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MORE THAN EDUCATING GIRLS: BRINGING TO LIFE THE CONCEPT OF A DYNAMIC SCHOOL SYSTEM



A CASE STUDY OF THE MOROCCO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS (MEG) PROJECT

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Creative Associates International, Inc.

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Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-0038-00

PREPARED FOR:

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

COVER PHOTO:

Provided by MEG Project

2005

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Basic Education and Policy Support Activity
Contract No. HNE-I-00-00-00038-00
Creative Associates International, Inc., Prime Contractor

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DISCLAIMER

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I. BRINGING TO LIFE THE CONCEPT OF A DYNAMIC SCHOOL SYSTEM: AN INTRODUCTION

The new national Moroccan school is working to become a school pulsating with life, thanks to a pedagogy that stresses active learning, not passive absorption of information; a school where cooperation, discussion, and collective efforts, not only individual work, are part of the everyday experience...(Translated text)

Charte nationale d'éducation et de formation, (National Charter for Education and Training), Octobre 1999



Participation. Collaboration. Experimentation.

These three elements were key to the success of the Morocco Education for Girls (MEG) project, a six-year effort (1997-2003) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support Morocco's Ministry of National Education (MNE). The project, which touched the lives of nearly one million children during its years of operation, was a response to the specific educational problems of Morocco, in which rural children, particularly rural girls, had limited educational opportunities. Finding solutions to these problems was spurred by the growing international attention on basic education following the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, and by Morocco's 1999 National Charter for Education and Training, which acknowledged the need to transform the country's education system.

The transformation was multi-faceted. There was a transformation of methodologies for improving classroom instruction. To achieve USAID's strategic objective, "increased attainment of basic education among girls in selected rural provinces," MEG involved increasing community support for

girls' education through three lines of action: improved teaching, improved school environment, and improved educational management at provincial/local levels. Thus, MEG encouraged more participatory, student-centered instruction, gender-sensitive materials and activities to supplement existing textbooks, a greater consideration of the local language, more relevant curriculum, decentralized management, and an environment that supported learning for boys and girls.

Second, there was a transformation in the communication and transfer of the new methodologies to educators and other stakeholders. MEG adopted a product-based approach to training, where training was not an end in itself but also a means for developing training materials for future use by the Ministry of Education (MNE). A total of 16 training modules were developed, tested, revised, and produced (see Figure 1). In addition, a decision was made to move the project's teacher training activities from participating pilot schools into the teacher training institutes (TTIs), and modules were adopted as part of the pre-service curriculum. MEG modules now make up six of the nine teacher training modules at all 34

**FIGURE I.
MEG MODULES**

Training of Trainers Modules to Improve Educational Quality (all in Arabic)

1. Student-centered teaching methodologies with applications to Arabic and mathematics
2. Equity in the school environment
3. School management from a partnership perspective
4. Manual for integration of new teachers into rural areas
5. Methodological guide for the implementation of activities under regional and local curricula

Computer-assisted Teacher Training (CATT-PILOTE)

1. Initiation to ICTs in education
2. Virtual knowledge networks
3. Educational multimedia evaluation
4. Web Quests
5. Project-based learning and technology

Education Management Modules

1. Developing results frameworks
2. Identifying performance indicators
3. Building effective teams
4. Forming public-private partnerships

Pilot Schools and Their Communities Modules

1. APTE (School Management Committee) Training
2. Social Mobilization

Moroccan TTIs. Copies are available on the worldwide web via the CATT-PILOTE program, which opens multimedia centers to teachers and the community.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, MEG guided Morocco in transforming the process for achieving reform, combining and sometimes introducing participation, collaboration, and experimentation in exciting and different ways. These processes made for a dynamic school system — a living, learning entity, with new and/or revitalized relationships between partners at all

levels of the existing education system. The MEG experience demonstrated that a dynamic school is possible and has the capacity to reflect, learn, and transform itself.

The three elements — participation, collaboration, and experimentation — helped to make the MEG approach unique and successful. An introduction to each element will help place them within the context of the Moroccan education reform and within MEG's contribution to that reform.

ELEMENTS OF THE DYNAMIC PROCESS

PARTICIPATION

For participation in broader partnerships to take hold and be sustained, the beneficiaries [of education services] have to participate.

