PROGRAM EVALUATION OF LINKING EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROJECT IN RURAL & URBAN MOROCCO

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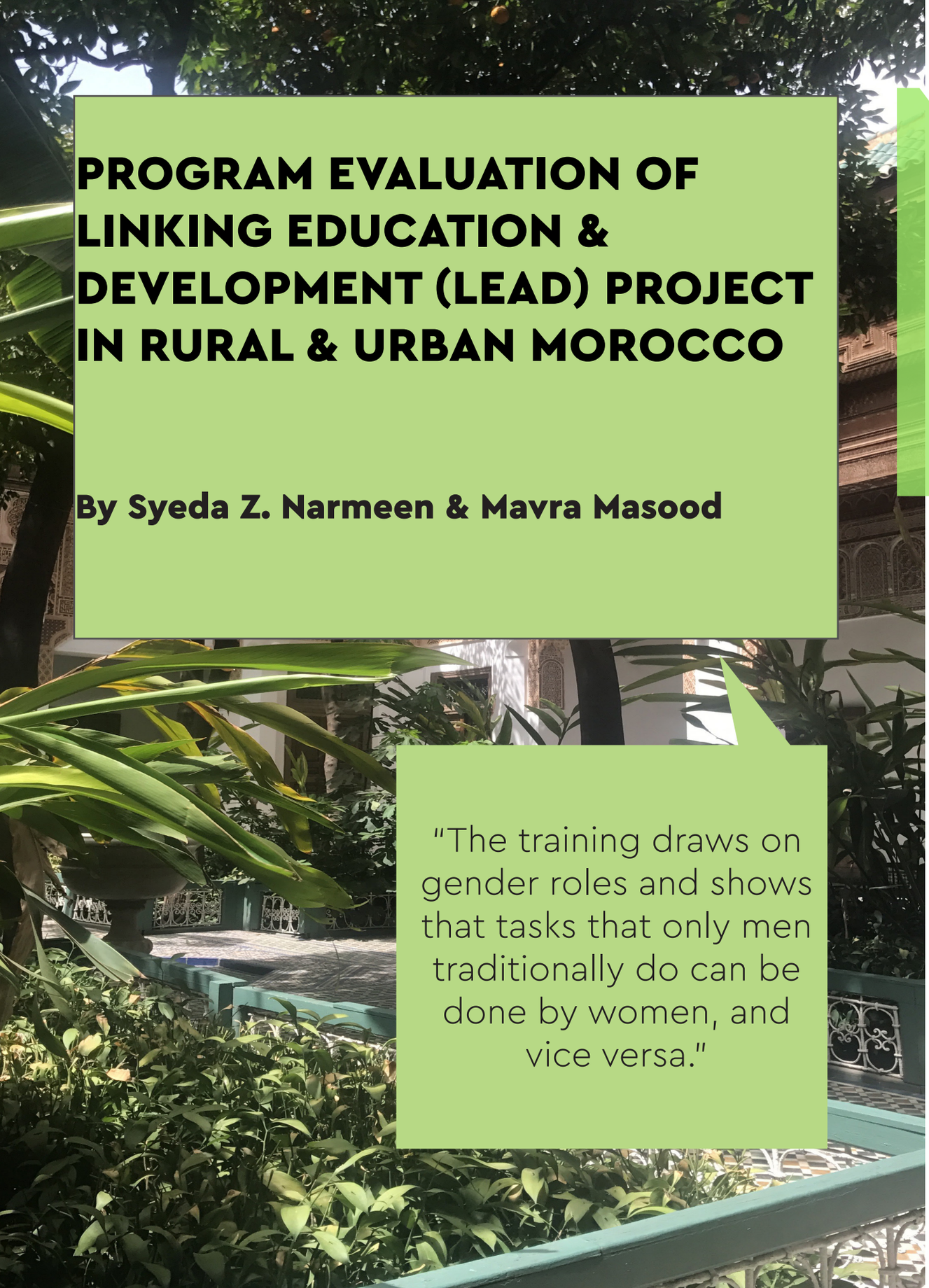

"The training draws on gender roles and shows that tasks that only men traditionally do can be done by women, and vice versa."

