



UCLG
Committee

Social Inclusion
Participatory Democracy
and Human Rights

**Inclusive Cities
Observatory**

« WOMEN'S DESK »

Oriental Region, Morocco

Period of implementation: 2008 - 2010 | Study case written in 2010

The "Women's Desk" project (2008-2010) is a gender mainstreaming experience in a challenging socio-cultural context. In addition, the project is an example of a process by which local institutions and services have appropriated gender mainstreaming methods in economic integration policies. The Women's Desk aims to be a space for consultation and coordination between the various local services in the Oriental Region in order to improve the services provided for the women beneficiaries. It provides a range of services, starting with comprehensive care for women in precarious situations, listening to them to ascertain their problems and needs, providing them with information and referring them to either the relevant local services in case of legal, health, sociocultural or educational problems, or to the appropriate services for job seeking and socio-professional integration.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

Context

Regional context

The territorial scope of action for the "Women's Desk" project is the Oriental region in Morocco and in this first stage, the prefecture of Oujda-Angad and the provinces of Berkane, Taourirt and Figuig (in Bouarfa). The Oriental Region is the second largest region in the Kingdom of Morocco by area. It covers an area of 82,820 km², equivalent to 11.6% of the country's total area. According to RGPH (Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat - General population and housing census) data for 2004, the region has a population of 1,918,094 inhabitants, with 1,183,355 living in the towns and 734,739 in rural areas. The Oriental Region consists of a prefecture (Oujda Angad) and 6 provinces (Jerada, Berkane, Taourirt, Figuig, Nador and Driouch), 86 rural municipalities and 27 municipalities.

The region's geographic location means that it contains a great deal of natural diversity: it stretches from the Mediterranean to the Sahara. For this reason, it occupies a central position in the national development plan and in Morocco's economic, political and social relations with Europe and the Maghreb countries. The region, which accounts for 11.6% of Morocco's area, nonetheless has no more than 6.4% of the country's population, which means that the regional population density level is low, at 23 inhabitants per km², while the density for the country as a whole is 42. There are also major disparities within the distribution among the prefectures and provinces in the region, which ranges from 377 inhabitants per km² in the prefecture of Oujda-Angad and only 2 in Figuig (RGPH 2004).

Geographical location	Far North - East
Administrative structure	1 prefecture, 5 provinces, 22 municipalities and 91 rural municipalities.
Area	82,820 km ²
Population	1,908,905 inhabitants
Density	23.2 inhabitants/km ²

Social context

The Oriental Region is one of the largest poorer areas in the country (11% of Morocco's area). It has a population of 1,947,000 inhabitants. It has suffered from long-standing serious economic and social difficulties brought about by drought, the depletion of its mineral resources, its weak industrial base, the closure of the borders with Algeria (since 1994) and the development of a vigorous informal and illegal economy, essentially involving the contraband trade from the Spanish enclave of Melilla and Algeria.

According to the RGPH results for 2004, the poverty rate in the region was 24.8% in rural areas and 13.8% in urban areas, i.e. an average of 17.9%. Compared with the national rate of 14.2% (7.9% in urban areas and 22% in rural areas), the Oriental Region lies in fifth position in the national poverty rankings.

The vulnerability index ranges between 16.90% in the prefecture of Oujda Angad and 22.97% in the province of Jerada. According to the same data from the poverty map, the index is higher than 20% in four provinces.

The same sources show that:

- The illiteracy rate is 42.9%, with women affected to a greater extent than men. The rate of female illiteracy in the region (as everywhere in Morocco) is higher (60%) than for men (32.7%) and their rate of employment is lower (13.8% compared to 54.5% for men);
- The largest age groups are as follows: 29.5% are children under 14 years old, and 61.4% are people between 15 and 59 years old;

Immigrants from the region account for approximately 30% of the country's domestic migration.

Policy development

The "Women's Desk/Observatory" is part of the central government's policies for decentralization mentioned above, for strengthening the skills of women, and human development. The Women's Desk aims to provide a space for consultation and coordination between the various local services in the Oriental Region in order to improve the services provided for the women beneficiaries. It provides a range of services, starting with shelter for women in precarious situations, listening to them to ascertain their problems and needs, providing them with information and referring them to either the relevant local services in case of legal, health, sociocultural or educational problems, or to the appropriate services for job seeking and socio-professional integration.

