

Guided Thesis

For the Degree Master of Arts in International Community Development

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GLST 5973 Integrative Project II

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3 May 2023

Integrative project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in
International Community Development

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ESSAY 1: CONTEXTUALIZATION

Introduction

Over time, societies experience diverse transitions that signify their increasing complexity. For community development to be effective, several different aspects must be considered. One major aspect is contextualization: the practice of designing programs and processes with a focus on the particular cultural characteristics and inherent resources of a given people, place, and time (Inslee). We must first observe what existing structures can be further developed and what capabilities are already well enacted within the community. Only then can we fully understand the cultural context we are operating in. By understanding how individual aspects of a community work together to form the whole, we can take a collective approach towards achieving sustainability.

Contextualization in Morocco

Morocco's geographical location between Africa and Europe justifies its multiculturalism in language, religion, and ethnicity. The languages spoken in Morocco today are Standard Arabic, Berber, Moroccan Arabic, French and Spanish as well as Moroccan Judeo-Arabic, which is spoken in Sephardic and Arab Jewish communities (Daniel). French has been the most influential language due to French occupation from 1912 to 1956 (Daniel). Despite the lasting influence of French, religion has had a much more profound impact on Moroccan culture. Religion has provided the framework and values that have shaped Moroccan society, such as gender roles. This has created a strong sense of national identity and pride, which I noticed during my fieldwork. For instance, many Moroccan men and women continue to justify gender inequality in the workforce based on religious beliefs, citing that it is a man's role to financially provide for the family.

Across all popular religions, there are themes that must be interpreted to fully understand their proceeding traditions (Vogl). It is crucial for community practitioners to consider the ways that a religious history has influenced the present and how it will affect the future of their populations. Islamic practices and philosophies dictate most aspects of Moroccan daily life and need to be considered in order to build successful community and program development. Programs and activities that reflect and integrate Moroccan heritage tend to be more impactful than those that don't (Creative).

In the *Art of Community*, Vogl states that success in growing a community will depend on how well you can understand and articulate the following qualities: shared values, membership identity, moral proscriptions, and insider understanding. Cultural context determines what these characteristics are and how they are incorporated into the context. For example, Moroccans share strong values and morals that would influence the success of a project or program if not understood and interpreted correctly.

According to Hofstede Indexes, Morocco is a collectivist society where people tend to belong to 'in groups' and responsibilities are shared among the group members (Hofstede Insights: Country Comparison). A close long-term commitment to a 'group' of members, whether family, extended family, or extended relationships, are examples of such relationships (Hofstede Insights: Country Comparison). I immediately noticed this aspect when I visited the House of Couscous and Duar Larrb. Collectivism was evident in the fact that each woman contributed a particular skill or duty to the group, and all seemed to take responsibility for the welfare of one another.

When I spoke with the President of the House of Couscous about what could be improved within the cooperative she explained that the women wanted to earn more income so

they could be independent and support their children, daughters especially, as many daughters drop out of school Her main desire was for the women to become literate and benefit now and those in the future. Once again, this demonstrated loyalty and high interpersonal connections among the group of women (Hofstede et al.).

Contextualization and Empowerment

Human agency is a highly influential factor in developing an overall framework for empowerment that is relevant across communities. However, the value of individualism differs among people and cultures (Institute). A key step in understanding agency in non-Western collectivist cultures is to distinguish between individualism and autonomy. An autonomous person can be either more individualistic ascribing greater priority to the individual's goals, or more collectivist ascribing greater priority to the needs of the group (Institute). Communities are often more equipped to deal with external constraints, inhibiting agency when internal and external factors are contextualized (Institute).

The Empowerment Institute has facilitated the IMAGINE Empowerment Workshops in culturally diverse regions such as Africa, India, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. The Women's Empowerment Workshop is intended to be "adapted to various contexts including multiple women's issues, cultural and religious perspectives, nonliterate and intergenerational populations, and languages and dialects, as well as being adaptable for men and youth" (Institute). The Empowerment Facilitators carefully adapt the material to each local culture. There are variations of this approach in Muslim countries, such as Morocco, where passages from the Quran are woven throughout the workshop and the call to prayer is taken into account during the schedule of the workshop.

Creativity and Collaboration

Moroccan culture is rich in rituals, symbols, and stories. While these practices may be visible to an outside observer, their cultural meaning is only revealed through the interpretation of insiders (Hofstede et al.). For instance, the traditional Moroccan tea ceremony is not just a way for people to enjoy a beverage, but an opportunity for the host to demonstrate hospitality and generosity. In Morocco, women have used cultural practices and traditions as the basis for creating innovative projects, which is one of the ways in which they are able to run cooperatives on a successful basis.

Due to the historical silence and exclusion of women in Morocco, deliberate and creative efforts need to be made to ensure their voices are heard (Myers 275). Women's roles in development are prioritized in HAF's work, and communities are engaged in empowerment initiatives to achieve gender-equitable development. This growth, however, is hindered by a low literacy rate and a lack of resources, making it more difficult for women to fully become independent.

The participatory approach ensures that the voices and views of women are heard throughout the workshop. The cooperatives operated by women play an essential role in the economic development of Morocco and are a result of realizing their creative potential. For example, the village of Duar Laarb decided to open a cooperative based on artistry and carpets because most of the women had that skill. These possibilities were discussed during the workshop after encouragement, trust, and transparency were presented by the facilitators and a working relationship was formed.

