Books or Stories? The Changing Value of Social Education in Rural Morocco

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Formalized, secular education is generally regarded by the western world as the "cure-all" for the developing world's problems and under many circumstances this is true: religious fanaticism, child and mother mortality rates, violent crime, and general human rights abuses have been shown to decrease in educated communities. In recognition of the positive impacts education can have upon developing nations, the United Nations has included several provisions for universal education in the Millennium Development Goals, created in 1990 and meant to be achieved by 2015. Due in part to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (UNMDG), the global spotlight has begun to focus on increasing the universal education rate, particularly in the developing world.[1] Much of the focus has been on the African continent, especially Sub-Saharan Africa because the continent plagued by disease, high mortality rates, and some of the world's worst human rights abuses. By focusing on the regions of the world that are most desperate for development, the United Nations has been able to identify and begin to solve some of the root causes of much the world's problems.

While much of the emphasis of the UNMDGs has been on Sub-Saharan Africa, the North African region has made some notable strides in achieving the UNMDGs: Morocco is likely to achieve goals 3 and 4, may achieve 2 and 5 with some changes, data is unavailable for goals 1, 6, and 8, while they are unlikely to achieve goal 7; Algeria is on track for goals 2-7 and data is unavailable for goals 1 and 8; Libya is likely to achieve goal 4, may achieve goals 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 with some changes, and data is unavailable for 6 and 8; Egypt is likely to achieve goals 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6, may achieve goal 3 with some changes, and data is unavailable for goals 7 and 8.

Out of this entire region, Morocco proves to be an especially interesting country to study in the context of the UNMDGs for several reasons: unlike it's North African neighbors, Morocco did not undergo a massive political revolution following the Arab Spring, thus making its position in the context of the UNMDGs easier to analyze since the government has not been overthrown. This observational study aims to do two things: first is to examine Feriyat, a village in rural Morocco in the context of the UNMDGs and how a village that exists with virtually no chance of achieving all of the MDGs functions; second is to show that while this village is relatively 'un-modern,' the women of Feriyat lead very beautiful, meaningful lives.

Examining Feriyat through the lens of the UNMDGs

Goal 1: End Extreme Poverty and Hunger: Halve the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day; Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people; Halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Morocco at 123 out of 177 countries with regards to poverty. The HDI is composed of many factors, all of which are used in tracking countries' progress towards achieving the UNMDGs. According to the United Nations Development Program's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), Morocco has an index of 4.8%. The MPI is calculated by taking household size and examining those households having no household member who has completed five years of schooling and having at least one school-age child (up to grade 8) who is not attending school; having at least one household member who is malnourished and having had one or more children die; not having electricity, not having access to clean drinking water, not having access to adequate sanitation, using "dirty" cooking fuel (dung, wood or charcoal), having a home with a dirt floor, and owning no car, truck, or similar motorized vehicle while owning at most one of these assets: bicycle, motorcycle, radio, refrigerator, telephone, or television.[2] The maximum MPI score is 100, with the poverty threshold being 33.3—that is, any household with a MPI score greater than 33.3 is categorized as impoverished. A rating of .048 means that 4.8% of households in Morocco fall into the UNDP's "poor" category. 2.5% of Moroccans live below the international poverty line of $1.25 purchasing parity power/day, down from 8.4% in 1985 and 9.7% of the total population is unemployed while around 20% of Moroccans between 15-24 are unemployed.[3]

Feriyat, in the context of this goal, is very interesting. Throughout this project, observational research was conducted on the El Amm family. Within the El Amm family, the parents received no education while the younger generations of children and grand children have completed or are enrolled in primary schooling. There were no school-aged children who did not attend school. From my observations of families living in rural areas, meals consist mainly of bread and potatoes, and a truly extraordinary amount of sugar is consumed on a daily basis. Because of cultural norms, women receive very little meat, should any be available. Unlike other families in Feriyat, the El Amm family possessed only male/bull cows. Because a cow must produce a calf to produce milk, and male cows do not birth calves, bull cows do not give milk.[3] Milk is a major source of protein, vitamins, and vital nutrients, especially when meat is unavailable. The El Amm family does not have access to sanitized drinking water or "adequate" sanitation (both of which shall be discussed later). They do, however, have several televisions, several cellular phones, and a bicycle. The floors are cement and while propane is the main source, both coal and wood are also used for cooking.