Ministry Official

MEG promoted the use of active, ongoing participation, with the contractor involving the funder (USAID), the MNE, and other stakeholders at the national, provincial, and local levels. Stakeholders shared in identifying issues and then planning, implementing, and monitoring interventions.

At the onset, Moroccan education consultants were hired to examine the curriculum and design supplementary materials that reflected student-centered approach to learning. Ministry central office staff and Provincial Education Officers (PEOs) worked to develop, test, and refine teaching/learning documents. Community leaders, school directors, teachers, parents, and students identified issues, organized and revised PTAs, and designed and coordinated community-based micro-projects to improve local school services. While maintaining respect for Morocco's traditional culture and practices, the MEG team and MNE partners in the provinces encouraged women to express their views, contribute their ideas, and volunteer their time. Activities were characterized by open, honest communication, regular dialogue and

debate of the issues, brainstorming for new solutions, and accountability by the parties involved. These interactions slowly established strong relationships, built on mutual trust and respect.

The success of MEG training sessions and modules supports the premise that participation is essential for successful program planning and implementation. Mutual trust improves school partnerships and participation, and thus school environments.

COLLABORATION

MEG broke with the past. Before the MEG project, there was little to no collaboration between levels...

Ministry Official

MEG promoted not only participation but also collaboration across national, provincial, and local levels — between the MNE and USAID, between the MNE and the nation's teacher training institutes, between school directors and teachers, between school directors and community members, and between school directors and inspectors. Within these exchanges, representatives worked together in project planning, training, implementation, monitoring, and modification.

MEG's emphasis on collaboration helped transform participatory relationships into dynamic partnerships and make more effective use of human resources as partners who learned to communicate and work together. Bureaucratic and hierarchical divides gave way to more equitable par-

ticipation, consultation, and learning from experience.

MEG showed that partnerships and collaboration can lead to ownership and quality, and that collaboration across and among established institutions achieves wider project impact and sustainability. To increase effectiveness in collaborative relationships, however, project goals set by outside funders should reinforce ministry vision and policies, and trusting, personal relationships are essential. In addition, joint training promotes collaboration for education quality management and helps ensure success.

EXPERIMENTATION

One of the main advantages of a project is the ability to experiment...

Ministry Official

Across all project activities, MEG systematically put into practice the principle of learning from experience and provided opportunities for experimentation, which is crucial for innovation.

Stated simply, if something didn't work, MEG worked to change or improve it. Sometimes this required brainstorming and consensus building with the MNE, school directors, and/or the community. At other times, this required working with USAID, the funder, to see how things could be changed within the framework of contract requirements. With these tests, partners at the Ministry level observed that the experimental and scientific nature of the process gave MEG a capacity to be responsive to the demands of the MNE and partners at provincial and local school levels and adapt to evolving conditions and needs. In addi-

tion, practice with experimentation helped to change attitudes about working through and with the established bureaucracy. One PEO noted that people were reassured because they could afford to make mistakes; thus, they did not feel the weight of bureaucracy when they implemented activities, and this helped them evolve.

MEG also provided proof that experimentation leads to innovation. To increase effectiveness, programs need decentralized leadership and innovations that address the context-specific needs of rural communities. For example, through modifications to the original plan, the MEG experience showed that equity involves more than merely girls' education.

RESULTS

Implementing its plan using participation, collaboration, and experimentation, Morocco made substantial gains towards achieving Education for All between 1996/97 and 2001/02. Rural enrollments increased from 55 percent to 84 percent of the total number of primary school-aged children. Rural girl enrollments surged from 37 percent to 79 percent. MEG pilot schools, in particular, sustained project gains: rural girls accounted for 46 percent of first-grade enrollments in 2002-3 and for the 2003-4 school year after MEG ended. Girls' grade 6 enrollments rose 24 percent, indicating a trend towards increased girls' attainment of basic education; girls accounted for over 40 percent of the total grade 6 enrollments in MEG pilot schools after six years.

This case study explains how it all happened.

II. MOROCCO'S CHALLENGES TO EDUCATION

ACHIEVING EDUCATION FOR ALL IN MOROCCO: NATIONAL CHALLENGES

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand launched a worldwide effort, Education for All (EFA), to ensure that all children received a basic education. United Nations and international aid agencies, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and other sponsors sought to advance EFA through a variety of approaches that paid particular attention to girls. They cautioned that simply expanding education systems that left girls and women behind would not achieve social and economic advancement towards prosperity for all.