During the workshop I observed, the women were motivated and eager to brainstorm ideas of what they could do, how they could sell their products, and how they could use their

skills in the process. Assessment of community assets and needs is done in order to provide the information necessary to set the stage for the design of the program or in this case, the cooperative (Myers 209). The empowerment workshops facilitated by HAF incorporate an asset-based community development approach, (ABCD) along with the participatory approach to determine community assets. For this specific community, the assets included the talents and skills of the women, financial resources, and land for infrastructure. In order for this program to work, someone from the community has to be willing to donate a piece of land to situate the cooperative and meet to decide on a president for the cooperative.

Collaboration is crucial to the success of the women's empowerment program and its implementation. Developing a collaboration structure based on contextualization, will lead to greater collective impact because all stakeholders work together with a unified understanding of the context. Programs of the High Atlas Foundation engage and collaborate with individuals and organizations of varying backgrounds, at various levels of influence, from households to national policy makers. HAF collaborates with cooperatives, associations, and education institutions, targeting women, youth, farmers, and students of all ages. HAF has taken collective action toward sustainability and contextuality by bringing together these actors with different perspectives and diverging interests together (Kuenkel 113).

Practices of Contextualization

As community practitioners, it is our duty to understand that a community's culture represents opportunities and resources (Inslee). Contextuality frames how to attend to the people we serve and what the largest piece of the problem is all about (Kuenkel). We must take the time to learn about the cultural context as a prerequisite for any outsider engagement (Inslee). This was one of many lessons I learned during my fieldwork. I entered Morocco and the field sites

with very little knowledge of the cultural context and impact of religion. Nevertheless, by immersing myself in my surroundings and listening to community members, I began to grasp the cultural context and how they arrived at that point in their society. If you don't know enough about other cultures, there is a risk of evoking ethnocentric perceptions: the "evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture and in reverse knowing too much can evoke non-ethnocentric perceptions" (Hooghe 4). We must avoid these stereotypes by being aware of and minimizing the general assumptions about a culture through contextualization. If not, we risk the program's overall success and potential impact on the community. The initial phase of my qualitative research might have been easier and less frustrating if I'd taken more prerequisites towards contextualization. However, this was a lesson learned as the process of contextualization includes recognizing there's room for improvement and growth within oneself as well.

Along with contextualization, copowerment and collaboration are a part of the ICD values. These three core values demonstrate the practices I want to apply in my future work. Prior to beginning the program, I was aware of these values separately from working in AmeriCorps. However, I hadn't applied them in a community that wasn't my own or that I was unfamiliar with. When I moved to Spain, I realized I would be considered an outsider and would need to practice these values in my own life and in my vocational work.

Contextualization will always tend to local needs and creative forms of expressions as long as human culture exists. Culture is an inherent quality of human life. Understanding a culture requires establishing relationships, a crucial practice for community practitioners who must master patience, humility, receptivity, creativity, and flexibility. Therefore, in my future

work it will be necessary to take the time to learn about the cultural context prior to any engagement and relationship building.

Understanding history is also as important to deeply understand the communities present and their self-identity (Myers 207). You must be willing to listen to the whole cultural story. By doing this, we can gain insight into a community's understanding of the formal side of their belief systems and demonstrate to the community that we think its story is valuable (Myers 207).

An ethnographic approach is most effective when you are trying to understand human society and culture from the perspective of the participants rather than the researcher (Merriam). To understand a culture, you must spend time with the group. An ethnographic analysis involves the “identification of essential features and the systematic description of the interrelationships among them” (Merriam). As a strategy to prove validity and reliability in an ethnographic study, a "thick description" technique is often used, which is a highly descriptive, detailed description of the setting and particularly the findings of a study (Merriam). This means providing enough descriptions to contextualize the study so that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and hence, whether findings can be transferred (Merriam).

I used an ethnographic approach for my observations of the empowerment workshop I attended to conduct qualitative research. As a result, I was able to shift my own interpretations from an etic perspective (outsider or researcher) to an emic perspective (insider to the culture) to better understand their needs and difficulties and develop actionable plans to address them (Merriam). Furthermore, I built relationships and trust with members of the community and gained a better understanding of their culture and values. The women showed interest in what I

was writing and what I wanted to know as an outsider, which to me indicated that they welcomed my observations and curiosity.

In terms of community development, I would like to broaden my knowledge and experience by applying contextualization in more international contexts. For instance, I am interested in exploring how I can use my research to support other communities where women are seen as second-class citizens and apply the IMAGINE Empowerment workshop in their efforts to develop sustainable initiatives. I think this would be a strong tool for women to acquire in communities where domestic violence or violence against women is high in order to break the cycle and gain independence.

Conclusion

Globalization has led to an increase in the interconnectedness of people, cultures, and societies around the world. This has created a more complex and interconnected environment, which requires an educated perspective to navigate and understand. To keep up with the rapid social changes, it is necessary to have mastered the prerequisites of understanding the larger context and relating to one another. Contextualization offers essential characteristics to prepare community practitioners for context-sensitive settings and cross-cultural collaboration.

Contextuality is a sense of wholeness where we can explore the bigger picture and place our actions in it (Kuenkel). We must observe, listen, create, understand, and appreciate human competencies if we want to change the world. Contextualization allows us to understand the cultural nuances of a given society and the impact of different values and beliefs on people's lived experiences. We see beyond our own perspective to recognize and respect different cultural values, and to better comprehend how our actions can affect the lives of others.