Background

The idea for a "Women's Desk/Observatory" project in the Oriental Region is based on the observation that women in the Oriental region have difficulties recognizing their role in local development. This region was also chosen to promote initiatives to strengthen women's skills in collaboration with decentralized cooperation partners, for at least three key reasons:

- An eloquent diagnosis (gender-related social indicators), the formulation of precise expectations (launching initiatives to improve these indicators), an attempt to respond adequately (the idea of a Women's Desk/Observatory), a clearly identified promoter of the project (the Ain Ghazal Oujda 2000 Association).
- The strong interest shown by regional leaders at the time.
- The enthusiastic dynamism of the Oriental Regional Working Group.

Indeed, as a result of the mission by the representatives of ART FEMMES in Morocco in November 2005, the Oriental Region was identified as a pilot region for including the gender approach in local development planning and for the application of pilot initiatives for the empowerment of women by means of the implementation of collaborative networks at local and transnational scale (i.e. decentralized cooperation networks). The first two initiatives that were to be launched in Oujda were identified to that end: an international workshop for strengthening's women skills in governance and local development, as well as an economic empowerment project for women in the Oriental region: the "Women's Desk" that was launched during the workshop. In December 2005, a mission in Oujda carried out by the head of the "*empowerment* of women" area of the ART/GOLD Maghreb programme confirmed the Oriental Working Group's interest in

launching the initiative. Later, with the support of an expert from Oujda, a process of diagnosis and planning began in order to involve institutions, associations and local women in carrying out the project.

The first participatory diagnosis showed:

1. The existence of many initiatives, some of which came from existing public services and were linked to business start-up support, job seeking and training, and others that came from civil society and were involved with the integration of women in the workplace by creating income-generating activities, training and the promotion of rights.
2. A lack of knowledge of the existence of these services among most of the women in the target group who attended the focus groups and individual interviews.

A major lack of data on the situation of women in the region, despite these data being an essential tool in decision-making and the adoption of the appropriate policies for the integration of women in development.

Policy objectives

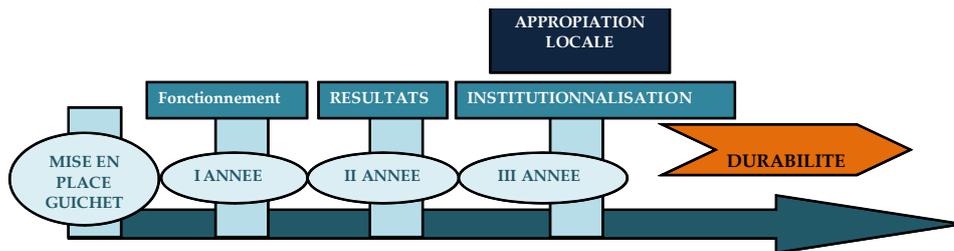
The "Women's Desk/Observatory" project aims to achieve women's active involvement in local development by means of:

1. Improved access to local services for women in the region by providing them with information relating to all existing services provided by both public services and associations.
2. The establishment of a network of local services to improve the quality of life of women in the Oriental Region.
3. The collection of data and information, and production and dissemination of the analyses, studies, research, surveys and statistics on the situation of women in the various provinces and municipalities in the Region in order for decision-makers and public, associative and private actors to be able to obtain strategic gender access and carry out projects to apply gender mainstreaming in their local development policies and initiatives.

In a broader sense, this ambitious project aimed to contribute to reducing poverty among women by providing strategic support for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the monitoring indicators of the MDG National Report 2005, and especially Goal 12: "To reduce the disparities between men and women in access to employment, equal pay and access to resources."

Chronological development and implementation of the practice

The "Women's Desk" Project in the Oriental Region aims to implement a solid and long-lasting structure, enabling the coordination of all local services targeted at women.



To that end, the first phase, the project, which lasted for one year (2008), consisted of the deployment of the Desks in the following 4 provinces in the Region: Oujda, Taourirt, Berkane and Bouarfa. The first phase involved:

1. *An initial three-month phase*, involving the selection and training of the employees, the equipping of each "Women's Desk," an awareness campaign for the local services and the local people in the four provinces concerned, and the establishment of a local services network for women;
2. *a second nine-month phase* involving the opening of the four "Women's Desks", the provision of services, training courses and the final production of the terms of reference for the network of local services for women at provincial and regional level.

