



Functional Literacy Unlocks Business Opportunities for Moroccan Weavers

Imagine living your whole life without being able to dial a phone number by yourself, write your name or read street signs, and that you can recognize money only by the different colors of the bills. This is a reality for 44 percent of adult Moroccans and 60 percent of Moroccan women, according to World Bank figures from 2008. Illiteracy is a barrier to independence, higher income and a better standard of living.

MCC's \$32.8 million Literacy and Vocational Education Activity, part of Morocco's overall MCC compact to reduce poverty through economic growth, seeks to help fishers, smallholder farmers and artisans in the most economically disadvantaged areas of Morocco, where illiteracy is particularly prevalent. The project will broaden their standard Arabic literacy, numeracy, job-specific, and entrepreneurial skills, providing participants with the knowledge necessary to start businesses and incorporate new technologies and innovations into their business.

The curriculum also emphasizes essential "life skills," such as basic health, sanitation, occupational safety, and gender equality. Since 2009, more than 70,000 people have joined the program—65 percent of whom are women.

Meet Yamna Beyekkou and Yamna Benali, a mother and daughter from Boumia

Yamna Benali is in her mid-50s and attends classes offered in a remote town in Midelt province in the Atlas Mountains. The remoteness of the village was a major factor contributing to her lack of education as a child.

"Before, a woman's education wasn't valued," she said. "My family was worried about me walking far to school by myself, especially during primary school. While there are some schools now within walking distance of her village, none existed when Yamna Benali or her daughter Yamna Beyekkou were young.



Yamna Beyekkou and Yamna Benali are excited for their newfound opportunities, thanks to the training received.

When her mother learned MCC would bring a literacy class to her community, she took the opportunity to enroll herself and her daughter, delighted that they would finally have access to education.

Hindered by illiteracy

Yamna Benali's life was strongly affected by her inability to read and write. When her son fell gravely ill and had to be hospitalized in Meknes, a city about 125 miles away from the village, a family member accompanied her because she couldn't read the destinations posted on the bus. Upon her arrival at the hospital, the staff informed her of the wing where her son was admitted, but she could not find it on her own because she could not read any of the signs. When she was supposed to give her son his medicine, she could not read the instructions indicating the proper dosage or frequency of the medication. "He is permanently handicapped from this illness," she said through tears. "It is a terrible memory. I felt so lost."



Girls attend a literacy class near Boumia.

Thanks to MCC, her situation is gradually changing. Now that she can read numbers and is starting to understand letters and words, Yamna Benali no longer needs to rely on others to such a great extent. She can now make phone calls by herself and travel without an escort. With their increased literacy, mother and daughter hope to form a weaving cooperative with the other women attending the class to sell their products throughout the region and perhaps beyond.

The mother, having grown up speaking only Berber, a dialect in Morocco, also dreams that one day she will be able to read a newspaper and understand debates in Arabic. Although this will take much practice and effort, if she succeeds it will help her become more involved in community decision-making processes and bolster her knowledge and independence, inspiring other women in her community.

Thousands of women throughout Morocco have already received training to learn how to read and write, opening new opportunities to them. These women are now closer to a path out of poverty and are opening doors to economic growth.