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ESSAY 2: QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Introduction

For your consideration, I would like to illustrate two different pictures for you. Imagine that you are walking into a room. On the floor of this room, there are carpets on which women are sitting and tables in the middle of the room that have paper and pencils laid out on them. Now, let's imagine you are about to enter another room. And in this room, you see two rectangular shaped windows in the front looking outside. Double wooden doors accompanied by several pairs of shoes. As you take your shoes off and begin to walk inside you find yourself walking on soft, plush, beautiful, embroidered red carpet flooring where 18-20 women and a cute baby boy are patiently sitting and looking at you in a welcoming manner. Rugs line the walls of the room with thick cushion pillows embroidered with red, silver, and burgundy-colored beads and patterns. There are 4 low-top round tables in the middle of the room with papers and colored pencils on top and flip chart pages on the left wall with Arabic words written on them.

As your mind drifts away from the first room and imagine the second room, you may feel that it raises much more curiosity and questions in you. However, the two descriptions are actually describing the same room. It is the community center of Duar Laarb, the village where I observed the Women's Empowerment Workshop during my fieldwork. But as you have noticed, the descriptions are obviously quite different. One is generic and bland, while the second one is a "thick description" with details that offer an insight into what is going on. This is a characteristic of ethnography, a common type of qualitative study that focuses on the culture and social regularities of everyday life (Merriam et al). Qualitative research is an approach that "seeks to explore personal and social experiences, meanings and practices as well as the role of context in shaping these" (Skovadal and Cornish). The following will describe how the qualitative method

helped me gain a better understanding of Moroccan culture and how women's empowerment programs and workshops operate.

Qualitative Methods in the Field

Qualitative studies aim to uncover and interpret meanings by studying the interaction of individuals and the culture of society in which they live, as ethnography endeavors to understand the interaction between individuals and culture (Merriam et al). Essentially, this is both a process and a product that focuses on human society and culture (Skovdal and Cornish). Spending time with a particular group is one of the most effective ways to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of that group and most likely, the only way community practitioners can fully know what is best for a community and its members.

The High Atlas Foundation initially caught my attention as an organization to work with because of their model for the women's empowerment program. The model is to engage in partnerships with communities and utilize the participatory methodology to determine and implement an initial project before utilizing revenue. For me, it was important that I was able to observe the participatory method in the field and interpret the findings of my research to fulfill the requirements of my project. The 'focal point' of my fieldwork was the community center where the empowerment workshop was held and "the place where insiders activities cluster" (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 192). I would spend the next three days observing, sharing, and learning with facilitators and workshop participants.

As a fieldworker, "our purpose is to collect and consider multiple sources of information, not simply facts, to convey the perspective of the people in the culture you study" (Sunstein and Strater14). You must combine an outsider's point of view with an insider's perspective (Sunstein and Chiseri- Strater). At the beginning, I knew very few things about the culture in Morocco and

I had no insiders or connections to the subculture other than the High Atlas Foundation. The opportunity was perfect for me as it would allow me to immerse myself in the culture of the group and to understand it better. The first entry I made in my fieldwork notebook was my immediate awareness of my senses and how thankful I was to be to be surrounded by a culture where I could tap into all my senses while conducting my fieldwork. According to Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, when you are making observations, one cannot rely only on visual details to draw conclusions, you must also include other cultural artifacts that are related to the group as well as rituals or behaviors in common with their own culture (172). Listening to the sounds of the scooters zoom by, feeling the textures of the rugs and carpets, tasting the traditional couscous, and smelling a mix of spices and herbs as you walk through the market, all revealed Morocco's cultural presence to me.

My first encounter with rituals in Morocco was enchanting. It was the first time I had heard the adhan, the Islamic call to prayer and I was amazed by the intense sounds and deep words. It gave me chills as the sounds echoed across the city. The call to prayer happens six times a day as a moment for the country to stop, reflect, and thank Allah (God) for all that has been given to them. This experience is not something you necessarily see but rather hear. The prayer comes from the mosque's speakers and is recited by the muadhdhin or muezzin in English. This is the chosen person at a mosque who leads the call to prayer from inside the mosque, a sacred space of worship for Muslims.

Unfortunately, I do not speak or understand Arabic. Therefore, I had to rely on the facilitators to translate what they could in the workshop. I made my interpretations by observing the women's reactions, emotions and interactions with one another. In this case, I was able to use qualitative methods to obtain information about the empowerment program, how participants act

and engage with one another and the facilitators, the acceptability of the program and contextual factors such as social norms and cultural practices.

On the last day of the workshop, I was deeply moved and inspired by the work put in by the participants and facilitators of the workshop. The impact was clearly visible. However, there was a gap. The data was not tangible. This observation led me to ask further questions about the monitoring and evaluation of the workshop. I recognized that for the workshop to enhance, HAF needed to strengthen the quality of their monitoring and evaluation of the empowerment program. With this realization came the idea for my project and how to demonstrate the different ways in which the program had an impact, community-level acceptability and the factors enabling or hindering the workshop (Skovdal and Cornish).