Feriyat is primarily an agricultural village where men work with livestock or in the fields while the women cook, clean, and take care of all domestic tasks. The proportion

of unemployed people is astronomically high. Not only could most people be found sitting idly throughout the day, but it seems that the only realistic option for employment, at least in the eyes of male Feriyat citizens, is immigrating to Spain to do menial labor and sending money home. In the El Amm family, two of the four sons live and work in Spain and another is in the process of obtaining the necessary paperwork and visas to immigrate and join his brothers. As there is no solid definition of "meaningful employment," it cannot be determined with the available information whether or not domestic tasks are considered "meaningful." In examining Feriyat through the context of this goal, it becomes obvious that much work needs to be done in order to meet this particular UNMDG, particularly with regards to diets.

Goal 2 and 3: Universal Education: Ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling; eliminate gender disparity in in all levels of education

These goals are two of the most interesting and important UNMDGs, and are the main focus of this paper: not only do they state the importance of universal access to education, but emphasize the fact that mere physical access to a school is not enough. In developing nations around the world, there are sometimes enough schools but not enough teachers or supplies. In some cases, the mere physical presence of an education system is not enough. Children in developing nations, especially females, are usually burdened with a large load of domestic responsibilities from a young age. They are expected to assist in household chores and take care of younger siblings as soon as they are old enough to do so. These societal expectations prove to be a challenge to achieving universal education. Morocco has made great strides towards the goal of universal education. Between 1990 and 2011, Morocco's Education Development Index ranking for education rose from .254 to .447.[4] The education index measures a country's relative achievement in both adult literacy and combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrollment. First, an index for adult literacy and one for combined gross enrollment are calculated. Then, these two indices are combined to create the education index, with two-thirds weight given to adult literacy and one-third weight to combined gross enrolment.[4] In fact, the entire Arab region has seen a drastic increase in HDI: in 1980, when the HDI was introduced as a more comprehensive means to analyze development than previously existing factors such as GDP/GNP, the overall HDI of the Arab world increased from .444 (1980) to .641(2011).[5] Morocco's HDI, according to the most recent data published by the UNDP, is .582, contributing to an overall HDI rank of 130 out of 187 countries and below the average HDI in comparison to the rest of the Arab world. One of the contributing factors to Morocco's fairly dismal HDI ranking is its Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranking: Morocco's GII ranking has gone from .706 (1995, first available ranking) to .510, reflecting an increase in female achievements in reproductive health, empowerment, and participation in the labor force. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market. The index shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It varies between 0, when women and men fare equally, and 1, where one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions.[5] As this explanation shows, having a ranking closer to 0 is desirable. Over the last fifteen years, Morocco has made many changes to its society that have contributed to its overall improvements in the HDI. There are now more women in parliament than ever before and the recent Moudwanna reforms greatly increased women's rights regarding marriage and divorce and shared responsibility of the household.[6] There has been an influx of government support in sending rural girls to school, with the development of live-in dormitories/student houses at little or no cost (as subsidized by the government or various NGOs) to accommodate the need for housing nearer to secondary schools. UNICEF's data shows that girls' education in Morocco, in light of the UNMDGs, has been doing very well: (all data 2005-2009) primary school attendance ratio of females to males (gross) is 88; survival rate to last primary grade administration data is 76%; secondary school enrolment ratio of females to males (gross) is 51; secondary school attendance ratio among females to males is 36; and literacy rate for females 15-24 years of age is 68%.[7]

Feriyat is an excellent example of recent change in the global effort to reach universal education. Approximately ten years ago, according to Dr. Lahcen Haddad, a primary school was built to cater to the villages' young children. Both boys and girls attend the school, with the age range being larger than the typical school as some children began their schooling at a much older age than is standard. In Feriyat, there are undoubtedly more boys in each classroom than there are girls, whether this is due to more boys of primary school age living in the region or due to societal expectations regarding girls' education is unknown. However, it is of note that every teacher in Feriyat's lone school is male, which speaks to the history of inequality in education in rural Morocco. The mere creation of a primary school in Feriyat within the last decade shows initiative, and with the increase in financial support from both the government and various NGOs, of girls' secondary education, Morocco is dedicated to achieving universal education.