The *second phase* of the "Women's Desk" project in the Oriental region lasted one year, from 11 December 2008 until 11 December 2009. In this context, the 12 months of the project pursued the following objectives:

- The creation of a fifth Women's Desk in the Province of Jerada, and the launch of an awareness campaign for local services and local people in the province.
- Reinforcement of the internal structure of the "Women's Desk" by means of training courses on various topics and organization of technical exchanges and experiences with FAMSI (Huelva, Spain) in the framework of decentralized cooperation.
- On-going support for the beneficiaries by means of training tailored to their needs, and referral to social and professional services.
- Consolidation of the network of local services for women and improvement of the quality of services offered. This was achieved by organizing awareness meetings, a training course on the Gender Approach for gender focal points and managers of local services, and updating the Local Services Guide in each province.

In 2008 and 2009, the project was implemented by the Oujda Ain Ghazal 2000 Association, as the body responsible for the project. This was due to its extensive experience in gender approach integration and women's empowerment activities in the Oriental Region, as well as its knowledge of the areas concerned. It was also one of the main local actors actively interested in implementing the project during early identification and formulation phase.

During the six months of the *3rd Stage*, the Ain Ghazal Association was accompanied by the CODEV Association from Jerada in the implementation and management of the Women's Desk. This third phase of the "Women's Desk" project in the Oriental region focused on:

- Consolidation of the involvement of the various local institutions and services in order to ensure sustainability, local ownership and improvement;

- Reinforcement of the internal structure of the "Women's Desk" by means of training courses on various subjects and the organization of technical and experience exchanges within the framework of decentralized cooperation (Huelva in Spain, the Region of Umbria in Italy).
- The production of a reference book about capitalizing on the Women's Desk experience.

During the 3rd phase and the assessment of the results of the project among 2,002 women referred to professional placement, only 20% were able to enter the labour market. This is because most of the women who received attention have a medium educational level (32% are illiterate, 23% have a primary education level) or failed to meet the demands of the labour market despite having educational qualifications. To that end, and because of the skills of the beneficiaries, the association deemed it necessary to adopt two objectives:

Objective (1): To promote training leading to qualifications.

Objective (2): To help the women to create Income Generating Activities (IGA)

In this regard, the association signed an agreement with the CODESPA Foundation for a 24-month period from 1 October to 30 September 2012, which aims to improve the professional integration of disadvantaged women by holding training courses leading to qualifications on subjects meeting the needs of the labour market, reinforcing the direct integration of women by raising awareness among private sector actors, and fostering the creation of self-employment.

Intermediaries

The implementation of the Women's Desks required the involvement of various national and international organizations and institutions. The regional support institutions include:

- The Wilaya of the Oriental Region: Provides institutional support for the "Women's Desk" project in the Oriental Region and is part of its Steering Committee.
- Taourirt Province: Provides institutional support for the "Women's Desk" project in Taourirt Province in the Oriental Region.
- Figuig Province (in Bouarfa): Provides institutional support for the "Women's Desk" project in Figuig Province (in Bouarfa) in the Oriental Region.
- Berkane Province: Provides institutional support for the "Women's Desk" project in Berkane Province in the Oriental Region.
- Jerada Province: Provides institutional support for the "Women's Desk" project in Jerada Province in the Oriental Region.
- The offices of the National Aid Programme in each province affected by the project: Taourirt, Berkane, Jerada and Figuig (Bouarfa).

Moreover, collaboration with local NGOs in each province to implement some activities involved the following associations:

- Asociación Enfance et Solidarité de Jerada
- Asociación Coopération et Développement (CODEV)
- Highlands of Bouarfa Women's Association

A coordination mechanism to ensure the correct implementation of the project was also established:

- The Oriental Region Working Group: The Oriental Region Regional Working Group, in coordination with the Association Ain Ghazal 2000, the Provincial Working Group in each target province, the Coordinator of the "Women's Desk" project and the team ART GOLD Maroc programme, is responsible for guaranteeing the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project at regional level. The Regional Working Group will also be responsible for the impact analysis conducted by the project at a regional level.
- The Provincial Working Group of Berkane, Figuig, Jerada and Taourirt: The Provincial Working Group in each province affected by the project, in coordination with the Association Ain Ghazal 2000, the Coordinator of the "Women's Desk" project and the team ART GOLD Maroc programme, is responsible for guaranteeing the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project at provincial level.

