport.



➤ AT A GLANCE ◀

At a glance: TIBU Africa and the power of sport

Tibu Africa is an NGO that uses the power of sport to devise innovative social solutions in the field of education, empowerment and socio-economic inclusion of young people and women through sport. It is present in more than 18 cities, 12 regions of the kingdom and 5 African capitals, and aims to become the driving force behind sport for development in Africa by 2030. “On the strength of its commitment to young people, girls, women and young people with disabilities and NEET, our organization is making social innovation through sport its key tool for developing solutions and helping to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In the face of the global health crisis, we strongly believe in the power of sport, which appeals to the values of cooperation, solidarity and commitment to the most vulnerable populations,” says Mohamed Amine Zariat, Ashoka Fellow & Founding President of TIBU Morocco.

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