Goals 4 and 5: Child and Mother Mortality Rates: Reduce, by two-thirds, Infant Mortality Rate for children under 5; Reduce, by three-quarters, Mother Mortality Rate; Achieve Universal Access to Maternal Care

According to UNICEF, the infant mortality rate for children under 1 year in 1990 was 69/1,000 and, as of 2009, is 33/1,000 live births; and for children under 5 years was 89/1,000 (1990) and is now 38/1,000(2009). The decreases in infant mortality rate are on track with the goals of the UNMDGs: mortality for children less than 1 has been reduced by 47% and less than age 5 by 43%. Morocco is 74th in world for infant mortality, with each woman having a 1/360 chance of dying due to pregnancy/birthing related complications, and 66th for maternal mortality: one of the reasons for this relatively high ranking could be that there are only .62 physicians for every 1,000 persons (in comparison with, as a base, the U.S'. 2.672 physicians/1,000 persons and Egypt with 2.83 physicians/1,000 persons).[6] Because there has been a low physician to person ratio for a long period of time, Moroccans have become adept at home-birthing in areas where doctors are not readily available. That is reflected by the relatively low maternal mortality rate. This being said, it is important to note that many women prefer to give birth at home. Giving birth in the home is preferable to some because the home is seen as a warm atmosphere where a woman can be surrounded by her family members. "Giving birth is perceived as a natural event and not a sickness," so many women do not understand why they should go to a health center. Norms among rural Moroccan communities have shifted: no longer are women expected, because of cultural/religious reasons, to go through pregnancy unaided by medical professionals. However, after speaking with several pregnant women, it was ascertained

that while traveling to nearby Bejaad for regular check-ups is now the norm, it is still expected that a woman will give birth in her home. Despite this societal expectation, the increase in hospital visits during pregnancy has resulted in a decrease in both mother and infant mortality rates in rural Morocco.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS: achieve universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it; have halved by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Morocco does not have a serious problem with HIV/AIDS: according to UNICEF, only 19,000-34,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS as of 2009, and the nation-wide prevalence rate is .1%. Other major infectious diseases such as Typhoid, Malaria, and Encephalitis are similarly a non-issue in Morocco. The biggest challenge faced by HIV/AIDs prevention and education organizations is social stigma. In the conservative Muslim culture of Moroccan society, discussing sex is taboo, thus the discussion on how to prevent HIV and other STD transmission does not occur in a formal setting. As a result of this, only 12% of girls between 15-24 have a "comprehensive understanding of HIV".[7] High risk groups such as truck drivers, sex workers, and prisoners are typically more prone to contracting HIV and other STDs than other people. As a result of this, organizations such as Moroccan Association for the Fight Against Aids and Pan-African Association for the Fight Against Aids have begun programs that target at risk individuals. One of the main forums for teaching safe sex practices is through sessions that teach sex workers how to properly use condoms. According to a 2010 article written on AIDs awareness in Morocco, because Moroccans see themselves as living in a conservative culture, there is strong resistance against HIV/AIDs education because it necessitates discussing sex outside of marriage.[8] While no data was available on the attitudes of the Feriyat education system towards HIV education, it can only be assumed that in this extremely conservative community the issue is not discussed, partly because it may seem irrelevant or because it is taboo.