Other intermediaries included the decentralized cooperation partners, i.e. FAMSI, the Provincial Council of Huelva (Spain), FELCOS / Region of Umbria (Italy), which supported the initiative since its inception by conducting technical exchanges and experiences to improve the services offered, and the CODESPA Foundation for the continuity of the Women's Desk initiative for a further 24 months, until 30 September 2012.

Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies

Beneficiaries

	Beneficiaries	How they have benefited
Population	12 women from the Oriental Region (5 Desk event organisers, 5 experts in women's' employment, a financial assistant and a coordinator).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained to work in the "Women's Desk" in each of the target provinces • Obtaining a decent income.
	The women from the Oriental Region who were beneficiaries of the services provided by each Women's Desk in the five provinces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,000 women benefited from attention, listening, information and counselling for women seeking legal, health, education and sociocultural services. • 2,002 women were referred to the local socio-professional integration services. • 500 women benefited from training courses on various subjects (computing, introduction to accounting, job seeking techniques).

	The 1,908,905 inhabitants of the Oriental Region (928,142 men and 980,763 women).	Indirect impact of the Women's Desk Service.
Local services (government, associations, institutions and local businesses)	Employees of local services in the Oriental Region (Oujda, Taourirt, Jerada, Berkane, Bouarfa).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 employees benefited from training on the gender approach of employees in local services for women (40 per province)

Participation in the processes applied

The "Women's Desk" project has probably been an example of good practice among the initiatives carried out in the Oriental Region involving the participatory approach with regard to identification, implementation and monitoring. The project was implemented following a joint consideration of the need to launch an initiative including gender mainstreaming in the Oriental Region. The various institutions were identified from the start and were key players in the on-going reflection on the sustainability and local ownership of the initiative.

All the institutions and all the local services involved are currently mobilizing to ensure the sustainability of the project at a local level. The participatory method was used from the beginning, and may be an example that is passed on to other regions in Morocco on the basis of the mechanisms developed in the Oriental Region. Obviously, any transposition should take the difficulties encountered at a local level and regional specificities into account

Institutionalizing and financing

Institutionalization processes

The project is part of a long-term strategy aimed at the institutionalization of each "Women's Desk" to ensure local ownership of the project. During the first year of the project, various local institutions and services expressed their interest in and commitment to the project's success. This can be seen by the various agreements signed in 2008, 2009 and 2010 between the National Aid Programme in Jerada, Berkane, Bouarfa and Taourirt Province, which provided premises for the Women's Desk in each province, and provided institutional support in the creation of the various training courses, workshops and missions that took place during those years.

The sustainability of the project and its local ownership are dependent on the involvement of the various actors in the region in the creation of the provincial and regional network of local services for women. A strategy with two axes is anticipated within this framework:

1. Coordination of actions at national level in line with the initiative of the Ministry of Social Development's national strategy for gender equality.
2. Coordination of actions at a local level, especially through meetings held with the governors of the target provinces that have already expressed an interest in ensuring the continuity of the project, by assuming part of the staff's salaries. In this context, the meetings with the governors and the mayors of the municipalities and the directors of the other institutions to assume part of the continuation of the Women's Desks are scheduled to continue.

Financing

The "Women's Desk" Project was implemented with the ART GOLD Maroc programme and its international decentralized cooperation partners. The ART GOLD Programme and the Andalucian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI) provided technical and financial support for the project during the three phases of the project (2008/2009/2010). In overall terms, since the project started in 2008, and during its three phases, it has required an overall budget of **3,325,205.42 MAD**, of which the ART Gold Programme funded 63%, amounting to a total of **2,085,509.86 MAD** and the FAMSI funded 21%, amounting to a total of **703,795.56 MAD**. The table below presents the financing broken down by phases.

