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It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this seminar and explain the problems of rural Moroccan women, which hinder its promotion and development. At first, I want to present my warmest gratitude to the organizers for inviting us to this seminar on rural women, such an important issue for our association that it was the cause of its creation and continues to be its primary focus.

On the other hand, the need to integrate rural women in the various programs and national development plans has been expressed by the recommendations of the UN and by the statements from international summits, like in Mexico City, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Abidjan, Geneva, and recently in Beijing.

This last summit has considered essential that the work of rural women be recognized and valued in its contribution to the family, democracy and development

Several measures have been taken to implement the directives of the Governments and of these summits, but we need to note that the progress made so far by our country remains below the expectations, and this in the rural areas.

There, the conditions of life have become even more difficult and women are particularly affected in their life at home, in terms of health, education, habitat, wood or water supply, etc.

Moreover, the income of rural households is 53% of that of urban households, making life in the countryside much more difficult.

The situation requires all decision-making bodies to mobilize quickly, to deploy considerable efforts to improve the living conditions of the rural population in order to better integrate rural women in the process of economic and social development, so that they can reach at least the same level of development that their sisters have in the urban environment.

We should emphasize, however, that women everywhere have begun to organize and form associations to fight for rights not yet acquired, and in fact they persist in improving their living conditions.

It is within this framework, particularly the marginalization of rural women, that our Moroccan Association for the Advancement of Rural Women, referred under the term AMPFR, was created by a founder group consisting of Professors, Researchers, Physicians, Engineers, Agronomists, Farmers, Cultivators, etc.

It was agreed that its primary objective would be "the promotion of rural women in those areas that correspond to the many activities and skills of its active members".

Before introducing to you our Association, let me offer you a brief analysis of the current situation of rural women of Morocco:

The Association has published a brochure with the essential figures, as well as a little document entitled "Diagnosis - Action – Perspectives" which, under the *raison d'être* of our Association, presents the main indicators (demographic, socio-economic, legal, etc.) through the analysis and comparison of two urban and rural areas. I shall therefore present to you the indicators to be considered to promote rural women.

- Rural women represent 51% of rural population. 40% of them are under the age of 15, while in urban areas this figure is 30%.
- 53% of rural women are married, over 34% are single and 12% widowed or divorced.
- 58% of girls younger than 20 years, leave the rural areas to urban areas in search of work as maids or housekeepers, cheap labour for industry, or other illegal activities.
- The number of children per woman is 5.5, against 2.5 in urban areas. This index has been trending downward because of the practice of contraception, celibacy and the decline in early marriage.
- The education and culture reveal significant delays in the training of rural women, maintaining high rates of illiteracy (87%) against 50% in urban areas, and a school enrolment of rural girls of 28% against 79% in town.
- The share of girls in vocational training is still negligible compared to that of urban areas.
- The implementation of health policies in rural areas remains also very weak: the health of the mother, child health, sanitation, infrastructure, equipment etc.
- In the socio-economic sphere, participation of rural women in the workforce is a highly revealing indicator of the weight and the role they hold in the rural world. Thus, their participation in economic activity being 43% is nearly twice as high as that in urban areas (24%).
- According to their employment status:
  - 79% of working women work as family helpers or apprentices, which is a job not recognized and poorly paid.
  - 13.4% are independent and 5.2% employees.
- The time devoted to work is on average 12 hours per day and can sometimes reach 19 daily hours. This hard work is unfavourable to the education of children, their schooling and promotion.
- Regarding housing conditions in rural areas, it should be highlighted the lack of a policy of rural settlement, based on the needs of the population. Dwellings are built of adobe. They seldom have a kitchen, a washroom or showers, and usually suffer problems of electricity and drinking water.

- The legal status of Moroccan women, whether urban or rural, it is governed primarily by what is known in Morocco as the Moudawana, together with other legal rules. In September 1993, women got the revision of the Moudouana, and thus reduced some social differences. The new provisions on marriage, divorce, guardianship or pension take into account the fact that women are citizens in full, responsible, and playing a major role in society. But the implementation of these provisions remains still very weak.

To participate in the improvement of socio-economic indicators related to rural women, the AMPFR has set general goals for the implementation of its programs. Let me summarize them now:

- First: the struggle against illiteracy: its rate is very high affecting mainly the rural woman. It is a scourge that requires the mobilization of everyone
- Second: to encourage the schooling of rural girls to reduce the gap between the rates for boys and girls in primary and secondary education. To emphasize that the educational advancement of rural women contribute significantly to the improvement of wellbeing, respect and enjoyment of human rights.
- Third: to develop means of mass information for a greater awareness of the rights of Moroccan women and, at the same time, for a change in attitudes towards the role of women and men.
- Fourth: the improvement of living and working conditions. In fact, several obstacles hinder the process of integration of rural women in the economic, social and institutional development. These obstacles are either related to their sex, or to a lack of development in their community. Hence the need for regular consultation among the organizations involved in the promotion of rural women.
- Fifth: the integration of rural women in occupations suited to its socio-economic situation. Since the scope of work of rural women is limited to activities related to agriculture, it is in this sector that we plan actions to improve the conditions of female rural work, such as traditional activities, working time, quality level, remuneration etc. And this, by supporting organized groups, cooperatives or associations.