Goal 7: Environmental Sustainability: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources; Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss; Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation; By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

In light of the global population reaching 7 billion, the need for environmental sustainability will become even more important. In the context of Feriyat, however, the idea of environmental sustainability is virtually non-existent. Feriyat is a community that survives mostly off of agriculture and because of that there is rampant over-harvesting and illegal clearing of land in-order to make way for more useful or profitable crops. As of 2008, 81% of Moroccans have access to improved drinking water sources, with 98% of urbanites having access and 60% of rural persons having access. 69% of Moroccans have access to improved sanitation facilities, with 83% of urban persons and 52% of rural persons having access to improved sanitation facilities.[7] It should be noted that traditionally, Moroccans (along with many other countries around the world) use Turkish/squat toilets instead of western toilets. The possession of Turkish toilet that connects to a septic system is considered an "improved sanitation facility," thus the lack of a Turkish toilet or septic system would be considered unimproved. In Feriyat, toilets of any kind are far and few between and there is no septic system—the majority of families use nature as their bathroom. Plumbing is similarly unheard of or very few families have even squat toilets and those that do lack any form of plumbing. Thus, their waste goes directly into the ground. Most families in Feriyat are dependent upon the rains for their water, as they get water from illegal wells that collect rainwater. Running water is scarce: at the time of writing, there is only one known family in Feriyat with running water. Because of the vague nature of 'significant improvements in the lives of 100 million slum dwellers' it is unknown whether or not this applies to Morocco.

Goal 8: Global Partnership: Develop further an open, rule-based, predicable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system; Address the special needs of the least developed countries; Address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small island states; Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries; In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries; In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication

As Morocco is not a landlocked country, small-island state, or classified as a "least developed country," and has a strong import/export relationship with the Western world and is not a country with a high risk of major infectious diseases, many of aspects of this particular UNMDG are to some extent irrelevant. Furthermore, many of the goals of "Global Connectedness" are geared towards improvements that can be made by the government and large corporations, and as this paper focuses on the grass roots level, inappropriate to discuss here. There are, however, some aspects of this UNMDG that can begin at a grass roots level. The use of internet and social media websites, such as Facebook, played a major role in the recent Arab Spring. The worldwide popularity of such websites speaks to the interconnectedness of the entire world, as people of all ages living in any country are capable of connecting with one another over the Internet. Even people living in rural areas have "profiles" on Facebook, despite having extremely irregular access to the Internet. In Morocco, the prevalence of social media networks and cell phones is a nationwide phenomenon: 72/100 people have cellular phones while 33/100 have regular access to the Internet. It should be noted that the cellular phone statistic is skewed; many urban Moroccans have two or more personal cellular phones, thus increasing the density of cellular phones throughout the country. In Feriyat, all men were observed to have cellular phones while their female counterparts did not have personal phones. Phone service in Feriyat is extraordinarily limited: in order to make or receive calls, one must climb up a hill and continually adjust his or her position to receive a signal. Another aspect of global connectedness that is not addressed in the UNMDG but should be noted is the international quality of Feriyat. As has already been mentioned, many of the native inhabitants of this region immigrate to Spain in order to find lucrative work, and a few times each year to see their families. Another exceptional characteristic of Feriyat is that American students come for a weeklong "Village Stay" through the SIT study abroad program. Some of these students elect to return later in the semester and, in one case, in their post-collegiate lives. This introduces an interesting dynamic into the village, as the visiting American students are expectedly unaccustomed to village life, and force the citizens of Feriyat to examine how their lives differ from Americans' lives.

Conclusions on UNMDG Status

As can be seen from the brief examination above, Morocco as a whole is doing fairly well in the context of the UNMDGs, partially because some of the issues the UNMDGs aims to change have already been achieved in Morocco. However, the UNMDG that rural Morocco in particular is having the most difficulty with are the ones concerning universal education and gender equality. The remainder of this research examines the historical and contemporary challenges related to these issues, and will look at the viability of non-formal education as a means to create a meaningful society among those who are unable to receive the formal, secular education the UNMDG aim for.