After the workshop, I had a meeting with Yossef, the President of HAF to discuss my observations. He agreed that the monitoring and evaluation of the empowerment workshop needed to be enhanced and continuous. Monitoring involves a “continuous process of appraising program progress and identifying strengths and weaknesses, with the aim of modifying and improving the program” (*The Participatory Development Process and Tools A Guide for Communities and Facilitators*). This is an important aspect as partners and community members will want to know whether the program implementation and on-going operations are meeting expectations of cost and impact among the participants (*The Participatory Development Process and Tools A Guide for Communities and Facilitators*). As a way of measuring the impact of a project on beneficiaries, you will need to create a measurement that identifies the beneficiaries in order to analyze how the proposed project is expected to affect them (Skovdal and Cornish). In many cases, communities and project managers will identify a specific activity, such as attendance at a workshop, as a way to measure the impact of the project on its beneficiaries.

For monitoring and evaluation, I proposed a survey be put in place to record the experiences and inputs of the workshop participants and demonstrate the impact and program outcomes. Although a survey is a form of data collection in a quantitative study, this survey was designed with the qualitative tendencies to demonstrate the participants' experiences and perceptions of the workshop. Qualitative research can be used to guide the questions in a survey, to ensure that they both include relevant indicators and ask appropriate questions (Merriam et al). As most rural women in Morocco are illiterate, I needed to be creative in designing the survey. I utilized an exploratory mixed-method design in which the "qualitative data is collected first, and then a survey is created based on an analysis of the qualitative data" (Merriam 47). It needed to be adaptable to their literacy level and available resources. This aspect of the survey was made possible through contextualization and collaboration. Two values that ICD and qualitative inquiry share that can strengthen the goals and program outcome. Working together proved to magnify the potential of my project due to the sharing of resources and expertise.

To measure the impact of my project, qualitative research is necessary. This is to translate the participants' perspectives into tangible data that can examine the relationship between the workshops and the success of cooperatives. This can be achieved through ground theory analysis, in which theories are developed by analyzing 'real-world data' (hotjar) that consists of "categories, properties, and statements that describe the conceptual relations between and among the categories and properties" (Merriam 228). Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated (Merriam et al). To examine the surveys, grounded theory would be used to analyze responses and develop hypotheses about why the participants want to open a cooperative, and how you can expand.

In the future, with continuous follow-up procedures and survey entries, I would like the surveys to demonstrate how the tools the participants learn in the workshop contribute to their success in becoming financially independent due to the operation of cooperatives. Data such as this is not only useful for stakeholders and partners, but it can also be used to introduce e-commerce into cooperative businesses to help the women generate more revenue.

Qualitative Research in Community Development

In qualitative research, data is gathered and examined from social practices and processes, and it is able to identify barriers to change (Grieb et al). Qualitative research prioritizes the questions of ‘How?’ and/or ‘Why?’. Quantitative approaches, on the other hand, are limited in their ability to take into account the lived experiences of people, their social interactions, or what needs to be done in order to improve outcomes related to community development. Ultimately, qualitative research enhances knowledge by “reaching the parts other methods cannot reach” and assigning meaning to data (Grieb et al).

The field of qualitative research has a lot to offer humanitarian and development organizations in their daily work. Qualitative research is recognized as a means of enhancing the results of programs, by offering engagement, accountability, advocacy, impact and innovation (Skovdal and Cornish). Community practitioners should be adapting a research approach to monitoring, and evaluation as well as learning (Skovdal and Cornish). Community development is a multidisciplinary and applied social science (Quimbo et al). Therefore, given the diversity of community needs and requirements, it is important that various approaches are considered in the design of interventions. This would ensure the wellbeing of people in the community.

Community development is often defined as a process that transforms marginalized communities as part of a broader goal of sustainable development (Quimbo et al). This is to

ensure that the members of those communities are able to collectively act on the situations in which they are living, and on the external forces that undermine and perpetuate oppressive conditions in their communities (Skovdal and Cornish). Community development as a system of theory and practice is a constant process of formation and continuous evolution that embraces subjectivity (Skovdal and Cornish). As exemplified by early experiences of institutional top-down approaches that evolved through participatory approaches to community-based and community-led courses of action that have evolved over time (Skovdal and Cornish). Hence, the success of any community development activity is not a matter of choosing the best approach or method. Instead, it is a matter of finding the appropriate combination of approaches or methods in order to achieve a particular purpose (Quimbo).

As a research approach, it can facilitate participation and encourage the use and development of creative and flexible methods that enable different voices to be heard. For example, HAF promotes the application of participatory development in communities, a common qualitative method that engages communities in their own development. The initial phase of the participatory process is to get to know the community and gather information about participants' experiences and perspectives (Stringer). Therefore, this method is qualitative in nature as you would use two qualitative measurements: observation and interviewing, to develop your understanding of the community's social, economic, culture and ways of operating. This information will be needed to create relevant measurements that can easily be implemented by the community and its committee (The Participatory Development Process and Tools A Guide for Communities and Facilitators).

Conclusion

In sum, the empirical materials used in qualitative research such as case study, personal experience, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts generate evidence that can be used to develop development programs in a community that are tailored to the local contexts. Research in qualitative methods involves alternating between theory and evidence to become deeply familiar with a subject. Therefore, it offers development practitioners the opportunity to understand the context of a program better and ensure that development programs resonate with local realities and expectations.

The various approaches to qualitative research encourage the use and development of creative and flexible methods to implement impactful programs. The development of situational analyses needs assessments to the monitoring and evaluation and outcome of programs gather information at the different steps to explore the feasibility, acceptability and areas of improvement in a program (Skovdal). Thus, qualitative research helps community development practitioners improve the quality, accountability, and impact of their programs so that we can make a real difference in the lives of people and be an agent of social change.

