

# Voices from Morocco



***“When I get married I will not have the same problems as my parents and grandparents. My grandfather had three wives and 15 children.”***  
***Project beneficiary***

## Association Marocaine Planification Familiale: Effective participation of youth

***This case study is one of a series of qualitative reviews called “IPPF Changing lives” which capture the stories of IPPF’s beneficiaries and clients from around the world. A rapid PEER (participatory ethnographic evaluation and research)<sup>1</sup> approach was used to train project beneficiaries to interview people in their social network. These voices provide us with powerful testimonies on lives changed - in some cases, lives saved - and illustrate how IPPF is making a difference.***

The lives of many young people have been changed through the Effective Participation of Youth project in Fez, Morocco, including in the Sahrij Ghaoua neighbourhood. The Association Marocaine de Planification Familiale (AMPF) project focuses on building skills of young people to plan and implement SRHR education projects, and raising awareness of young people, other relevant organizations, youth movements and national decision makers of the importance of SRHR.

The project activities are largely planned by the project’s youth committee members, who are representative of the youth population of Sahrij Gnaoua: about 85 per cent of them experience or have experienced social and/or economic problems.

The lives of many young people in Sahrij Gnaoua are characterized by high levels of poverty and unemployment, limited access to education, and child labour. The consequences of marital breakdown are severe for women, often resulting in poverty and isolation for them and their children. Many older adults who were brought up in conservative rural areas find it hard to accept the more modern values of their children, leading to inter-generational conflict. This is sometimes expressed through gender-based violence (sexual, emotional and physical) directed primarily at girls, but boys also encounter emotional and physical abuse. Petty or violent crime, drug abuse (glue sniffing) and alcohol abuse are common coping strategies adopted by young people to ‘forget’ the problems they face at home.

<sup>1</sup> [www.options.co.uk/peer](http://www.options.co.uk/peer)

***“The Association changed his life altogether - that futile life he was leading. He was not wasting time any more. He felt responsible, because you can’t give advice to anyone unless you yourself have changed.”***

***Peer interviewer***



***“All the power and sorrows I have – my talents explode in theatre. Also, the problems I have, I just want to transmit them to other people.”***  
***Project beneficiary***

## Achievements

Major achievements have included increased access to education and training, giving young people the opportunity to be creative and instilling in young people a sense of self worth and value.

Several young people were introduced to the project and went through a gradual process of education, support and friendship, leading to a transformation from being lost, confused and inarticulate, to becoming an informed and respected member of society. The project has enabled some young people to deal with the challenges of adolescence and go on to access higher education and professional training. The project also provides isolated young people with opportunities to make friends, share experiences and identify role models among other young people who have overcome significant difficulties and challenges. Also, staff provide emotional, physical, and very public support in order to enable young people to remain involved in the project.

Positive behaviour change has been a significant outcome of the project. Behaviour changes have included reductions in drug abuse, violence, apathy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as increased motivation, optimism, ability to organize activities and a desire to contribute to society. A volunteer described the changes seen in the young people involved in the project: “Young people, who used to be very passive, became part of the work we were doing and started to organize activities and transfer their knowledge to other people.”

Another achievement includes the provision of information on SRH including HIV and AIDS, sexuality education, family planning, safe abortion, STIs, and about the dangers of smoking and drug abuse. The project has also increased young people’s awareness of their SRHR, as well as other rights, including rights of child workers. High levels of poverty mean that many children are employed by local artisans, cooperatives and factories. These children lose access to education and are particularly

vulnerable to sexual and economic exploitation. One peer interviewer explained, “We want to sensitize [employers]... that they do not have the right to have children with them. The children should be at school, not working.”

The project also provides young people with broader skills. Through their involvement in the project, young people learn how to plan, implement, manage and monitor activities and public events. Young people involved in the project have become both more responsible and capable as a result of the project’s activities, and their communication skills have improved significantly. Once members have gained confidence talking about sensitive subjects in the safe environment of the centre, they then become involved in communicating this knowledge to others in a wide range of public arenas, such as schools, young offenders’ correctional centres and at community events. For young people, being able to express themselves clearly and coherently is a major difference that the project has made to their lives. One peer interviewer explained, “Before, a problem was lack of confidence for most of us ... After, we acquired a lot of confidence and methods of communication.”

The project provides a safe environment in which young men and women have the freedom, and are explicitly encouraged, to discuss issues and share information which would be considered taboo in most other settings, including HIV and AIDS, STIs, contraception and abortion. According to one peer interviewer, “We had lack of information about AIDS and STIs because these are taboos we could not talk about.”