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ABSTRACT

Background The objective of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of the Social Accountability (SAcc) approach used in the LEAD project. SAcc equips local stakeholders with the skills needed to participate in the decision-making process to implement projects in primary schools as well as communicate policies to the regional offices. **Methods** This formative evaluation analyzed the available data from the SAcc tool to assess the efficacy of the project. **Outcomes** We found that satisfaction is highest among principal and student stakeholders, as well as for communication. Although there were more male participants overall, a greater number of females were involved in the parent and student stakeholder groups. This may indicate a mindset shift on women's participation in the public sphere, thus improving their education and ultimately health outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Social Accountability, Primary Education, Morocco, Participatory Development, Girls' Education, Decentralization, Social Development, Transparency

INTRODUCTION

Despite 20% of Morocco's budget being allocated to education, it is one of the lowest performers in access, efficiency, and quality of education in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region.[1,2] The low level of achievement in education can be attributed to inefficiencies of resources and centralization of the education sector.[2] Education does not only affect the GDP of the country and an individual's socio-economic status, but can also affect health.[3] Individuals with lower education levels generally engage in riskier health behaviors such as physical inactivity, poor nutrition, poor sleeping habits, and smoking.[4] Due to Morocco's poor performance in education, reform became a top priority, leading to education policy focused on decentralization with more power given to the local level, known as Regional Academies of Education and Training (AREFs), to make decisions.[5]

The goal of decentralization is to strengthen citizen voices and bring services and elected politicians closer to citizens.[6] In the case of education, citizens continue to question the credibility of politicians because they are not held accountable to their promises to improve education since they are far-removed from communities. Through decentralization, citizens take project management into their own hands and only need to verify that policy makers have given them adequate resources.[6] There is evidence that countries that have increased accountability and a strong local decision-making authority perform better on international tests and have higher learning outcomes.[7]

Unfortunately, due to a history of failure in education reform and lack of job availability in the workforce after completing education, there is apathy and skepticism towards the education system among citizens, leading to a lack of participation.[5] This apathy can be observed in school discipline: Morocco has the second worst school discipline among MENA countries with students and teachers arriving late to school; student and teacher absenteeism; classroom disturbances; cheating; profanity; vandalism; theft; and abuse of teachers, staff, or students.[8]

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Social accountability (SAcc) aims to target the apathy and lack of participation in the education system. Accountability is the monitoring and evaluation of service providers.[9] SAcc builds on the concept of accountability from the bottom-up, through the engagement of normal citizens directly or indirectly to participate in decision making and monitoring.[10] SAcc has a "long route," in which citizens influence policy makers who influence policy and service delivery, and a "short route," in which citizens get directly involved in service delivery.[10]

The Linking Education and Development (LEAD) Project teaches stakeholders about what SAcc entails and how to use its tools. There are many kinds of SAcc tools, but each of its goals involves informing citizens of their rights, what services they should expect, and what they are currently getting.[9] In the LEAD project, a scorecard of satisfaction was utilized to improve accountability in service delivery.[9] LEAD primarily utilized the "short route" of SAcc, whereby local stakeholders make and implement decisions themselves. Ultimately, stakeholders are prepared to utilize the "long route" to make these changes sustainable by influencing policy makers.

The aim of LEAD was to use SAcc to improve educational outcomes in both boys and girls attending primary school while taking a particular interest in girls to diminishing the gender gap. Due to traditional gender roles in rural Morocco, females are discouraged from continuing school.[11] Only 26% of girls in rural primary schools continue to lower secondary school.[12] Educating girls is particularly important, as it has a snowball effect on health and development. Female education can decrease fertility, increase household income, and increase a country's GDP. An educated mother is more likely to seek maternal care and send her children to school.[13,14] Well-educated people generally have better self-reported health and lower levels of morbidity, mortality, and disability. Therefore, promoting education can consequently advance public health.[15] This study examined the progress and effectiveness of the LEAD project, which could have implications in improving health and development outcomes in Morocco.

METHODS

This study was a formative project evaluation of the LEAD Project sponsored by the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) Initiative. The LEAD Project came into effect

Learning about the artists featured on the walls of the newly crafted music room (as a result of LEAD) in Imlil Elementary School. Picture taken by research team.