The association plays a key role for the proper flow of information, development and promotion of rural women. It acts as part of a structure in order to coordinate the work of various stakeholders at both central and local levels, with the purpose of avoiding the dispersion of all the efforts done for the benefit of rural women.

- For the objectives related to health services, it is necessary to strengthen the role, the involvement and the responsibility of rural men in all aspects of family life, in particular to achieve the goals of health and well being for them, their wives and children.
- In short, the final objective is the design and implementation of income generating projects for rural women and rural girls. The goal is twofold: firstly to improve the material conditions of families, and secondly to integrate women in the socio-economic development of the region.

These projects can be individually or collectively promoted and will therefore use different technologies.

To accomplish the goals it has set on itself, the Association operates through the following organs:

- The General Assembly of the Association (active)
- The Board of Directors (elected by the Assembly)
- Regional and Local Offices (local stakeholders)
- The Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (role of audit).

The constant concern for the advancement of rural women forces the association to work in actions limited in time and space, and regularly monitored in order to achieve a greater impact and more credibility.

The Association carries out these activities according to the following approach:

Direct contacts, considered as field activities, carried out for the purpose of increasing awareness on the needs of rural women on the one hand, and also to develop attitudes, values and positive behaviours of target population (rural men and women), on the other. The Association works therefore:

- Either by direct contact, by organizing visits to the homes of rural women.
- Either by smaller meetings at the farm level for a maximum of ten women.
- Either through interventions at the level of "NADIS", which are a kind of village Clubs for technical assistance in specific areas. This approach allows the Association to address clear and specific issues that concern both rural women and men.

The Association also works in a larger-scale, in projects that affect many rural women and men. They cover general topics related to obstacles that shall be removed or achievements that shall be attained. Among these actions, I will mention:

- Intensive awareness campaigns and information.
- Information-day meetings.
- Radio transmissions.
- Exchange or loan of recording cassettes.

These actions are carried out in collaboration with the relevant departments or agencies and they are supported by audiovisual or written tools.

In addition to that, through its multidisciplinary teams, the Association promotes the exchange of ideas and experiences through colleagues, seminars, workshops, training courses etc.

These scientific actions are carried out in cooperation with national and international bodies, and focus on the various constraints that undermine the promotion of rural women, and on finding solutions to them.

The Association reproduces and distributes the documents prepared in these meetings for a better flow of information between the relevant operators, NGOs, agencies, departments, etc.

The programs of research and analysis are carried out by a national team called the Coordinating Board of the Association (CCA). These actions allow the Association to meet the specific needs of rural women.

Therefore, the association has an important publishing activity, including:

- The publication of a newsletter describing the activities of the association, the results of research, experiments, etc.
- The publication of articles in several means of communication with the results of research and studies.
- The development of brochures, leaflets or posters on the latest challenges and their solution.
- Edition of textbooks for the alphabetization of rural women.
- The publication of documents from our actions on development.
- The association develops implements and monitors the immediate income-generating projects to benefit rural women.
- It also organizes competitions on issues concerning rural women.

In **conclusion**, the analysis of the current situation of rural women shows that their integration in all aspects of economic and social activity will contribute significantly to improving the quality of their life, as well as the quality of life of their families.

This integration will allow, on the one hand, to optimize its dual role as housewife and working woman, as an actress of change and, on the other hand, to create the necessary conditions for full citizenship: economic, social, political etc.

Given the magnitude of the obstacles that women face and the serious problems of poverty, the Moroccan Association for the Advancement of Rural Women (**AMPFR**) was created to provide support to rural women in various areas that correspond to the many activities and skills of its active members. She intends to play a role in mobilizing national and international political views, according to a vision that sees rural women as stakeholders and direct beneficiaries of all policies and all programs and projects.

The rural woman is no longer considered a “subordinate”: it is part of the agenda of rural development.

Indeed, in order to get a more significant result, the Association has undertaken the design and implementation of flexible programs, responsive and innovative, to be implemented particularly in communities that suffer important needs.

For the latter, that is the program of the Moroccan Association for the Advancement of Rural Women (**AMPFR**), it must be emphasized that the overarching objectives, the operational structures, the intervention approaches, etc., **to hear their comments**, seem ambitious.

But we decided to raise the bar a little higher, while keeping our feet on the ground. In other words, this ambition did not frighten us. On the contrary, it encouraged us to be constantly dynamic and full of determination in order to implement specific projects on the field, to achieve the previously set goals, to obtain a credible result, with effects and a positive impact on rural women

The symposia, seminars, meetings, etc. are relegated to second place and they will not be organized unless by necessity.

The association members have pledged to go slowly but surely, giving priority to the actions on the ground and meeting the needs of rural women while respecting their cultural environment.

To emphasize that each general objective, was composed of several sub-goals or operational goals and each of these sub-goal has a corresponding number of specific and adequate actions.

Monitoring and evaluation are important in achieving each action.

I can not conclude this statement without renewing my most sincere congratulations to the organizers of this important seminar and express the hope that this two-day meeting will be the beginning of a series of specific actions aimed at the promotion of rural women.

Thank you for your attention.