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MOROCCO

RETHINKING GENDER AND EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE¹



KEYWORDS: gender, education, science and technology

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Introduction

The world today is characterised by the emergence of an information society which represents a major challenge for all countries. In particular, developing countries face many obstacles in their transition to an information society considering their comparatively low technological and scientific level. Many argue that the demands of this transition cannot be met without properly considering the role of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in education, and especially how to empower women in this context.

The linkages between gender, education and ICTs should be the cornerstone of a digital strategy. The use of ICTs to facilitate women's access to education is essential to the transformation towards an information society. Their inclusion in technical studies is of equal importance, and the internet is a critical enabler of both these needs. As the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNESCO declared in 1996, the internet "should be designated a development tool of 'public utility,'" adding, "It is precisely in the developing countries (...) that the Internet can render its greatest service."²

The key questions that could be asked are: What are the measures undertaken by Morocco to promote women's education and their orientation to science and technology? What is the impact of Morocco's 2013 digital plan? And what is innovative about the country's 2020 digital strategic agenda?

Policy and political background

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was signed by Morocco on 19 January 1977, and ratified on 3 May 1979. Related treaties and conventions have also been ratified, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified in 1993.

¹ This map has been provided by the author, and is an exception to APC's use of maps of states and territories recognised by the UN.

² Inter-Parliamentary Union & UNESCO. (1996). *The Parliamentary Vision for Education, Culture and Communication on the Eve of the 21st Century*. www.ipu.org/splz-e/unescog6.htm

Morocco's commitment to human rights is also found in its 2011 constitution, which states in the preamble: "The Kingdom of Morocco, an active member of international organisations, undertakes to subscribe to the principles, rights and obligations of their respective charters and conventions, and reaffirms its commitment to human rights that are universally recognised."³

In particular, articles 19 to 40 of the constitution are concerned with fundamental freedoms and rights, and article 164 deals with parity and the struggle against all forms of discrimination.

Since independence, ESCRs have been a key policy goal for Morocco's governments – and ICTs have been seen as a key way to enable these rights, as reflected in the country's national strategy for an information society and the digital economy. This has meant changes at many levels: in policies, laws, and even cultural practices. Currently, one challenge faced by the government is how to invest in ICTs in a way that enables ESCRs and empowers women so that gender equality can be achieved.

Impact and limits of Digital Morocco

The country's 2009-2013 digital plan, called Digital Morocco 2013, recognises the importance of education in the development of the country's information society. It draws the link between education and the digital economy and highlights the need for the engagement of all actors, giving a significant role to the private sector and universities. These objectives are reflected in the king of Morocco's speech to the nation on the occasion of Throne Day on 30 July 2008:

At the same time, we call on the government to adopt a new strategy dedicated to the industry and service sectors and the development of new technologies. This strategy should focus on the optimal use of the opportunities brought by globalisation in terms of investment flows. Further consolidating the Moroccan private sector and encouraging value-added industrial investment, this strategy should be intended to open the way for the Moroccan economy to be able to invest in new industrial niches using

³ www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/details.jsp?id=13535

innovative technologies and to create promising markets for its products and services. We have as much ambition as determination to ensure the integration of Morocco, its companies and universities, in the global knowledge economy.⁴

This strategy considers ICTs as a key tool for human and economic development⁵ and essential to enabling ESCRs for all. The goal of this strategy was the use of ICT as a cornerstone for human and economic development to ensure a good technological level for Morocco in North Africa. Gender equality was also a noticeable part of this plan, and was a feature of legal, institutional and financial changes necessary to implement the strategy.