Newly painted walls in Asni Elementary School. Picture taken by research team.

September 30, 2014, with a closing date of September 30, 2018. The aim of this project is to utilize SAcc to equip citizens with the tools they need to be self-sufficient in order to make changes in the school while empowering them with the capacity to make effective decisions and engage with the government to enable these changes.

The LEAD Project team consists of Care International Maroc (CIM), to coordinate the overall project, and partner organization Near East Foundation (NEF), to lead field implementation. The current beneficiaries include nine primary schools in rural Morocco (Marrakech-Tensift-Al Haouz region) and six primary schools in urban Morocco (Casablanca region), but more schools will be added for a total of 50 schools by the completion date. The local stakeholders include students, teachers, parent associations (PAs), and the principals of the schools.

"A disproportionately larger number of men participated in the LEAD project than women, with 63% men and 37% women participating."

The team conducts seven types of training/workshops with the local stakeholders in each of the schools, which include LEAD Project Presentation, SAcc Sensitization, Financial Management, Project Design, Gender Sensitization, Presentation of a Participatory Assessment and Monitoring (BAM) Tool, and Implementation of the BAM tool. As of the 2016-2017 school year, all the training and workshops were available to both males and females, except for the gender sensitization training, which was only available to females.

For this project, attendance of local stakeholders at each of the training/workshops was recorded for the rural region. The attendance data was recorded in French and was first translated to English before being analyzed. The data included the type of training or workshop attended, stakeholder group to which participants belonged, number of meetings attended, and gender.

Teachers and principals were grouped as one stakeholder group category for attendance, whereas in the BAM data, both stakeholder groups had their own category. The purpose of the trainings was to provide local stakeholders with the SAcc tools to independently organize, finance, and implement pedagogical projects in the school.

The BAM is a survey consisting of questions regarding information about school infrastructure, student performance, satisfaction of stakeholders, task delegation, and action plan creation. BAM surveys were completed in modern standard Arabic and were first translated to English before analysis. At each school, a committee of stakeholders, including two students delegated from their class, the PA, teachers, and the principal collaborate to complete

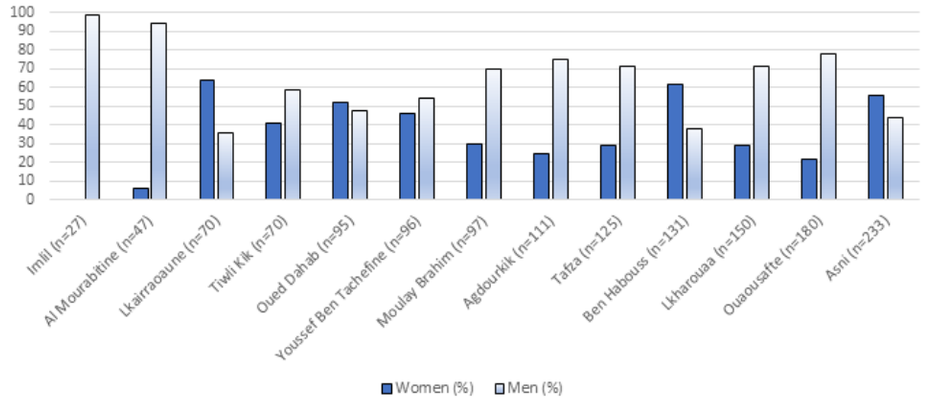

Figure 1. Percentage of men and women that attended training/workshop in each of the primary schools located in rural Morocco.