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ESSAY 3: ICD VALUES

Introduction

When I look back on my experience in the ICD program, I sometimes get emotional and am filled with immediate gratitude. From empowerment to leadership to self-efficacy, I have developed so much through this program. A program that aligned with my values and passions, but challenged me to improve and strengthen my leadership abilities, was very important to me.

The ICD program was transformative and informative, to the point where I feel more capable than I have ever felt before in my vocation. I have gained a profound perspective on problem solving and community development that I feel confident applying to real-world problems and social justice issues. As I move forward, I hope to continue to impart the knowledge I have gained to others and to become an agent of change in my community by continuing to follow the righteous path of doing good. In subsequent, I will elaborate on just how transformative the program was for me and the impact it has had along the way and will have in my future.

Copowerment

One of the many reasons I have such a passion for working with NGOs is due to the values that most hold. In whatever organization I found myself in, it was always one that had a mission I felt a strong connection to. The ICD program was no different. The core values of contextualization, copowerment and collaboration align with the type of leader and change agent I want to be in my life and future vocation. What makes organizations and programs successful and impactful are the many skills, resources and experiences the team has to offer. Through the value of copowerment I realized that most NGOs are so much more than just a helping hand. It is

a larger entity based on trust and mutuality, if run the right way. No matter the foundation or funds an organization may have, the pillar is ultimately extraordinary people who come from different backgrounds and expertise that use the appropriate approaches to effectively carry out a mission. However, with the appropriate approach, copowerment must be included. The practice of copowerment involves the act of freely empowering one another through collaborative efforts in a relationship (Inslee). This is a concept that is vital for us as community practitioners to practice so each side of the equation is heard and viewed as equally able (Inslee). Relationships are key to copowerment in order to build bridges of understanding.

My understanding of copowerment became clear to me while I was completing my fieldwork in Morocco. When I first arrived at the High Atlas Foundation, I was timid because I honestly was not sure what I would be able to contribute. I didn't speak or understand Arabic and was still learning about Moroccan culture and HA'Fs programs. However, I knew that I was interested in their approach to community development and thought maybe I could enhance it in some way. After speaking with Yossef, a light bulb went on in my head, and I saw where there was room for improvement.

From then on, my relationship with the team at the Women's Empowerment Workshops became a mutual exchange of curiosity and humility (Inslee). We asked one another questions, exchanged opinions, and were curious about our experiences with community development. I was even able to share some of the approaches I had learned from the ICD program with Amina, one of the facilitators of the workshop such as the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and the Trauma Informed Approach because she wanted to expand on the methods they used in the workshops. I felt that my opinions mattered and with that initiative of

copowerment I became more motivated in my fieldwork during the times of uncertainty and doubt within myself.

Copowerment offers the ability to recognize that community development is not a one-way street, rather it is a series of streets that intertwine to find a common direction through collaborative interdependence. In *Theories and Practices of Development*, Willis shares the dimensions of power, describing empowerment as something that comes from within and “power with” as the power that comes from individuals working together collectively to achieve common goals (139). Meaning that copowerment serves as the power with one another to serve effectively and mutually. In the interview video with Forrest Inslee and Medard Ngueita, he explained copowerment as inviting people’s input, relationships and local wisdom. This helps things to work more smoothly and efficiently in a program or organization. In copowerment, we are sharing the power as leaders to move forward and help do the work that is necessary for change.

Personal Transformation

My personal transformation journey has been nothing short of eye-opening and life-changing for me. Before I found the ICD program I had enrolled in other programs and made decisions that I thought would be beneficial for me, but nothing compared to the decision of joining the ICD program. It was one of the best decisions I made despite the challenges and trials I had ahead of me. In fact, it is for those reasons that I applaud the program and its impact. In the master's program, it is obvious that there will be challenges, but the way in which they will be encountered is one of the mysteries of what to expect. As a result, I was able to discover a side of myself that was much more capable than I expected.

From the start of the program, I knew that this would serve as an advantage in my professional and personal life. I was eager to get out of my comfort zone and challenge myself. For me, it has always been about how I can serve better, for “true vocation joins self and service” (Palmer 181). At the beginning, I wanted to pursue my master’s degree because I wanted to academically challenge myself and be a scholar. However, after I read Palmer’s *Let Life Speak*, I began to think of my own personal self-knowledge and how that too can grow. After all, it is mostly choices of the heart that have led me to where I am today. Palmer speaks of choices that lead to wholeness, not by calculation but by a profound personal truth (Palmer). To find that truth you must be faithful to your true self and embrace your own liabilities and limits (Palmer). By denying our true self, we risk the consequence of doing more harm than good if we were to serve unfaithfully.

Self-knowledge comes through inner work. This was important for me to practice and understand because without doing the inner work I would not have been able to do the outer work (Palmer). I worked through this aspect deeply in Morocco as I learned and observed in the women’s empowerment workshop. We are normally taught to think of inner work as being a private matter but Palmer states that though inner work is personal it does not have to be private and can help others in the community (Palmer 841). I was able to witness this during my fieldwork as the women are encouraged to speak about their inner workings among their community members for help and support as part of the empowerment process. On the second day of the workshop the participants were told by the facilitator that you “need an image to have vision” and “to be honest with yourself” (Hajjami). I took those words in and asked myself the same questions that the participants were being asked such as where am I now? And where do I want to go? Self-reflection, journaling, as well as being honest with myself, became the means

by which my journey in the program became the process of discovering who I am and what I was called to do which led me to a more fulfilled approach to my life.