The plan was accompanied by two key measures: the first ensuring the availability of quality human resource skills able to satisfy the sector's needs; the second one dealing with online security of data and personal safety (or "digital trust").⁶

Moroccan legislators have introduced several legal texts in an attempt to deal with the challenges relating to cybercrime, the protection of personal information, and copyright, including:

- Law No. 07-03 supplementing the Criminal Code regarding offences related to automated data processing systems.
- Law No. 53-05 on the electronic exchange of legal information.
- Law No. 09-08 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data.
- Law No. 34-05 amending and supplementing Law No. 2.00 relating to copyright and allied rights.
- Decree on the interconnection of telecommunications networks.
- Decree on general conditions of operation for public telecommunications networks.

Digital Morocco 2013 also involved creating a technology innovation fund.⁷

The impact of the plan on the empowerment of women seems evident. According to 2010 statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Executive Training, 15,287 female students had enrolled for a bachelor's degree

compared to 14,474 male students. This shifts noticeably at the master's degree level where, of a total of 3,071 students enrolled, 1,251 were female. Similarly, fewer women than men enrolled in PhD degree programmes.⁸

This gap can be explained by the family responsibilities that women have after marriage, gender stereotypes that limit women's participation in technological fields, and other cultural and social reasons.

However, according to the ministry, women are moving more into scientific and technological specialties. Of 263 master's and PhD students in science and technology, 121 were women. (The number of women enrolled at the master's and PhD level exceeds 50% in other specialties such as medicine, dentistry and pharmacology).⁹

Digital Morocco has also had a positive impact on women's access to business. In terms of innovation, the plan supported women entrepreneurs through its programme called "Infitah for Her" (Open for Her). This programme encourages the use of ICTs by women entrepreneurs, especially those who have very small enterprises, in order to increase efficiency and improve productivity.

However, despite these achievements, the financial and human resources devoted to this sector are still insufficient in addressing the disparities in women's access to education, and their engagement in the scientific and technical fields, compared to men. In particular, there is a need to rethink education policy in order to ensure equal access for men and women to the scientific and technical specialties.

Moreover, it is difficult to attribute the evident empowerment of women to the 2013 plan alone. For example, six years ago the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Executive Training launched a project called INJAZ¹⁰ with the goal to ensure easy and cheaper access to ICT equipment for students. According to the ministry, this programme

4 This is not an official translation. The original text is in Arabic and it was officially translated into French.

5 Ministère de l'Industrie, du Commerce et des Nouvelles Technologies. (2009). Maroc Numeric 2013 : Stratégie nationale pour la société de l'information et l'économie numérique 2009-2013. https://ccdoe.org/sites/default/files/strategy/Maroc_CyberSecurity_2013_FR.pdf

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de la Formation des Cadres. (2015). Effectifs des diplômés selon le domaine d'étude et l'établissement universitaire 2009-2010. www.enssup.gov.ma/fr/Statistiques/2171-effectifs-des-dipl%C3%A9m%C3%A9s-selon-le-domaine-d%20%99%C3%A9tude-et-%E2%80%99%C3%A9tablissement-universitaire

9 Ibid.

10 Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de la Formation des cadres. (2016). Lancement de la 6ème édition du programme INJAZ. www.enssup.gov.ma/fr/Actualite/3152-%D8%A5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AC-%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2

aims to improve the quality of education and skills development of students in order to facilitate their integration into the job market.¹¹

The programme offers students high-speed internet access for a year and a laptop or tablet, covering 85% of the cost of the internet access and the hardware. The programme benefited 64,000 students in 2016.¹²

This is just one of several programmes that have emerged in the education sector prior to the digital plan.

Others include:

- Supporting engineering students with computers and other technological needs.
- A programme called “GENIE” (Genius) focused on primary and secondary schools with the aim of ensuring that pupils have access to ICTs from an early age.
- A programme called Nafida@ (Window@) which aims to facilitate teachers’ access to ICTs (laptops and internet) and which was launched in September 2005.¹³

All these actions and programmes have had a positive impact on women’s access to education and their empowerment generally.

Next step: 2015-2020 strategic agenda

In order to face the challenges imposed by globalisation, the Moroccan government set up a new digital strategic agenda for 2015-2020. This strategy considers ICTs and education as a cornerstone of technological development. It also considers universities as an important actor in the digitisation process.