Many of the project activities – particularly those aimed at sharing information on SRH, HIV and other issues that are not typically discussed openly - involve theatre. Theatre has provided an opportunity for young people to experience childhood pleasures they had missed out on, articulate distressing experiences, take on different personalities, introduce humour into their daily, frequently stressful lives and reveal their personal

worth through the production of something that is simultaneously enjoyable and valuable to their peers.

The combination of gaining knowledge, putting it to use through changed behaviour and using their creativity to share information with others, has led to significantly enhanced feelings of self worth. For many young people, involvement in the project has also led to a reduction in conflict with their parents.

## Challenges

The lack of salaried staff means that the centre is only open during standard office hours and, as a result, cannot be accessed by young people and children who are working. Other challenges are linked to the anxiety and suspicion of parents, particularly fathers, whose traditional cultural values conflict with the project's aim of providing SRH information and services to young people. A large number of young people stopped coming to the project because household poverty had forced them to drop out of school and go into early employment. One peer interviewer explained, "Her mother is ill. Who will pay for the expenses...? My friend started to go to work in houses. This is why she stopped coming to the centre."

Another reason for leaving the project was the overwhelming impact of the pressures, challenges and problems facing many young people. One peer interviewer described how the project has been unable to help some young people: "We try to give him advice, but in vain. The project could not do anything for him ... For some people, the impact of the problems they have is so strong they cannot change easily."

Other young people, particularly girls, stopped coming to the project on either a temporary or permanent basis because of opposition from their parents. This opposition was either based on the opportunity costs of their involvement, for example, loss of potential earnings, or disapproval and concern about the nature of the project's activities or of the mixed groups of boys and girls.

## Lessons

The project uses a wide range of activities to keep young people involved and interested. The main approaches used are: round-table discussions, listening centres (to provide one-to-one confidential support), theatre, poetry, music and seminars. By far, the most popular medium with the peer interviewers and their friends was theatre. In a life that was frequently described as boring or 'futile', writing and performing plays presented them with a creative outlet which allowed them to develop their talents in writing, directing and acting and has given them a way to constructively spend their free time.

The project gives a strong sense of ownership to the youth, which helps increase the accessibility of information and services to young people who find it difficult to discuss personal issues with older service providers. One staff member explained the importance of the use of peer education and support: "There are youth who are ashamed to talk about these things, but they can talk about [them] easily because it is with another youth, and in confidence."

In addition to supporting young people who are members of the centre, the project also works closely with a wide range of specialist organizations including NGOs involved in the protection of street children, young offenders' institutions and children's homes. AMPF provides SRH training to these organizations and, in turn, attends training sessions run by these partners.

There is a strong focus on making young people aware of their political, economic and SRH rights and a commitment to enabling girls and boys to work together on project activities. All of these approaches have been successful in equipping young people in Sahrij Ghaoua with skills, confidence and a sense of self worth that enable them to lead meaningful, productive lives in an extremely challenging environment.

***"Before, it was ... the beginning of delinquency, beginning to take drugs, drifting from schools, the beginning of pessimism... After, we made good use of our free time. We went back to school ... It is a new life that has started."***  
Project beneficiary



***"Before, my parents were very authoritarian. They never allowed me to speak. Now they ask me for advice because they know I am qualified enough to give advice."***  
Project beneficiary

***“At 15, I had some bad friends and I did so many bad things: using drugs, smoking, other things I cannot mention. I became a real delinquent and dropped out of school in the middle of the year. I was sleeping in the street and was living in very bad health conditions. When I came to the Association, I became someone very positive and I was positive about myself. Now I am giving advice to other people and telling them that nothing is impossible. If I changed, it means everyone can change.”***

*Project beneficiary*

Morocco	
<b>Country context<sup>1</sup></b>	
Population (millions), 2007	31.2
Adult illiteracy rate (% aged 15 and above), 1999-2007	44.4
Population living below \$1.25 a day (%), 2000-2007	2.5
Life expectancy at birth (years), 2007	71.0
<b>Context for young people<sup>2</sup></b>	
Child labour (% of 5-14 year olds), 1999-2008	8.0
Primary school net enrolment/attendance (%), 2003-2008	89.0
Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate (%), 2003-2007, male	84.0
Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate (%), 2003-2007, female	67.0
Women (20-24 years) that were married/in union before the age of 18 (%), 2000-2008	16.0
Children underweight for age (% aged under 5), 2000-2006	10.0

<sup>1</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2009, (Website, accessed on 06-04-10).

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, At a Glance: Morocco, (Website, accessed on 06-04-10).



**Association Marocaine Planification  
Familiale**  
6, Rue Ibn El Kadi  
Les Orangers  
RP 1000  
Morocco

The International Planned Parenthood Federation is global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

**International Planned Parenthood Federation**  
4 Newhams Row  
London, SE1 3UZ  
UK  
info@ippf.org  
www.ippf.org  
UK Registered Charity No. 229476