Phase	Period	Overall budget	Budget	Partners
1st Phase	14 March to November 30, 2008	1,236,088.70 MAD	- 679,808.70 MAD - 187,400.00 MAD - 288,880.00 MAD - 80,000.00 MAD	- ART Gold Maroc - UNFPA - FAMSI - Assessed local contribution
2nd phase	1 December 2008 to 31 December 2009 (extended to 31 March 2010)	1,242,091.72 MAD	-806,676.16 MAD -335,415.56 MAD -100,000.00 MAD	- ART Como/AECID - FAMSI - Assessed local contribution
3rd Phase	1 April 2010 to 30 September 2010 (extended to 30 November 2010)	847,025.00 MAD	-599,025.00 MAD - 30,000 MAD - 79,500 MAD -138,500 MAD	- ART Gold Maroc - FELCOS - FAMSI - Assessed local contribution

Outcomes and reflections

Key results and achievements

The "Women's Desk" project has been a pilot experience in the Oriental Region which has provided important results, which can be summarised as follows:

- Implementation of 5 Women's Desks, with a coordinating office in the prefecture of Oujda-Angad, and 4 provincial offices in the provinces of Jerada, Berkane, Figuig and Taourirt;
- Creation of a task force consisting of a project coordinator and one events organizer and one job seeking expert at each Women's Desk;

- Training of the Women's Desk team on: Entrepreneurship and development, PowerPoint, Access, Listening techniques, Communication plans, Reinforced listening techniques, team spirit in *business plans*.
- Attention for 3,135 women, with 1,719 of them referred to services. 2,002 women registered as jobseekers, of which 57% were referred to professional integration services and approximately 20% found employment;
- Analysis of the situation of women in the Oriental Region, production of statistics and databases including all the socioeconomic indicators on the status of women.
- Start of a reflection process on the implementation of a regional gender equality strategy in the services and institutions in the Oriental Region;
- Exchange of experiences and technical exchanges on experiences of gender equality between the project team and various institutions and associations in the province of Huelva in Spain (2008/2009) and the Region of Umbria - FELCOS (2010).
- Strengthening of the skills of the 500 beneficiaries of the project throughout the Oriental Region by means of training courses on job seeking techniques, income-generating activities (IGA), an introduction to accounting, needlework, and computer skills;
- The start of construction of a network of social services for women by means of the following initiatives: awareness-raising and involvement of local services, establishment of a provincial network in Taourirt on 17/11/08, an awareness meeting for local services in the Province of Bouarfa on 31/12/08, an awareness meeting for local services in the Province of Jerada on 21/12/09; an awareness meeting for the local services in the province of Berkane on 24/12/09.
- Designation of a gender focal point in each local service and institution involved in the local services network at regional level and in each of the project's target provinces;
- Production of a local services Guide on a regional scale (816 services identified in the 5 target provinces).

Overall assessment and replicability or adaptation elsewhere

The "Women's Desk" Project is an experience of the inclusion of the gender mainstreaming approach in a challenging sociocultural context. The project is also an example of a process by which local institutions and services have appropriated gender mainstreaming methods in economic integration policies.

The Project has succeeded in identifying the needs of women in terms of employment integration and adapting the range of services to their needs. Personalized follow-up has been undertaken, and specific proposals made with a view to coordinating supply and demand in the territory, thanks to a partnership agreement established with professional integration institutions in the region, offering specific solutions to help women seeking employment.

The "Women's Desk" Project is an example of the involvement of local actors in the consideration and proposal of alternatives to improve the socioeconomic status of women in the Oriental Region.

Main obstacles

The implementation of the project and its consolidation were nonetheless accompanied by several limitations and difficulties:

- The successive changes in territorial authorities, political authorities and the heads of some external departments delayed its implementation.
- The lack of ownership of this initiative by newcomers, and sometimes their scepticism required an increase in the number of advocacy meetings.
- The inaccessibility and distance of women in rural areas to information for women in regard to the existence of local services.
- The lack of involvement by some institutions in the territory.

Recommendations

- Provide the Women's Desk with a legal status and institutionalize the coordination mechanism.
- Broaden the circle of partners, including all services, without exception, given the mainstreaming of the gender concept and its integrationist and transformational approaches.
- Guarantee the strengthening of skills among all actors involved.
- Create a support fund to finance and prolong the women's desk initiatives
- Create a regional observatory to better identify the reluctance and resistance to achieving gender equality.
- Intensify efforts to rehabilitate unemployed women.

Raise awareness among uninvolved actors, and particularly men about on the problem of discrimination against women as regards the opportunities offered locally

Further information

This case was researched and written by Giovanni Saporiti, Luca Portacolone and Cristino Pedraza, under the supervision of Dr. Giovanni Allegretti at the Social Studies Centre at the University of Coimbra (Portugal) in 2011.

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