Morocco was a case in point. The following statistics indicate the situation that Morocco faced in the 1990s:

- Morocco's education system was not able to attract and retain half of its children long enough for them to attain a basic education.
- Morocco's overall net enrollment rate for all children, 58 percent, lagged behind the average rate (81 percent) in the Arab world.
- Nearly 50 percent of the adult population was still illiterate. This included 45 percent of the women and 24 percent of the men aged 15-24.¹
- Rural areas had low school enrollment and completion rates, particularly for



girls. In 1998/99, only 12 percent rural youth and 4 percent rural girls continued their studies beyond primary levels (Ministry of Education Statistical Report).

These glaring rural/urban and gender divides highlighted a situation where Morocco could not tap into all its human resources to advance social and economic development. The MNE decided to address the needs of rural children, particularly girls, by launching a nationwide strategy to improve school quality. Five rural provinces with extremely low girls' enrollment were selected as "laboratories" for the new strategy, and MEG was asked to work in these provinces. In one of these regions, Essaouira, only 13 percent of rural girls were enrolled in primary school. In two other target regions, Al Hoceima and Sidi Kacem, respectively, only 21 percent and 26 percent of rural school-aged girls were in school.

¹ Agence Canadienne de développement international, op. cit, p. 17. The statistic derives from data collected in 1998 and has certainly been reduced somewhat in the intervening six years. Still, it gives a measure of the huge challenge facing the country.

In September 1996, the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States signed a grant agreement to increase girls' attainment of basic education in selected rural provinces. To support this goal with technical assistance, USAID/Morocco awarded a contract for the MEG Project in September 1997 to Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII), in partnership with Management Systems International (MSI) and Save the Children (SC). The project ended six years later, in September 2003.

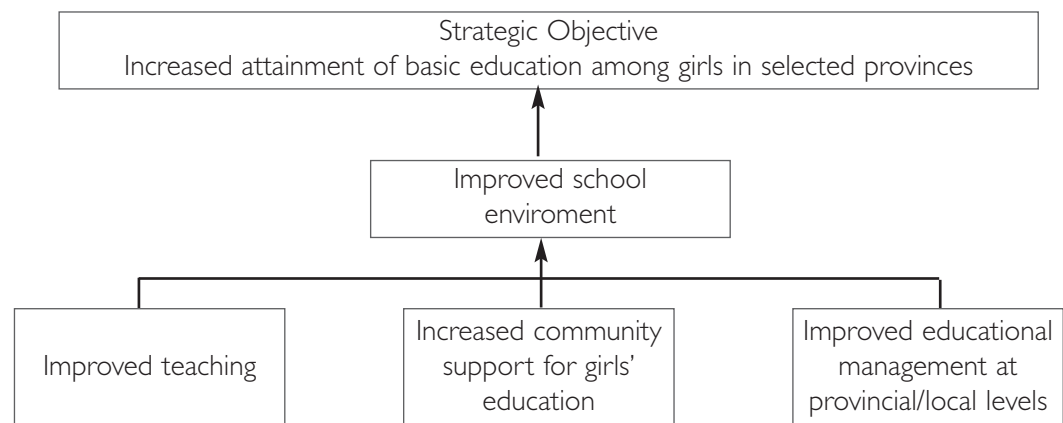
During the implementation period, the Ministry recognized that expansion alone would not move Morocco closer to achieving EFA, unless education quality improved. To offer an acceptable level of quality, Morocco's 1999 National Charter for Education and Training recognized that reforms needed to transform the education system and place the child as learner at the center of a "process of reflection and

action." Following the publication of the Charter, USAID re-aligned the MEG project to support the ongoing education reform. Given the budgetary constraints that Morocco faced, such transformation had to make more effective use of existing resources. From 1997-2003, the MEG project supported the Ministry in making more effective use of resources, particularly human resources, and improving quality through a dynamic approach that encouraged experimentation and learning in order to transform the education system.

MEG OBJECTIVES

As previously mentioned, to support Morocco's MNE, USAID/Morocco had set a strategic objective: increased attainment of basic education among girls in selected provinces. The overall MEG project objec-

FIGURE 2.
USAID STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE AND LINES OF ACTION RELATED TO MEG



tive was to achieve improved school environments along three specific lines of action: training-of-trainer activities to improve teaching skills; increase community support for girls' education in pilot schools; and improve education management at provincial and local levels (see Figure 2).