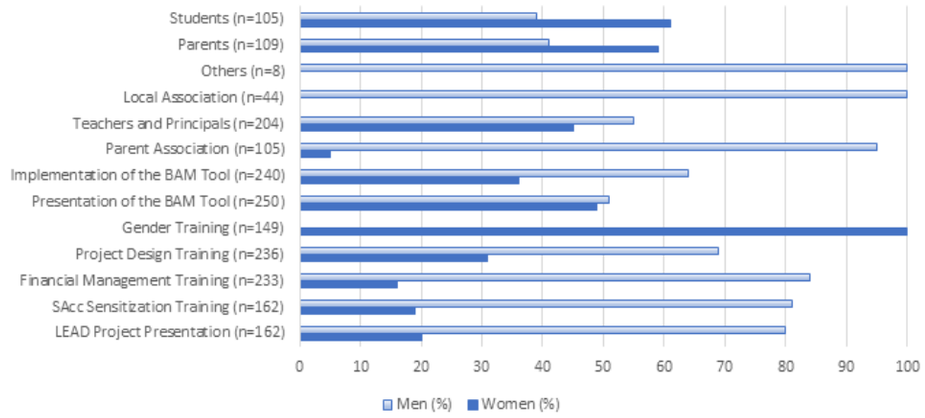

Figure 2. Percentage of men and women attending each type of training/workshops and percentage of men and women that were a part of each of the stakeholder groups.

the BAM so that the voices of all parties are represented. PAs can use the information from the BAM to communicate with AREFs and influence policy.

A key component of the BAM tool is the satisfaction scorecard. Out of the 15 BAM tools, 12 schools had 14 variables to evaluate satisfaction, and three schools had 21 variables to evaluate satisfaction. To keep consistency within the variables, we did not analyze the satisfaction data for these three schools, but we analyzed the other information regarding the school from their BAM surveys.

Each variable was on a 5-point scale, with 1 being very unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied. The individual satisfaction variables were summed to give an overall satisfaction variable score.

To address missing variables in the satisfaction scorecard, the average score for the stakeholder group was given to each individual missing satisfaction data before the overall satisfaction was summed.

The data in the BAMs were compared by rural and urban locations of the schools.

SAS 9.4 software was utilized to conduct all data analysis. Characteristics of the population attending the seven training workshops in the rural region were described, paying close attention to the gender of attendants. The data in the BAM tools from nine schools in the rural region and six schools from the urban region were described. Because the BAM tools were completed in groups with representatives from the four different stakeholder groups, the data were analyzed at the stakeholder group level.

OUTCOMES

Training/Workshops in the Rural Region

There were data available for thirteen schools in the rural region regarding the training workshops. There was a total number of 1,432 attendees, which could include participants who attended multiple training workshops. A disproportionately larger number of men participated in the LEAD project than women, with 63% men and 37% women participating. However, in four out of thirteen schools, more women participated than men (Figure 1). Figure 2 describes the number men and women who attended each type of training as well as the number of men and women who were part of each stakeholder group. The same number of participants attended the LEAD Project Presentation and SAcc Sensitization Training, and more men attended all training/workshops except Gender Training. The stakeholder groups of parents and students had a greater number of women and girls involved than men and boys. All other stakeholder groups had more men than women involved, with participants from the local association and other

Descriptors	Rural schools - n (%)	Urban schools - n (%)
Mean number of students per school	432	613
Mean number of teachers per school	15	14
Mean class size per school	30	47
Mean number of classrooms per school	8	19
Presence of a primary education department	67	67
Presence of a cafeteria	67	0
Presence of transportation	11	17
Presence of sports infrastructure	44	83
Presence of on-campus student housing	0	0
Presence of a library	50	67
Females in schools (n=3,843)	47	53
Males in schools (n=3,753)	51	49

Table 1. Descriptors of rural and urban primary schools.

Satisfaction variable	Rural schools	Urban schools
Closing time	2.9	2.0
Information availability	3.4	3.2
Participation	3.0	2.9
Performance	3.5	3.2
Student communication	4.1	3.7
Teacher communication	4.5	4.4
Communication	4.5	4.7
PA Communication	3.7	4.0
Achievement	3.4	3.5
Quality of education	3.3	3.5
Educational support	2.3	3.0
School space	3.0	3.4
Parallel activities	2.6	2.8
Textbooks	2.7	2.7

Table 2. Mean satisfaction scores (out of 5) for all stakeholder groups in rural and urban primary schools.

stakeholder group categories having no women as participants.

BAM Survey Data for Rural and Urban Primary Schools

Characteristics of the nine rural and six urban schools are described in Table 1. Urban schools had a greater number of students, larger class size, and more classrooms; however, both had about the same number of teachers. None of the urban schools involved in the LEAD Project had cafeterias.