Recent History of Education in Morocco

In order to understand the current situation in rural Morocco, it is important to have a background that provides context for the recent happenings and the societal structure. In 1912, Morocco became a French protectorate under General Louis H. Lyuatey as the resident general.[9] Lyuatey created an intricate and extremely hierarchical system of education. Five different types of schools were created for each social class and, as a student progressed from primary to secondary school, family lineage determined whether or not he could continue his education. In addition to his schools that separated children by their social class, Lyuatey created an entirely different school system for the Berbers as well; "the French regarded the Berbers as a group that needed taming". This belief ultimately led to the creation of a legal separation between the Berber and Moroccan Arab populations in a document called the Berber Dahir. While the dream of a "Franco-Berber" education never came to pass, this strict separation of nations within a state caused deep harm to Moroccan culture as a whole. In 1940, approximately 3% of the school-aged population was in school, a statistic that caused Lyuatey to drastically increase the number of schools throughout Morocco. However, "Lyuatey never envisioned educating the greater mass of Moroccans becausehe wanted only to create an educated Moroccan elite," a fact that is painfully obvious through his policies. Despite exacerbating the socio-economic tensions with his new system of schooling, Lyuatey did a great deal to advance women's education in his tenure as resident general. In 1933, the first all girls' school opened followed by another in 1939. These schools did not, however, instruct their female students in academic subjects, but only in the skills necessary to run a home (this type of education increased a girls' bride price). Prior to Lyuatey's "rule" of Morocco, young girls were generally unable to attend school as learning academic subjects decreased their bride price. While Lyuatey can be accredited with greatly advancing the status of women's education, it was only after Morocco's independence that girls were truly given the opportunity to learn. In 1956, Morocco gained tangible independence from its former colonizer, France. This does not, however, mean that Morocco gained ideological independence from France. At the time of independence, business, politics, and all aspects of life considered "upper class" were conducted in French, while Arabic/Darija were reserved for the "lower class" and more rural communities. Under French rule, education was non-compulsory; at the time of independence a mere 10% of children were enrolled in primary school, 15,000 boys and zero girls were enrolled in secondary school, and 350 students were enrolled at the university level.[10] Thus, despite Morocco's political independence from France, the vestiges of French supremacy and colonialism remained. Lyuatey's system of education was, again, geared only towards educating extremely wealthy Moroccan families and the European community of Morocco, as there were very few corresponding Arabic schools for the general Moroccan populace. Immediately following the formal decolonization of Morocco, the administration's effort to improve agricultural techniques and expand educational opportunities was an indication that it was more concerned with processes rather than simple forms. Numerous other programs have been evolved to bring greater benefits to Morocco's rural population, including the scores of work centers, community development pilot stations (in conjunction with an expert United Nations staff), and the national anti-illiteracy campaign for adults.[11] In 1963, education was made compulsory and mandatory for all children between ages 6 and 13. This mandate led to an immense overhaul of the education system. The Ministry of National Education (MOE) put in place two policies called Moroccanization and Arabization. Moroccanization refers to the replacing of expatriate teachers with Moroccan teachers, a feat that proved particularly difficult as there were very few trained Moroccan educators as a result of Lyuatey's former education system.[9] It was not until the mid-1970s that Moroccans filled the majority of teaching positions. Arabization was the process by which Arabic would replace the French language in all of Morocco's schools. Again, this proved extraordinarily difficult: Arabic, unlike French, is a highly impractical language for education "because of a lack of technical vocabulary in the language." Additionally, the Berber population had "no knowledge of French and very little to no knowledge of Arabic" as a result of its former segregation. These obstacles are what make Morocco such a unique case: in Northern Africa, there were no other states that faced these exact issues, as the native tongue was usually relevant to education.

Despite the many challenges facing Morocco with regards to educational reforms, Morocco has made great strides in improving overall literacy. In 2006, UNESCO awarded Morocco the Confucius Prize for Literacy as a result of the success of Morocco's Non-Formal Education Program. According to UNESCO's press release regarding this award, the Non-Formal Education program in an "innovative national literacy initiative designed specifically for marginalized adolescents in rural areas," coupled with training for recent dropouts who wish to return to school. The mere creation of this program speaks volumes about Morocco's desire to have universal and democratized education for all children. While Morocco's literacy rate is still unfortunately low (hovering around 54%), the initiative to improve education and eventually achieve universal literacy has been shown by the government.[6] In requiring all children regardless of gender, social class, ethnic group, or religious affiliation to attend school, Morocco has firmly asserted itself as a nation willing and eager to participate in the rapidly globalizing world. Education is, without a doubt, one of the most obvious ways for a nation to increase its participation in international organizations; as a larger percentage of the populous receives education, the status of a country increases rapidly in the eyes of global leaders.