The MEG team sought to ensure that these three components were complementary and mutually reinforcing. Improved management could only be effective with improved teaching and learning environments and increased community support. Without effective management practices, these improvements could not be generalized throughout the education system.

Across these components, the MEG Team used an active, participatory approach to identify issues, plan interventions, monitor progress, and make adjustments based on

preliminary outcomes. MEG promoted synergy and learning from experience in order to operationalize the process of reflection and action that Morocco's National Charter had envisioned. MEG transformed the dynamics of relationships among key players in the Moroccan education system and the clients, beneficiaries, and school communities they served.

This study provides summaries of activities in three lines of action: improving teaching; increasing community participation; and improving education management. Major issues and the related challenges, approaches, and results are presented. These summaries are followed by a review of how participation, collaboration, and experimentation were integrated throughout these activities, creating the dynamic, successful process for which MEG is known.

III. IMPROVING TEACHING

Modules and trainers brought very revolutionary training methods that had not existed previously. They got the directors to participate more, using competencies that they did not know they had. This training enriched the way directors manage schools.

Hoummad
Ministry Inspector

To support the MNE and attract and retain more students, particularly rural girls, USAID/Morocco funded technical support to improve school environments to achieve improved quality. And MEG did enroll more girls. Rural girls accounted for 46 percent of first grade enrollments by the 2002-3 school year, MEG's fifth year, and in 2003-4, after MEG ended. How did MEG pilot schools achieve and sustain these gains? How did MEG help the Ministry and education system sustain this momentum to overcome some of the challenges that Morocco's education system faces? The MEG team focused on improved teaching skills and, at the same time, strengthening the institutional capacities of Morocco's 34 primary teacher training institutions and the training modules being used. Increased community support for girls' education and decentralized education management helped reinforce these results.

MEG and its MNE partners faced one overarching challenge: How do you improve education quality in the face of a rural/urban divide in the education system? The MEG team also faced seven particular challenges:



- how to agree with the Ministry on problem definition with a view towards improving quality;
- how to target the most effective point of intervention in the education system to produce greatest impact;
- how to shift from traditional, teacher-centered learning methods to more engaging, student-centered learning;
- how to, in collaboration with the MNE, put in place a mechanism to create more relevant teacher training modules while respecting traditional values and language;
- how to improve equity;
- how to help teachers, particularly females, adapt to rural communities; and
- how to increase access to information and technology.

The MEG team, in close collaboration with the MNE and USAID/Morocco, addressed these challenges in ways that illustrate the elements of the MEG project strategy that hold promise for EFA in other contexts.

AGREEING ON PROBLEM DEFINITION TO IMPROVE QUALITY: DONOR VS MINISTRY

Challenge: The MNE faced overall low enrollment and retention rates, with gaping inequities between different social and economic groups, a lack of instructional materials, and inadequate teacher training to address diverse learning needs. To the MNE, the solutions defined in the MEG contract for improving educational quality, however, seemed insufficient. Promoting girls' education and ensuring a girl-friendly environment by assessing instructional materials and textbooks and identifying deficiencies in the presentations of girls and women was not enough.

Approach: The project team was able to move beyond the contract terms and build consensus around the need to improve quality and student learning, in general. USAID, the MNE, and MEG fully agreed that improved quality was critical but that the national curriculum would not be altered. Instead, MEG negotiated a plan for how to best use existing materials to inspire more effective, student-centered interventions at the school level, where the greatest impact on access and retention of rural girls could be seen. Eventually, it was agreed that MEG would review the national

textbooks for grades one and two, with a clear focus on identifying ways to make not just more "girl-friendly" learning but more active, student-centered learning in general, and ways to make content/curriculum relevant to the skill and information needs and economic opportunities of rural communities.

Results: MEG completed its technical task of textbook review, not revision, of the Arabic and mathematics textbooks, teaching-learning materials, and classroom practices for all primary grades, grades 1-6. Two main recommendations evolved from this review: make the student the focus of all teaching and learning activities; and have learning materials portray women conducting a wide variety of modern as well as traditional roles in society. These activities resulted in a module, "Student-centered Teaching Methods with Applications to Arabic and Mathematics." By the final year of the MEG project, the MNE had printed and distributed 18,000 copies of this module and introduced it into TTIs for training all future teachers in Morocco.