The Moroccan government is convinced of the importance of research and development and the use of ICTs to maximise knowledge and scientific productivity. The strategy is organised into three areas of work which include supporting businesses, knowledge about good practices concerning international standards, and networking.¹⁴ Besides this, the strategy aims to strengthen digital innovation through the use of ICTs to meet Morocco’s socioeconomic development needs by 2020.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ministère de l’Industrie, du Commerce et des Nouvelles Technologies. (2009). Op. cit.

¹⁴ Ministère de l’Industrie, du Commerce, de l’Investissement et des Nouvelles Technologies. (2014). Plan stratégique 2015-2020 : Maroc Numeric Cluster. www.mediafire.com/download/xk5mpt7jgeej99k/Plan+Strat%C3%A9gique+MNC+2020.pdf

¹⁵ Ibid.

In this context, on 13 June 2016 the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Executive Training launched an online platform for university students, involving public-private partnerships, with the aim of enhancing research and development.

We note that gender is not explicitly listed as a goal in the strategy, but it is a cross-cutting issue. The strategy effectively allows women easier access to information, knowledge and expertise. It democratises access to the internet by reducing equipment costs, which enables women’s economic empowerment and equality when it comes to accessing their ESCRs generally.

Actions contained in the strategic agenda will strengthen cooperation between Moroccan women and others, such as those in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Several project partnerships with European universities are now managed by women researchers in Moroccan universities. In this context we also note that the exchange of experiences and good practices between women’s associations in Morocco and other countries, especially European ones, has had a positive impact on women’s political participation and access to decision-making positions in this country.

Conclusion and action steps

Significant progress has been made in enhancing women’s access to education, especially in the field of science and technology, in this way strengthening their access to ESCRs.

Both Digital Morocco 2013 and the 2015-2020 strategic agenda are very ambitious. They touch several key areas and have reduced the digital divide between Morocco and its economic partners in the North such as the European Union and United States. Nevertheless, a considerable gap remains in overcoming disparities between men and women due to social and cultural reasons. Therefore it is necessary to rethink gender, education and ICTs and take these three pillars more strongly into consideration in the next digital agenda to ensure that these social and cultural reasons are addressed

Both digital agendas focus on the private sector, universities and government as principal actors. It is, however, necessary to rethink the important value that civil society organisations, especially women’s associations, can offer. A new digital strategy should integrate all Moroccan actors, even men and women as individuals, to face the challenges posed by an interconnected world.

Economic, social and cultural rights and the internet

The 45 country reports gathered here illustrate the link between the internet and economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). Some of the topics will be familiar to information and communications technology for development (ICT4D) activists: the right to health, education and culture; the socioeconomic empowerment of women using the internet; the inclusion of rural and indigenous communities in the information society; and the use of ICT to combat the marginalisation of local languages. Others deal with relatively new areas of exploration, such as using 3D printing technology to preserve cultural heritage, creating participatory community networks to capture an “inventory of things” that enables socioeconomic rights, crowdfunding rights, or the negative impact of algorithms on calculating social benefits. Workers’ rights receive some attention, as does the use of the internet during natural disasters.

Ten thematic reports frame the country reports. These deal both with overarching concerns when it comes to ESCRs and the internet – such as institutional frameworks and policy considerations – as well as more specific issues that impact on our rights: the legal justification for online education resources, the plight of migrant domestic workers, the use of digital databases to protect traditional knowledge from biopiracy, digital archiving, and the impact of multilateral trade deals on the international human rights framework.

The reports highlight the institutional and country-level possibilities and challenges that civil society faces in using the internet to enable ESCRs. They also suggest that in a number of instances, individuals, groups and communities are using the internet to enact their socioeconomic and cultural rights in the face of disinterest, inaction or censure by the state.

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