Social justice

The concept of social justice used to feel complicated and far from reach. My view of it used to be the impossible task of change for equal opportunities for all. I say impossible because unfortunately it is a task that has been made to be difficult due to social construction and capitalism. Social justice is the commitment to fairness in a society. However, this commitment cannot be derived from a place of structure. It must come from a place of love, moral vision and ethics. These elements are often warped to make it easier for oppression and exclusion to occur in societies around the world. With this in mind, I've come to realize how the term "we" signifies something different for everybody depending on if the system was structured for you or against you. This has also changed my philosophy of service and has made me realize that I must fight to make those voices heard.

While it is not my duty to change the world, it is my duty as a Catholic and change agent to be true to myself and serve my community with love. Social justice cannot be accomplished without love. Not necessarily emotional love but a love that motivates us to seek structures of justice (Moe-Lobeda). A lot of the time, love is pertaining to the private arenas of life, and not within governments or large institutions in general, which is why it must be used as a means for motivating social relations with the impersonal many (Moe-Lobeda). Thus, I hope my influence on social justice will be to encourage people to "do something" (Clawson 19) and help others recognize how our relationship with one another including our planet and the decisions we make can either be an act out of love that directs change or an act out of hegemony or denial that continues to mask systemic injustice and cloud our vision (Moe-Lobeda 319).

The various readings in *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of our daily choices*, *Resisting Structural Evil and Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* have made an impact on my own moral vision and changed the way I view myself as a consumer from the Global North. I realized that the decisions I was making about the food I eat, clothes I wear, or even the way I travel were not aligning with my belief in being a part of the transformation that commits to justice and creation care as a way of life (Clawson). By being silent about the way my purchases affect people and the environment such as buying clothing made in sweatshops or strawberries that were sprayed with toxic chemicals that are affecting the workers, I was also contributing to their pain and unjust toil (Clawson).

I needed to make a change. I began to be more conscious of where my products were coming from and looking at different companies' fair trade to see if they were ethical and fair. For example, I started to investigate the clothing brand, SheIn that I would occasionally purchase from because I became suspicious of their low prices and found that they were indeed an unethical company with a toxic work environment. I began to spread the word to my friends who I knew had boughten from them as well so they too could realize the unethical decisions we were making for a piece of clothing that was made with toxic chemicals. By recognizing how change in our individual lifestyles can join forces with change in corporations and policy practices, collectively we can evoke moral action (Moe-Lobeda).

My philosophy of service will be no different. I must include the ICD values in any project or program I work with and hold those I work with accountable, including myself for the decisions we make and its impact on social justice transformation. It wouldn't be right to unmask systemic injustice and structural violence if we as beneficiaries don't decide to recognize the problem and act on it (Moe-Lobeda). The few ways that we choose to seek justice is a place we

can start as individuals to become more aware of how our actions affect the world around us. This is a part of my philosophy of service that I intend to stand by in my vocation among contextualization, copowerment, integrity and rooting my actions with love (Clawson).

Conclusion

As a society we are interconnected, and therefore individually we have the collective power to challenge structural violence and be the ones to speak up rather than remain silent. Agents of change can be anyone, however, what's significant is that the actions of each reinforce the work of the others to seek change. In my own life, I embody the ICD values, and as a community practitioner, I understand the value and impact of practicing what we preach and of making a difference in the community. As a community, we can only grow as strong as our shared values. It is vital that we understand how others express and develop these values in order to grow a stronger community and a united society.

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Appendix 1: Project Proposal

Improving Monitoring and Evaluation of the Women's Empowerment Workshops at the High Atlas Foundation

Introduction

Empowerment can be defined as the power within, a woman's intrinsic belief in her ability to control resources and to make decisions (Aboukhsaiwan,). Women's empowerment and gender equity are critical factors in sustainable development (Aboukhsaiwan). The High Atlas Foundation (HAF) is a 501 (C)(3) nonprofit organization committed to making sustainable prosperity a reality in Morocco and has worked in the field of women's empowerment since 2011. Their empowerment program adopts the IMAGINE self-discovery workshop developed at the Empowerment Institute in the United States, which adheres to in the methodology of empowerment as “the expansion of a person’s capacity to create positive behavioral change by working directly with their own visions and goals” (Institute). The workshop assists women and gives them the tools to find their voice and achieve their goals (Foundation).

In addition to the empowerment gained through the IMAGINE workshop, the cooperatives that are developed create employment opportunities for nearby communities. It also plays an instrumental role in including rural women in the social economy. HAF aims to support this role in women's cooperatives and their development to create greater financial independence, expand networks and promote change in women's roles in their communities (Foundation).

Since then, a series of IMAGINE workshops have been held, benefiting 2,208 women from the provinces of Al Haouz, Boujdour, and Marrakech (Foundation). However, during my fieldwork observations and interviews, I noticed a gap in demonstrating the relationship between HAF and the cooperatives. This was also due to an empirical gap in measuring and evaluating workshop outcomes. The impact was evident, but the metrics needed to be improved.

In order for the IMAGINE Women's Empowerment workshop to build on and pursue its success with the operation of developing cooperatives, surveys should be in place and completed by the participants to increase standardized data and improve the effectiveness of the workshops. Demonstrating its impact through a program evaluation will provide the opportunity to publicize the workshops and the social economy of cooperatives.