ADDRESSING TRADITIONAL, TEACHER-CENTERED LEARNING METHODS AND LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

Challenge: Morocco has a long tradition of unilateral, teacher-centered and rote learning, or *la pédagogie frontale*. The instruction given in the traditional religious schools or *m'sid*,² which predated the pub-

² In Moroccan Arabic, *Derija*, the term *m'sid* is more commonly used than *kutab*, the usual term in Modern Standard Arabic.

The reform of education and training must place the learner, the child in particular, at the very center of educational reflection and action. Only in this perspective can it offer the children of Morocco the conditions necessary for their enlightenment and enrichment.

National Charter for Education and Training, 1999, p 10.

lic schools, was usually based on learning to recite the Holy Quran by heart. Circumstances in the public education system reinforced this approach, which used mainly memorization. Even if teachers wished to use active or interactive methods, they had to contend with large class sizes and a severe shortage of teaching and learning materials. Students were expected to sit passively and listen respectfully or suffer the consequences.

In addition, the language of instruction posed a particular challenge to applying more student-centered approaches. Teaching Arabic poses particular problems for Moroccan schools and children. In Morocco the spoken language, Derija, is significantly different from the written language, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Consequently, learning to read for a Moroccan does not simply involve decoding the symbols of written language into the sounds and syllables of the spoken language, but poses the far more daunting challenge of mastering a new and unfamiliar language. Skillful teachers, applying student-centered learning strategies, can facilitate this learning process by beginning with words and expressions common to both Derija and MSA. A still greater problem is posed by teaching Arabic to Berber³ speakers because the syntax and lexicons of these two languages differ greatly.

Approach: MEG promoted a shift to more active, student-centered learning. The first MEG module,⁴ “Student-centered Learning and Teaching Methods,” pioneered the approach that the project would use to develop all its training materials. This approach dovetailed with Morocco’s

National Charter mandate to center reflection and action on the learner, particularly the child.

The learner-centered method consisted of a multi-step process that analyzed the problem, explored different approaches, developed and tested materials, then repeated the process to refine and re-test. All of these steps were carried out in close cooperation with the PEOs and staff, usually through workshops. The workshop activities themselves modeled active, student-centered learning methods. Participants became aware that active, participatory workshop methods were as important as the module content.

Moroccan trainers and consultants facilitated workshops where participants could collaborate to create, test, and refine modules that addressed the evolving needs of teachers, particularly females, in rural settings. Other modules included student-centered learning methods, equity in the school environment, the creation of local curricula, social integration into rural teaching settings, and school management. The MEG training approach used active and participatory methods to create products that would continue to serve the MNE’s reform agenda long after the project had ended.

To create viable and effective teacher training modules, MEG drew upon the experience and knowledge of its local partners in the field. Before finalizing and disseminating training materials, the project experimented with their effectiveness through interactive training workshops. These training methods incorporated the principles of adult learning to draw upon and apply learners’ own

³The current politically correct term for Berber is Amazigh.

⁴What are referred as “modules” are integrated packages of learning materials. The module on student-centered learning, for example, consisted of five documents: 1) Learner-centered instruction: principles and applications; 2) Support document for improved learning of Arabic in primary school; 3) Support document for the improved learning of mathematics in primary school; 4) Manual on the conduct of reading and writing workshops; and 5) Learner-centered instruction: training manual.

knowledge and experience to new contexts. The MEG training teams invited participants to evaluate the workshops, and then adjusted the training accordingly. By modeling the principles and methods of active learning, the MEG team reinforced and exemplified the effectiveness of the cycle of experimentation, reflection on results, adjustment, and learning from mistakes as well as successes.

In this regard, MEG training provided opportunities for broader capacity-building in a process that allowed participants to experiment with hands-on, learner-centered methods. They assessed and consulted on the results of their experimentation with concepts and processes discussed at workshops. Workshops and the follow-up process were a test track to experiment with and revise modules that the Ministry could adopt and use.