The Overall Satisfaction Scores per stakeholder group are shown in Table 2. In rural schools, students tended to have the highest satisfaction score, followed by the principal, with teachers and PAs having similar scores. The highest satisfaction score was 73% and the lowest was 66%. In urban schools, the principal had the highest satisfaction score, followed by students, then teachers, and finally PAs. The highest satisfaction score was lower than that for rural schools, at 68%.

The average of each of the 14 individual satisfaction variables is shown in Table 2. Out of the 14 satisfaction variables, 6 were higher in rural schools, 7 were higher in urban schools, and one had the same score for both rural and urban schools. Rural schools had better scores for teacher and student communication, participation, performance, information availability, and school closing time compared to urban schools. Urban schools scored better on overall communication, PA communication, factors related to quality of education, and school space and activities.

Newly renovated 5th grade classroom in Tafza. Photos taken by research team.

DISCUSSION

This study evaluated the progress of the LEAD Project through available data to assess best practices and room for improvement. The objective of LEAD is to institutionalize the BAM Tool so that all primary schools have a standardized method of communicating with AREFs to implement pedagogical projects for schools while getting the input of all the stakeholder groups. The goal of LEAD was to improve educational outcomes in primary school children, prepare them to enter secondary school, and continue education, thus improving health outcomes because more educated people engage in healthier behaviors.[5]

"The LEAD project involved training local stakeholders in skills necessary to enact [social accountability] as well as sensitizing them about the importance of education and gender equality."

Looking at all the stakeholder groups together, a greater number of men were involved in the LEAD project than women. However, looking at the specific stakeholder groups, it is apparent that there were more women in the Parent category and more girls in the Student category. Considering more men are in the labor force compared to women (71% of men and 19% of women in rural areas and 82% of men and 37% of women in urban areas), women may be likely to be homemakers, especially in rural areas.[17] This allows them to have time to be involved in their children's education through participation in PAs.

Gender Trainings are crucial because they encourage the homemaker mothers to become involved in the PAs in a climate where they are discouraged from pursuing an education or working. The Gender Trainings delineate the difference between sex and gender and are conducted in a comfortable social environment with only women, as speaking openly about sex is considered taboo. The training draws on gender roles and shows that tasks that only men traditionally do can be done by women, and vice versa. The training empowers an underrepresented group that otherwise did not have a voice to participate in the decision-making process.

The student representatives in the LEAD project were selected through student nomination and voting. It is surprising that more than half of the representatives are girls, despite the fact that there more boys than girls attending the schools under study. This sheds some insight on a more egalitarian mindset of the younger generation.

The satisfaction scores were not very high, considering the BAM survey was completed before the projects planned within the survey were implemented. The satisfaction can be utilized to see where the stakeholder groups would like to see improvement. Stakeholder groups had similar overall satisfaction, all within 4-7 percentage points of one another. Among

Tafza Elementary School, surrounded bythe beginning of the Atlas Mountain Range. Photo taken by research team.

individual satisfaction scores, the lowest included textbook satisfaction, parallel activities, educational support, participation, and closing time. These variables directly impact the student rather than institutional infrastructure. The satisfaction variables that scored the lowest pave the way for stakeholders to identify what projects they want to focus on.

The variable that scored the highest in both rural and urban schools was communication. For SAcc to take root, communication must exist. This includes communication between stakeholders so that everyone's needs are heard, as well as communication between local stakeholders and the government so that they can push for funding and policy reforms. The scores represent that the stakeholders possess the ability to communicate among each other and, ultimately, to AREFs. The score for rural schools was lower perhaps due to less responsive AREFs in this region.

LEAD utilizes SAcc, which incorporates relationships on the individual, community, and institutional levels to promote education in children, particularly girls. For people to participate in the project, they must be motivated and think that they can make a change. This is dependent on their attitude, behavior, and self-concept. Each has a unique set of skills that they bring to the larger group when they become involved. Stakeholder relationships may also influence their involvement. For example, it appears that parents become involved with LEAD if their children attend the school. They may be motivated by their children because they want to make the schools better so that their child is excited to attend, and the husbands may motivate their wives to become involved in the PAs.

Participation seems to be greatly influenced by community, which encompasses the school and the social networks. If a noticeable number of people are participating from someone's social network, it may encourage them to participate as well. Visibility of progress in schools may show the community that the work of participants is valuable.