The purpose of the survey is to collect enough tangible data that can be transferred and organized online in Google forms. This will create a trackable metrics system of measurement and evaluation. As a result, the data can be compared and used to evaluate the impact rather than the workshop itself to demonstrate the effect on communities in the regions of Morocco. The data captured from the surveys can then be used to create a program outcome evaluation that assesses the program's effectiveness in producing change (TSNE). Through this measurement and evaluation, the High Atlas Foundation can demonstrate its ties to women-led cooperatives while bringing exposure to this form of social economy.

IMAGINE Women's Empowerment Workshops

The IMAGINE Women's Empowerment workshop is an initiative for women's agency and freedom. IMAGINE aims to "empower women throughout the developing world with the agency to transform the cycle of poverty and create thriving lives and communities" (Straub). The workshops currently take place in 12 countries throughout the MENA, India, Africa, and South and Central Asia, with 35 IMAGINE partner NGOs, the High Atlas Foundation being one of them (Straub). The focus on women is important because women have been identified as the primary agents for equitable change and sustainable development (Institute). Women's voices and agency are vital drivers for gender equality, and this must be recognized to break the vicious cycle of poverty, violence, and political instability in developing world countries (Institute).

The workshops are four days long and are led by trained facilitators selected by the Empowerment Institute (Institute). The program is culturally adapted to provide the tools that address the part of women's empowerment that is often missing (Institute). In Morocco, the workshop is conducted in Arabic, and seven themes are covered: emotions, relationships, sexuality, body, money, work, and spirituality.

In a conversation with Houria Chouhab (2022), the volunteer technical and field assistant in the farmer-to-farmer program at HAF, she explained to me that:

For workshops, how we contact these women is either a group of women that we know, that they have the intention of creating a cooperative, so we go there, we deliver the workshop, and we stress and give them more important to the access of work and money....Moreover, we conduct what we call the participatory approach workshop, which helps them to know what kind of cooperation they want. (Chouhab)

Due to this aspect of the workshop, she tells me that the workshop “empowers personal and professional level.” Demonstrating the importance of the community making the decision on their own and wanting to participate in the process of development.

The participatory approach used by the facilitators is based on the central principle of sharing knowledge and the authority to make decisions (Khezzaz and Rahmani). It encourages community participation that leads to greater self-awareness and confidence to implement a continuous cycle of development projects over time (Thompson). In another conversation with Fatima-Zahra, the Program Manager, she stated, " Some methods HAF has used to boost engagement within the community successfully is the participatory meeting where we use different methods including brainstorming, focus group, and community mapping pairwise ranking to understand the community needs." These women want to be empowered and

independent; thus, with the support of the facilitators and the aid of the High Atlas Foundation, they can accomplish this goal.

Cooperatives

Social and solidarity economy (SSE) is a form of economic activity combining productive activities with environmental and civil social objectives to address extreme poverty, inequality, and economic insecurity that currently exist in Moroccan society (Bouhazzama). Since the Moroccan Office for the Development of Cooperation (ODCO) in 1963, cooperatives have played an essential role in economic development and poverty alleviation (El Houssain Bouichou et al.). Cooperatives are known as an “independent association composed of people united together and voluntarily to achieve their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a collectively owned facility” and are based on the “values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, justice and solidarity” (Khezzaz and Rahmani). Each cooperative can be in a different agriculture and food sector, artisan, habitat, argan, or other, depending on what the members choose to do based on their skills and experience.

In a country where gender roles have only recently begun to be challenged in the public sphere, employment opportunities are slim or nonexistent for rural women. In an interview with Majda, the Program Assistant for HAF, she stated:

This training allowed women to know their rights in society as much as men and as much as an essential element in the development of the social economy, and this by the capacity of women to create a cooperative and to be autonomous. It also allowed women to become aware of equality between men and women and that women are capable of realizing their full potential for better economic growth. (Stitou)

Among the organizations of the social and solidarity economy in Morocco, cooperatives form an economic and environmental pyramid composed of social goals and sustainable economic growth (Khezzaz and Rahmani). The members of the cooperative share the profits and have an equal say in how the business is run. This way, underprivileged individuals can participate in market competition through democratic decision-making and joint ownership. (Joke et al. 2018, p.2).

As I observed a workshop at the Duar Laarb village in Marrakech, Director of Projects Amina El Hajjami explained "The first couple of years take development, communication, planning, and perfecting your artisan to make sure the cooperative remains sustainable. If not, you risk creating something that is not selling and doesn't last for years to come." Due to this, before a cooperative can be formed the members must complete training, also offered by the High Atlas Foundation. In a discussion of how cooperatives operate, Houria explained, "The meaning of a cooperative is to cooperate with one another." Thus, in the workshop, they discuss and learn the importance of working together and trusting one another to build a strong foundation for the cooperative.

In using the participatory approach, the workshops and cooperatives demonstrate a grassroots "bottom up" approach to community development and a prime example of asset-based community development (ABCD). The ABCD approach involves identifying and tapping all the potential assets in a neighborhood to shift the focus from problem-solving to asset building (Wilke). These assets can include the talents and skills of individuals, organizational capacities, political connections, buildings and facilities, and financial resources (Wilke).

However, this empowerment of individuals and communities is not automatic. Empowerment is something that comes from within, and "development organizations cannot be viewed as direct channels to empowerment; rather, they can help set up conditions within which

individuals and groups can empower themselves" (Willis). You cannot begin a cooperative by solely focusing on money. It is important to highlight the relationship between the Empowerment Workshops and the Cooperatives as women's empowerment stimulates economic development.

