

# Girls Education: Nation's Education Education for All: Dar Asni



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*06/22/2014*

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## Part I. Social Issue Addressed: Girls Education in rural areas in Morocco

Education is knowledge, and knowledge is power; educating a girl, means educating a nation, empowering a whole nation. It is the armament that will enable our country to be different, to become a better living place for its people. When we educate individuals, we provide them with the necessary tools to realize their dreams, to bring out the best of themselves, and the best of their country. However, providing these tools is not as easy as it seems, 62% of the Moroccan population are illiterate (Morocco World News, 2013), and some recent inspections estimated that approximately 55% of all women and 90% of rural women in Morocco are illiterate (Morocco World News, 2014).

It is believed that this retarding literacy rate is due to a combination of many cultural, social, economic, and geographical factors. As a matter of fact, girls drop out of school earlier and more than boys, especially in rural areas with difficult geographical structure, where the access to the nearest school requires a number of walking hours. Around 2.5 million girls of primary-school age live in rural areas, more than a half do not attend school, and 80% of the attending girls drop out in one of the primary school grades (1-6) (Morocco World News, 2013). Moreover, our society has many patriarchal values that decide about its structure, where girls' primary role in life is to get married as early as possible, assume the responsibility of their houses, and be good mothers and wives rather than going to school and obtaining professional carriers. Most girls in the countryside get married before age 14 (Morocco World News, 2012). Hence, boys are given the priority to study over girls, as they are perceived to be the breadwinners, the active producer, who needs to have good educational skills to be better man of the future.

Besides, the critical financial situation of the families in those regions do not allow them to pay for their girls' education in neighbor cities. And even if they do, they are not confident whether or not their daughters will be safe while they are away from their eyes.

Fortunately, there are many national and international NGOs willing to devote their financial and human resources and expertise to help those girls find their way through their dreams, and get the education they need.

## Part II. Introduction of Organization: Education for All, Dar Asni

“Education for All” is a nongovernmental organization that was first established by Mike McHugo in 1978 with the goal of empowering women and improving gender equality.

After many years in the Marrakech region, he and some of his friends decided to establish the “Education for All Morocco”, and in 2008 they opened the boarding house “Dar Asni”, where I volunteered. (Efamorocco, nd). In 2009, another boarding house in “Talat n'Yacoub” was opened. The third house was established in “Ouirgane” in 2010. (GoVoluntourism, nd).

This organization's main mission is to help young girls in the rural regions of Marrakech to pursue their studies in middle and high school, as many of them live very far from the nearest high school. Thus, the organization tried to raise funds in order to build boarding houses near high schools in that region, as they believe that “educating a girl, is educating the next generations”. (Efamorocco, nd).

“Education for all” is mainly lead by Mike McHugo and Haj Maurice that try to ensure the financial needs of the boarding houses, through the profit of their project “Kasbah Toubkal”, and raising funds. Concerning “Dar Asni”, it is managed by the house mother Latifa Aliza who

takes care of all what the girls need during their stay in the house, supervises their homework assignments, and deals with the volunteers who want to join the organization. There is also Sister Latifa Maatalah, the cook, who takes care of preparing the girls' food during the whole week (efamorocco, nd).

The organization welcomes female volunteers from all over the world. They help in tutoring the girls, playing with them, teaching them new competences and all of this while living with them in the boarding house for a period of time (this is what explains excluding male volunteers from this opportunity to respect the cultural and social rules of the region).

### Part III. Student Activity Within the association:

I joined 'Dar Asni' boarding house for girls with the purpose of discovering what is the experience of being at a boarding school, studying far from you family, as well as getting in touch with the girls in need and help them enjoy their stay at the 'Dar'.