Contemporary Issues in Education

Now, 55 years after independence, Morocco faces a fairly different set of issues when it comes to education. Education in Morocco is free and compulsory through primary school (age 15). Nevertheless, many children, particularly girls in rural areas, do not attend school, and most of those who do drop out after elementary school. The country's literacy rate reveals sharp gaps in education, both in terms of gender and location; while countrywide literacy rates are estimated at 39.6% among women and 65.7% among men, the female literacy rate in rural areas is estimated only at 10%.[12] According to Dr. Lahcen Haddad, a member

of the Committee for the Promotion of Girls' Schooling in Rural Areas and President of Bejaad for Sustainable Development, the main obstacle facing Morocco in its efforts to achieve universal education is accessibility. Because a large proportion of the population lives in rural communities which do not necessarily have schools, the education rate is very low among these people.[6] Children sometimes have to walk miles in order to reach a secondary school, as most villages have primary schools, but a group of villages will usually 'share' a secondary school to supplement the lack of available teachers and funding. Furthermore, Dr. Haddad says oftentimes families cannot pay to send all of their children to boarding schools in order to continue their education. In this situation, male children are almost always given preference over female children. To combat this, organizations such as the Committee for the Promotion of Girls' Schooling in Rural Areas have begun to crop up all over Morocco. These organizations offer rural girls the opportunity to live in dormitories for free and study at the secondary level. But what happens to the girls who are not lucky enough to attend school or become literate? Are they relegated to live rural lives, following in the uneducated footsteps of the ancestors? In learning more about Moroccan society through personal experiences in rural and urban communities, the conclusion was reached that the women who live these rural, uneducated lives are living lives that are equally as valuable and meaningful as their educated, urban counterparts.

Challenges Specific to Rural Populations with Regards to Education: Observational Research in Feriyat

As was mentioned earlier, significant portions of Moroccans live in rural communities. Generally speaking, rural communities are much more 'traditional' than their urban counterparts, with gender roles being much more polarized. Women bear the brunt of cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and generally ensuring that their household runs smoothly. Men tend to the livestock and were observed to have an enormous amount of leisure time compared to women. A very small number, if any, of the adult women in Feriyat, the rural village where a portion of the observations were conducted, were literate. However, most of the female children in this community were enrolled in the local school, illustrating the shift in attitudes towards and the availability of education.

These five women, who were all as different in looks as in personality, were the kindest, most beautiful women I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. None of them had attended school and all were illiterate, but living with them that helped me realize that education does not always come in the classroom. Rayhana, the eighteen-year-old wife of one of my brothers, was seven months pregnant with her first child. Despite being so young, so newly wedded, and so very pregnant, Rayhana was the first of my three "sisters-in-law" to truly welcome me into her household. She decorated me with beautiful henna, asking questions about my life and, when my limited Darija ran out, speaking to me as if I could understand simply because she did not want me to feel isolated in this strange new home. Rayhana had been married into a polygamist household, that is, she had two mothers-in-law. Both of these women, whom I called Mama Wahed and Mama Jooj, were incredible human beings who possessed enormous hearts capable of loving any and every one that came into their home. They were around 55 years old and had born many children: in my home, five sons remained and several of the other families in the village were borne of their kin. I wrote a short story that showed that education does not only imply formalized schooling, and that women from very different backgrounds in Morocco are able to live in an inexplicably beautiful manner regardless of whether or not they have gone to school.