Likewise, for language of instruction, the MEG team and colleagues took a student-centered approach that started with the students' language, Derija or Berber, then using MSA for classroom instruction, and progressively introducing written Arabic, always following the MNE curriculum. Berber was the mother tongue of the majority of children in six of the eight provinces where MEG worked.

Results: The MEG team produced a series of modules, or integrated packages of learning and training materials, focused on improving education quality (see Textbox, Training of Trainers Modules to Improve Educational Quality). The first in this series was "Student-centered Teaching Methodologies with Application to Arabic and Mathematics."

The new modules were tested with teachers in the pilot schools, and TTIs began to use these modules for pre-service training to assist incoming teachers in moving from traditional pedagogy to more active, student-centered approaches. MEG carefully monitored the module introduction into the TTIs. In the 2002/2003 school year, for example, more than 600 instructors in the TTIs used the above modules to instruct over 3,700 future teachers and 600 in-service teachers. Evaluations showed that the teachers appreciated student-centered teaching methodologies and the other educational quality modules as easy-to-use, effective, and enjoyable.

Only after the module had been used with success on a large scale in a variety of different settings, was it considered ready for publication and wider dissemination. In this case, the MNE, not MEG, published and distributed 20,000 copies of the student-centered module throughout Morocco.

TARGETING MOST EFFECTIVE ENTRY POINTS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM TO IMPROVE QUALITY

Challenge: MEG's initial design focused training efforts on pilot school teachers. The training activities were to be conducted only in rural pilot communities. But this approach proved ineffective for several reasons: the number of teachers reached was too small; the costs were too high; and the teacher turnover was too rapid to ensure that the training had a real impact on student learning. Although it was appropriate for MEG staff to go to the grassroots level

to find out what was happening, the local level was not a suitable focal point for teacher training efforts for improving education quality. The impact that such an approach could achieve over time was inherently limited. In addition, the high turnover rate of school directors and teachers made the progress achieved both fragile and difficult to assess.

The MEG team and their partners' challenge of improving education quality also faced a divide in the education system between the key quality control agents: TTI instructors and primary school inspectors. Customarily, the system trained these two professional groups separately. This separation also reflected the rural/urban divide. Although the TTI instructors were experts in their subject matters, most had no experience in primary schools and little awareness of the realities in remote rural schools. Most TT instructors were recruited from among professors of the lycées (high schools), which are nearly all located in urban or semi-urban areas. By contrast, the inspectors had extensive knowledge of the realities of rural education, but their academic training was more limited and often outdated. Yet their job was to visit the schools and evaluate teacher performance. Although both groups engaged in training teachers, the instructors and inspectors did not work together and often hardly knew one another.

At the start of the MEG Project, inspectors were assumed to be the key partner and points of entry to the education system at the start of the MEG Project. But a general consensus began to emerge within MNE that many inspectors had relatively little

impact on the system or on education quality. The inspector's role was to regularly visit his or her assigned schools, which were often located far from towns, up dirt roads, or even on tracks inaccessible to motor vehicles. Many inspectors, especially in extremely remote and poor regions, lived far from their assigned provinces. Because no transportation was provided and reimbursement of transportation costs was delayed and uncertain, many inspectors rarely made their rounds. Indeed, MEG encountered some situations in which the inspectors assigned to particular schools were unable to even find them. Consequently, inspectors' impact on improving education quality in rural schools was in fact much less than assumed.

In addition, planners also were reminded that school directors are key to improving education quality. An effective director can have a direct effect on quality by influencing teacher behaviors and encouraging teachers' professional growth and commitment to the school as well as increasing community involvement.

Approach: MEG adopted a strategy that, in effect, integrated pre-service and in-service teacher training. After two years of struggling to get the best results out of a fundamentally defective approach, MEG moved training efforts into the TTIs, thus extending the project's influence and ensuring nationwide impact. MEG designed teacher training modules to ensure that project initiatives were institutionalized and achieved a maximum multiplier effect. In addition, to improve education quality, MEG promoted teamwork and mutual learning

by collaborating on the experience of the two groups of professionals — TTC instructors responsible for pre-service training, and the inspectors, who conduct in-service training — and providing opportunities for them to work together. MEG also included school directors into some of its training activities.