A comparable approach to the LEAD Project was taken in Ghana in their School for Life Program, in which community participation was investigated. The researchers found that if a community member is mobilized to participate, it does not mean that they automatically possess the skills needed to teach, administer, mobilize resources, or inform the larger community about the importance of education. The approach assumed that community members are inherently capable of learning these skills with the right training because they are the primary stakeholders with the most to gain. It also included marginalized groups like women, who were available and engaged to participate, in a culturally conscious way.[18] Like the project in Ghana, the LEAD project involved training local stakeholders in skills necessary to enact SAcc as well as sensitizing them about the importance of education and gender equality.

The unique social context of Morocco, with an ethnic composition of Arabs and Berbers and at least six languages spoken, introduces a wide range of conflicts for education.[19] Arabs reside primarily in urban areas, and Berbers, who were historically marginalized, reside in rural areas. Morocco also has a tradition of multilingualism, the languages spoken colloquially are different than the languages used for instruction. This presents challenges for children succeeding in school.[20] The LEAD project addresses both ethnic groups of Morocco by implementing the project in urban and rural areas. Additionally, this project addresses the societal implications for why girls may not be coming to school and why women may not be involved in decision making.

Limitations

Due to a small sample size of only 15 schools, the data was descriptively analyzed. A regression analysis may have been conducted to create a predictive model of school satisfaction if more data were available. Because of the small sample size, missing values had the potential to introduce bias in satisfaction. Rather than considering a missing value as null, we used the average value of the satisfaction variable. Null values could reduce the overall satisfaction score, causing stakeholders to look less satisfied. However, using the average values may have also biased scores to be lower or higher than their true value. Also, three rural schools' satisfaction scores were excluded because they did not have the same satisfaction variables as the other 12 schools, which leads to a smaller sample size and lost insight about the satisfaction of these three schools.

Data used in this study were originally in French or Modern Standard Arabic and were translated to English before being analyzed. Because this was a quantitative analysis with defined categorical variables or continuous numeric variables, there was less room for misinterpretation of the data. Therefore, issues associated with translation were minimized because the data was measured in defined categories.

Further Future Directions

This project has a closing date of September 30, 2018. The LEAD Project will have been implemented in 50 schools by this date. At that time, an endpoint evaluation will be done to consider the efficacy of LEAD to see whether it is viable to standardize and implement the BAM into institutions. Also by this time, the sample size will be large enough to conduct statistical analysis to assess the effectiveness of each training to gauge best practices for which trainings are most helpful and how many are necessary to attend. The gender trainings, which are now only conducted for women, should be expanded to include men as well. To ensure cultural sensitivity, the gender trainings for men should be conducted by male instructors in sessions with only men.

In general, families invest less in girls' education because the costs are larger than the private returns.[21] Although education is free in Morocco, families must pay for books, supplies, transportation, and clothes.[22] Parents may feel that the anticipated private returns do not justify the previously mentioned costs and would prefer their daughters get married or engage in activities that will immediately generate returns for the family, such as taking care of younger siblings and doing house work.[23] However, the gender trainings, which may change the mindset of men to empower their wives to participate in schools and their daughters to pursue education, may cause families to invest in the future rather than focus on the immediate returns.

Ultimately, encouraging girls to pursue education will lead to positive health and development outcomes, including decreased fertility, increased likelihood of seeking maternal care, improved child

health, fewer child marriages, and reduced gender disparities in socioeconomic status.[24-26]

CONCLUSION

This project appears to have a strong impact on women and girls. Despite traditional gender differences in involvement in participatory groups and informal elected bodies in Morocco, we found that women and girls showed more involvement than men and boys in the parent and student stakeholder groups. Women and girls, a traditionally marginalized group, are mobilized to participate because they are given a forum to have their voices heard. We can anticipate that this involvement will lead to positive educational outcomes which will in turn lead to positive health outcomes. Having girls attend schools, as well as changing the mindset of the community to encourage girls to continue to pursue their education, may lead to women postponing marriage and childbirth. When they plan for and decide to have children, they will be more likely to seek out maternal care, which will lead to better health outcomes for the mother and child, and they will invest more into each child.[25]

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NEF's LEAD team in Morocco take a break after a meeting with a parent teacher association president in Ourika.