Wabi-Sabi, or, The Act of Finding Beauty in Inherent Imperfection

Khadija, so it was said, was born on a cloudless night when the moon was so bright that one could see as if it were day. Her birth was miraculous, so it was said, because despite the cloudless sky, rain pounded the earth and the wind raced through the air, creating rivers that swept away chickens and threatened to flood even the loftiest of compounds. Perhaps owing to her extraordinary beginning, Khadija possessed an innate ability to shed light on beauty in the most dire of circumstances. Or perhaps, it was her ability to do this that allowed her to be born in the midst of a wild storm. Despite her incredible creation, Khadija was not destined to live an extraordinary life, at least not in any tangible manner. Her life was to be spent raising and caring for a sprawling family in the rural Moroccan countryside, toiling away to create a paradise for her loved ones.

The lazy buzz of flies in the mid afternoon sun lulled Khadija into a soothing rhythm as she wound row upon row of colorful yarn into intricate patterns, slowly creating a beautiful rug. Sitting on her low stool in the cool comfort of one of the many small rooms in her compound, Khadija half listened to the sounds of the Moroccan hillside and half hummed a song she'd never heard as she waited for her family to assemble en masse for tea.

"Dada Dada Dada!" A miserable wail suddenly pierced through Khadija's calm. Seconds later, a sticky toddler stumbled into the weaving room, tugging on Khadija's pajamas, a look of pure ecstasy at the sight of his grandmother erasing the misery of moments before. It was not just baby Abdhakim who was filled with happiness whenever he was in the presence of Khadija, but everyone who encountered her.

Khadjia could always solve the most difficult of problems. When she was sixteen, she became the second wife of Hassan, a man in the village next to where she had grown up. Hassan's first wife, Fatima, was a beautiful, fiercely proud woman, and was furious that her husband had deigned to take a second wife. Fatima, of course, could not fully express her anger to Hassan, but held no reservations in ensuring that Khadija knew she was not welcome in Fatima's home. Fatima refused to help Khadija in fetching water, causing Khadija to spill much of her precious cargo whenever she returned home. Her young arms were too weak to lift the heavy jugs from the family's donkey. Khadija bore these cruelties with a smile, never complaining about her burden and answering in only the sweetest tones when Fatima addressed her. At first, this caused Fatima to become colder and angrier. But slowly, Khadija's shy smile and laughing eyes melted Fatima's heart, and she relented in her anger.

Khadija, of course, had recognized Fatima's hatred for her and was not unaffected by it. She was acutely lonely for the first months of her marriage, living in this strange village with an unwelcoming woman and large, gruff husband. Khadija's mother had always taught her that if she could laugh instead of weep, smile instead of frown, and hug instead of hit, Allah's kindness would beam down upon her. And so this is what Khadija did for several years until, one day, finally, Fatima relented.

"It is not the fault of Khadija that Hassan took her to be his wife. It could not hurt to show this girl some kindness," Fatima thought. And so, day-by-day, Fatima allowed Khadija to become a member of the family and to share in the love that enveloped their home.

Khadija and Fatima grew old together under the hot sun of the African sky,

fetching water, cooking bread, and birthing many, many children. The two women grew inseparable, to the point that it seemed impossible to imagine a time when they had been anything less than sisters. Their daughters grew up and moved on to have families of their own, some of their sons moved abroad to seek their fortunes, but the two women were never alone. Slowly their remaining sons married women, who, like Khadija had done so many years before, made treks from villages near and far to appear at their compound, eyes wide with nerves and hands clutching their belongings. Fatima realized that Khadija was most adept at welcoming these frightened, young women into their homes and serves them their first tea.

The first child to bring a new wife into Khadija's home was Abdwahed, her second son and most beloved (though this was, of course, a secret). When Abdwahed's young wife, Miriam, appeared in Khadija's home, the elderly woman's heart swelled with empathy as she recalled her first time stepping through the low doorway into the dusty compound. Miriam wore a similar look of fear and anxiety as Khadija poured her a glass of impossibly sweet tea. Khadija told Miriam all about her new home, trying to prevent the foreboding silence from creeping into the cracks of their conversation. Miriam sat, her eyes like orbs, as she did her utmost to listen to the words of this kindly woman and blink back the tears that constantly threatened to fall in her tea. Gradually, Miriam's pounding heart slowed its pace and her tears dried before they could even fall.