MEG insisted on training the inspectors and the TTC instructors in the same workshops and drew upon their complementary knowledge and experience. These two professional groups became more sharply aware that they could potentially complement one another and work in synergy. MEG workshops provided a setting where they began to practice direct, person-to-person collaboration. Primary TTI professors, who train all future primary teachers, received particular attention. Inspectors were charged with overseeing and monitoring the introduction of MEG materials into the TTIs.

Results: Through the 16 training modules and corresponding training at the TTIs, MEG trained thousands of educators. Trainings were integrated, cross-fertilization sessions that brought various groups together: faculty, master teachers, inspectors, and student-teachers; school directors and trainers; faculty, inspectors, and school directors; and/or provincial and regional education teams. Synergy and collaboration grew.

ADAPTING CURRICULUM TO MAKE IT MORE RELEVANT

Challenge: In consulting with target school communities, the MEG team and local partners learned that many parents perceived that schools did not offer relevant skills or information, and believed, moreover, that education alienated their children and youth from the traditions, values, and realities of rural life. The National Charter provision that 30 percent of school time be devoted to regional and local curricula provided MEG with an opportunity to introduce needed methods of adapting and innovating curriculum to make content more relevant. While 70 percent of curriculum content was to remain national in scope, common to all students, the new emphasis on regional and local curricula provided a means to anchor teaching and learning in the realities, information needs, and local economic opportunities of rural Moroccan communities.

This innovation signaled an official recognition of Morocco's vast diversity and allowed the curriculum to adapt to regional and local specificities of Morocco. But in practice, the development of regional and local curricula posed a major challenge to the Ministry's Directorate of Curriculum. Diffusing the adapted curricula from one institution to another also challenged the central Ministry's usual mode of operation. The Ministry invited both MEG and UNICEF⁵ to collaborate in developing and testing methods and prepare suitable regional and local content.

⁵ As explained in this section, MEG elected to develop a methods Guide to enable teachers to explore the rural milieu and identify local and regional needs and resources for use to develop teaching and learning activities and materials. UNICEF opted to create a sample curriculum by applying the methods used at the national level to the regional and local levels.

Approach: MEG took an appealing but abstract notion and translated it into a practical approach that empowered teachers and communities. MEG developed the “Guide to Adapting Regional and Local Curricula (RLC),” a methods guide to enable teachers to explore the rural milieu and identify local and regional needs and resources that they themselves could incorporate into teaching and learning activities and materials. The easy-to-use methods provided teachers with the capacity to develop their own teaching and learning materials.

To develop the guide, MEG involved the faculty and students of the TTIs in all phases of the work being carried out on regional and local curricula. Teams composed jointly of teacher training professors and education inspectors familiar with the pilot communities studied the rural milieu to test and apply the methods. A wide range of areas and activities were examined: local institutions, health and environmental issues, and economic and cultural activities at the school, village (douar), and provincial levels. Case studies, many of them based on pilot school experiences, were developed to illustrate how the information collected could be converted into learning activities and materials. Most of the activities illustrated and discussed in the Guide are relatively simple and could be used in almost any rural school: field trips, art exhibits, visits by resource people such as local artists or artisans to the school, group discussions or reports on subjects of interest. Such activities represented a significant departure from prevailing practices that restricted “education” to the official curriculum and textbooks.

Results: At the request of the Ministry, MEG published its Methods and Training Guide, which was widely distributed at central, regional, and provincial levels. For the Ministry, RLC is still a work in progress. MEG’s experience found that short-term training and encouragement equipped rural Moroccan teachers with the skills they needed. In follow-up sessions, new teachers who had been trained in the RLC methods prior to graduating from the TTIs demonstrated that the training had equipped them to take a more innovative approach to teaching and make greater use of local resources.

Finally, legitimizing regional and local curricula provided another opportunity to involve local people in the life of the school. Craftsmen and craftswomen, for example, were invited to share their specialized skills with teachers and students. These opportunities provided an additional opportunity to strengthen school/community partnerships and links to increased economic opportunities to earn a livelihood. Rural parents appreciated having their traditional skills valued and recognized for a national education project.

MAKING THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT MORE EQUITABLE

Challenge: Promoting gender equity was at the very heart of MEG’s mission. Initially, when introducing the project and project leadership to the Ministry, USAID officials presented MEG as the MEG Project, with a focus on girls. But project activities perceived to favor girls at the expense of boys

PHOTO CREDITS:

Photos provided by MEG Project

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