

Women's leadership propels USAID project improving teacher-training in Morocco

The project, managed by ASU, is providing opportunities for women to influence an overhaul of primary teacher preparation.



Professor Bouchra El Andaloussi gives feedback to her students, who are preparing to become teachers, at a teacher-training center in Rabat, Morocco, in June 2022. El Andaloussi's desire to improve Morocco's teacher preparation system led her to take a leadership role in a USAID-funded project led by Arizona State University. (Photo by Daniel Lynx Bernard for ASU.)

By Daniel Lynx Bernard — July 24, 2022

Women may face challenges in seeking leadership positions in academia when they are outside male-dominated professional networks and expected to balance their careers with a disproportionate share of household duties. In Morocco, female instructors are finding opportunities to provide leadership in a project that aims to improve coordination among institutions that train teachers.

The Higher Education Partnership–Morocco (HEP-M), funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Arizona State University in cooperation with the Moroccan government, formed research and development groups involving instructors from universities and government teacher-training centers throughout Morocco that prepare primary school teachers. These groups are revising syllabi and instructional materials for primary teacher preparation in order to align Morocco’s institutions with each other and with international standards.

Because of the distance between group members around the country, participation by international experts and social distancing during the pandemic, most of the groups’ meetings have taken place online. This has provided an unexpected benefit for women members, said Bouchra El Andaloussi, a teacher-trainer who has participated in three groups.

“When women in Morocco or elsewhere take on positions of responsibility, despite everything, they are still in charge of daily tasks for the family and the household,” El Andaloussi said. “The fact that this work happened online and is still happening remotely, and that all the Regional Centers for Teacher Training in the country are involved in this project, has encouraged more women to join these development groups, and to maintain involvement over the long term.”

“There is an enormous engagement on the part of women,” El Andaloussi said, adding, “They have the willingness to work on several modules. They are always present, on time and contribute effectively to the design and elaboration of these syllabi. Remote work perhaps has had the benefit of showing the level of engagement on the part of women and even revealed the obstacles that work against women’s desire to flourish in their professions and give more.”

In her job as an instructor-researcher at the Regional Center for Teacher Training in Rabat, El Andaloussi already had a full slate of duties leading classes for future teachers, heading the department for training French teachers, and conducting research into the effectiveness of teaching methods. But when she learned about the goals of the HEP-M project, she felt it was well worth her time. El Andaloussi agreed to serve on multiple research and development groups revising syllabi as well as a steering committee that reviews groups’ output.

“I know the trainer’s job since I’m a trainer myself, and I know that we can define what’s missing in the instruction of teachers: a syllabus that will be a guide for the different trainers, whether they be experienced trainers or novice trainers, which will unify everyone’s vision for each module,” El Andaloussi said. “To reach those objectives, you have to stick with it. You have to work. You have to sacrifice a bit of your time and contribute to this challenge.”

The time commitment is significant, said Nouzha Elaoudati, a professor of education sciences at Abdelmalek Essaidi University in Tetouan, Morocco. As the facilitator of the work group on applied education sciences, Elaoudati said she has scheduled and

managed dozens of meetings in addition to writing detailed meeting reports and communicating with the project managers. “You have to listen to the group members and motivate them to share their ideas,” Elaoudati said. “It also requires coordinating and communicating with the facilitators of the other work groups.” But Elaoudati said she found the effort fulfilling and benefited from networking with experts in the field.

Promoting equal opportunity across sectors is a global priority for USAID. The HEP-M project, implemented by ASU’s [Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College](#) in cooperation with Morocco’s Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation and Ministry of National Education, Preschool and Sports, was designed to promote gender equality in teaching opportunities and gender awareness in classroom content. HEP-M has provided workshops on the status of women’s empowerment in Morocco and internationally; how gender affects educational outcomes; and inclusive teaching methods.

Meanwhile, HEP-M is providing entry into professional networks from which women are sometimes excluded. The work of the research and development groups introduced teacher-trainers to counterparts in other institutions and regions. The project is also formally analyzing the social/professional networks in all teacher-training institutions: In addition to gauging gender parity, the analysis will provide a map of experts so all participants will know whom to contact for advice or assistance on different aspects of their profession.

Lamyaa Fares, a trainer of Arabic teachers from Inezgane, Morocco, said she appreciates HEP-M’s attention to gender dimensions. Fares joined a HEP-M research and development group aimed at training prospective teachers in innovative methods of instruction. Fares said Morocco has made strides in encouraging women to become educators, but that leadership positions within educational institutions are still overwhelmingly male. “Women now have easy access to teaching professions. Female teachers seem to be in the majority in the recruitments in the last decade. But much

remains to be done to ensure female leadership, particularly in positions of responsibility,” Fares said.

Rabha Kissani, an assistant professor of education at Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra, said HEP-M has broadened her perspective on her profession. As she participated in a group revising the training curriculum for French teachers, Kissani interacted with colleagues from around the country and different types of institutions. “The HEP-M project allowed me to deepen my thinking on several issues related to teacher training, in particular how teaching and learning is a multi-dimensional activity,” Kissani said. “The project has also allowed me to meet other scientists, and to exchange with my fellow researchers about opportunities for scientific collaboration.”

Like El Andaloussi, Kissani said she decided to devote time to HEP-M because of her personal and professional convictions. “I saw that it was my duty and my responsibility to contribute to this work,” Kissani said. “I am convinced that primary school is the base of the pyramid, and that we must invest fully in figuring out, collectively, the conditions necessary for it to succeed. I want to share with my students — future teachers — all the tips of the job so they can achieve the expected results.”



Professor Rabha Kissani participates in a brainstorming exercise at a HEP-M workshop in Rabat, Morocco, in February 2022. (Photo by Daniel Lynx Bernard for ASU)