My main duty in the association was to tutor the girls and help them with their preparation for the final exams (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the baccalaureate) in a variety of subjects such as French, English, Islamic education, natural science, Math and Physics. I knew that my stay will not last for a very long period of time, so I wanted to be very organized and efficient so that I can maximize the benefit, and be able to teach them as much as I can during that short period of time. So, I first set with the girls in order to know their weakness points and their school schedules. Although they all were at the same high school next door, but their classes were in different times. At the end, we agreed to set the group study for the evenings, and during the day I work individually with each of them on the specific things that she finds most hard to understand and master. During the group study sessions, we start by explaining the chapter, and

then give them a set of exercises, which we correct after a while together. Besides, I worked with them in previous years exams, so that they get acquainted with the exams official form, structure, and content. My goal was to help them be strategical and efficient in their work, in order for them to master the concepts easily, in a short amount of time, and also be able to answer appropriately during the exam, and hence get the best grade they can have. Obtaining very satisfying grades will not only provide them with a large set of choices for their future; but, it will make their families proud of them, and prove to the ignorant people in their villages that educating their daughter is a must.

When the girls are at school, I used to help the cook Latifa preparing the meals while chatting. She is a very nice person who I respect a lot as she treats the girls as her own daughters, she used to prepare the meals with so much love and innovation. During the girls' free time, I taught them some basic things on computers, as I am a computer science student, I wanted to share with them part of my passion, and my field of study which is computing. I wanted them to feel what technology can bring to their lives.

At the end of the academic year, I wanted to check on the girls' grades and academic achievements in order to evaluate my own work and efforts. Seven of the girls got their baccalaureate degrees, and they are going to continue their college studies in Marrakesh. The association of education for all, and precisely 'Dar Asni' should be very proud of the output of their work, and should take credit for these girls achievements and good results, as well as the engaged volunteers that worked with the girls, who ranges from Al Akhawayen students(there were quite many) to foreign people who came to provide help. Besides, the girls' hard work, and strong desire to succeed, achieve their dreams, and have a different future from just being a normal housekeep in a rural village fully related to her husband.

Being part of the association, believing in their mission statement was the best of this experience. I felt proud working with them, because I believed that by this I helped, although with a very small amount, in the fight for girls' right in education. I helped in the development of this region, and of my country as education is the motto for any country evolution. I felt that I am to some extent a useful citizen, who not only takes, but also pays back its society by helping other citizens gain abilities and tools to achieve their dreams.

#### Part IV. The Personal Impact:

This Experience had a huge impact on me, and made me discover many things about myself that I have never taught be able to do. I knew more about my abilities and limitations. I first discover that I have a very long term patience, as I was able to explain things to the girls in many ways, all along without screaming o yelling. On the contrary, I was happy to do it, I felt that it was my duty and my responsibility to make them understand no matter how. I also discovered my ability to cope with the new environment, it did not took me anytime to do it. From the first minute I stepped into the house, I got introduced to the girls, they took me to their dorms, and they have shown me their little special things which made me feel very exceptional. They gave me a value, and welcomed me into their lives, while they only know my name and nothing else.

In my second semester at AUI, I discovered that there is a number of hours of social work that I should accomplish before graduating. I have never thought about doing any social activity earlier, I have always believed that by getting involved into social work I will only get involved into other people problems and it will just waste my time and energy. So, I went to that association just because I had to. But, this believe changed after this experience, and I now feel

very ashamed each time I remember what I used to believe in. I am very thankful to AUI for imposing that on us (requirement to graduate), which turned out to be the best experience I have never thought about doing.

## Part V. Towards Future:

After my experience in Asni, I have decided to get involved in the social work as much as I can. During last year's Ramadan, I went to an association of handicapped children in my home city, where I helped in the organization of many entertaining activities for those children and families.

I now believe that the social work is one of the key terms that will solve many of the problems we have in our country, we just need to be organized and innovative in the solutions we provide.

My friends and family appreciated what I did, I.e. getting involved into a social activity. They also appreciated how this affected me as a person, as I became more responsible, more mature, and more patient.



## Conclusion:

To conclude, this was a great life experience, where I have learned many lifetime lessons from every girl in the association. It ,as well, allowed me to get an insight about one of my countries social issue, and know more about the people who work hard behind the scenes, and contribute in making the change.

I will definitely get involved in associations, and encourage all the people I know to do it because it is an opportunity to learn, to change, and become a better citizen.

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