As the years passed, new wives entered Khadija's home and soon there were babies and children running around her family's compound. Their musical voices carrying through the still summer nights. Khadija too grew older as the seasons changed, yet her ability to soothe those around her remained. Even during the harshest of winters, when it seemed the sun would never emerge from its lair and when the food was scarce and the wells frozen, Khadija refused to let her family go hungry. She meticulously portioned every morsel of food at each meal, ensuring that all the members of her continually growing family were always well fed and left mealtimes with smiles upon their worn faces.

Khadija taught generations of girls how to stretch food during the winter, how to weave fantastically beautiful rugs and where, precisely, to touch a cow in order to coax her into giving milk. Her granddaughters were able to attend the new elementary school, proudly showing Khadija their painstakingly written alphabet while she clapped in delight, her joy in sharing in their knowledge more than if she herself had suddenly learned to read. The many years under the unforgiving sun and stinging dust had taken its toll on Khadija's body, yet her spirit went unmarred.

Khadija's gift lay not in any ability to toil away at a desk or in leading a country, but in teaching those around her how to love one another, and the steps necessary in order to carry out their lives in a peaceful, wonderful, beautiful way. In order to do all of this, Khadija always said, you must share what Allah has given you, and only then will the world become beautiful.

While this story depicts a woman whose life falls far outside of the UNMDGs, it is meant to show that living a life outside of these lofty goals is by no means less meaningful or less "good" than living a life within the UNMDGs. Despite Khadija's lack of formal education, she passed on what are perhaps the most important human qualities to her children and those around her, teaching them to be kind, sharing, and patient.

Final Conclusions

It would be ignorant and cruel to say that the women in Feriyat are better off without formal education or to say that their lives are filled with a simplicity that is unavailable in the developed world. These women lead intellectually and physically challenging lives, in a way that is unimaginable to someone from the western world. Would their lives be different if they had been able to attend school? Would Mama Wahed and Mama Jooj have entered into a polygamous marriage as very young women? Would they still be living in Feriyat, weaving rugs and baking loaves upon loaves of bread? Would they still be laughing with their sons, engaging in animated conversations with each other and appreciating the mere presence of their family members in the same way? Most likely, the answer is no. In comparison with their urban counterparts, the women in the village are far more welcoming and possess a unique and innate sense of sharing.

After a thorough examination of Feriyat through the lens of the UNMDGs and after spending considerable time with the El Amm family, a conclusion has been reached: it is not reasonable to speculate how a rural community would be changed if the UNMDGs were accomplished. Furthermore, trying to decide whether or not a community would be "better off" after having achieved the UNMDGs is seemingly impossible. Of course, there is no question that any community would be better off without HIV/AIDS, infectious disease, malnutrition, and poverty. However, altering the employment, education, and "global connectedness" status of any community, rural or not, would have an enormous impact upon societal functions. One of the most common effects of an increase in education in a community is an increase in the number of people who choose to leave their homes after finishing education. Because education is known to open students' minds to new ideas, cultures, and places, it stands to reason that after finishing a full course of schooling a student would choose to live elsewhere. This can be positive, if the hypothetical is escaping a community that is rife with poverty or violence or this can be negative because it contributes to a loss of culture. With each person that moves away, their cultural traditions are diminished as they change to accommodate the cultures of the new community. That being said, universal education should remain a global priority: the positive externalities of educating even a small portion of any community are numerous, and the opportunities made available to educated persons are virtually endless. In light of the struggle to achieve universal education, Morocco has done a wonderful job in implementing new strategies to make up for so-called "lost time" during its colonization. Morocco, as a whole, has done a great deal in furthering girls' primary and secondary education. Various political and social programs have resulted in a shift in cultural norms, particularly within the last fifty years that encourage girls to attend school and to seek work outside of the domestic sphere. While there is still a long way to go before Morocco can be categorized as a country with universal education and equality in education, the recent efforts of the Moroccan government and various NGOs should inspire hope in the eyes of education-activists. Only time will tell how the efforts of the global community to create a system of universal education will impact global society and social constructs. If progress continues to be made at its current rate, it would appear the future holds great things for universal education and gender equality.

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