Survey

During my time at the Duar Laarb, I was blown away by how responsive and eager the women were to attend the workshop. You could physically see the impact and growth in the women as the days went by. However, there was no tangible way to reveal these results other than through word of mouth or written observation. In light of this, in a meeting with Yossef the President of HAF I asked if they had thought about implementing a survey towards the end of the workshop. He agreed that it should be done and that it wasn't right that they were missing that aspect. Consequently, we decided to take a proactive approach to monitoring and evaluating the impact.

Several factors need to be considered before developing the survey, including the fact that most women participating in the workshops are illiterate. In rural areas in Morocco, 89.1% of women are illiterate, while in urban areas, 67.5 percent are illiterate (Aagnaou). Therefore, Fatima Zahra and Amina El Hajjami, the program manager and facilitator for the Women's Empowerment Workshop at HAF, created a Likert Scale survey. A Likert Scale is a 5-point or seven-point scale, which allows the individual to express how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement (McLeod).¹

¹ . In this case, the choices under the questions are a numerical value from 1 to 5 to measure the attitude under investigation (Saul McLeod, 2008).

When designing the survey, it was essential to ensure the questions were easy for respondents to answer. Therefore, we kept the questions to a minimum of 12 with a separate blank page at the end for open-ended responses. I included questions that began with "who" or "how," along with some statements derived from how the workshop made the participants feel and their experiences. The facilitators and volunteers would be the ones to say the questions out loud to the women if they could not read so they could answer the question to their best ability. As the workshops are located in rural areas, the team cannot rely on technology and internet connection completely, so the surveys must be conducted with pens and paper.

In Likert scales, response categories are ranked, but the intervals between values cannot be presumed equal (McLeod). Therefore, the mean and standard deviation are inappropriate for ordinal data (McLeod). You can use statistics summarizing using a median or a mode or displaying the distribution of observations in a bar chart, not a histogram, as the data is not continuous (McLeod). The prototype attached results from a survey conducted at a workshop in August 2022. The responses were transferred from paper to online google forms to display the quantitative data appropriately and quickly analyze it.

Conclusion

An impact monitoring and evaluation system must be in place for the workshop's methodology to progress. As the survey data becomes available, it will allow them to create an outcome evaluation that highlights the impact and relationship of the workshop to cooperatives based on the participants' opinions.

A successful outcome evaluation should demonstrate power, empowerment, capacity building, and social capital in accordance with the ABCD method (Wicaksono). In terms of human development and economic means, the High Atlas Foundation performs an impeccable job in reaching this goal through the conduct of the workshops. When enough data is collected from the

surveys, the outcome program evaluation can illustrate how the Empowerment Workshops have impacted the participants and the social economy.

Survey Questionsⁱ

IMAGINE Participant Survey

Location: _____

Age: _____

Date of workshop: _____

Trainer _____

1) Were the objectives of the workshop largely achieved?

(1 2 3 4 5)

2) Did you find the workshop valuable?

(1 2 3 4 5)

3) Were the flipcharts made during the workshop satisfactory?

(1 2 3 4 5)

4) Do you think you will be able to implement the empowerment techniques learned during the workshop in your life?

(1 2 3 4 5)

5) How would you rate the usefulness of the content?

(1 2 3 4 5)

6) Did you gain any new ideas or understandings after attending the workshop?

(1 2 3 4 5)

7) In your opinion, which one of the seven areas did you experience the most improvement or understanding?

Emotions

Relationships

Sexuality

Money

Body

Work

Spirituality

8) Was participation and interaction encouraged?

(1 2 3 4 5)

9) The facilitator was knowledgeable about the workshop topics.

(1 2 3 4 5)

10) I know what I need to change to get to where I want to go.

(1 2 3 4 5)

11) I got the chance to speak up and express my feelings during the workshop/support group.

(1 2 3 4 5)

10) If you have a personal problem, what would you do?

- a) Tell a close friend.
- b) Keep it secret and try to solve it.
- c) Tell everyone you meet about it

12) Did you feel comfortable when you shared your experience with your peers?

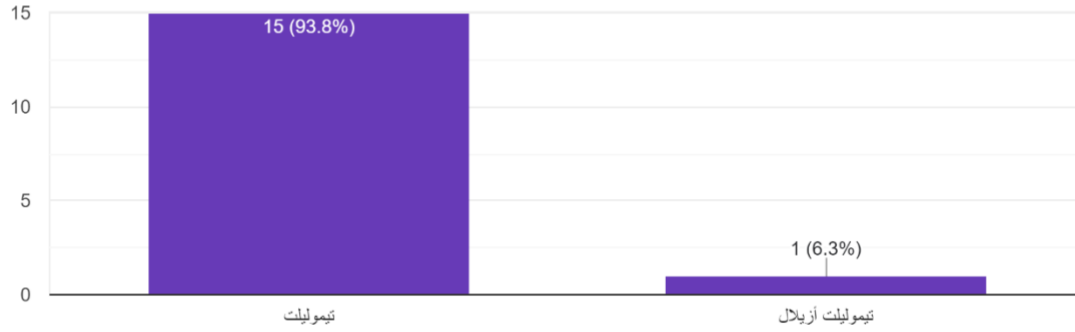
(1 2 3 4 5)

Comments/Visions:

Survey Results

Location

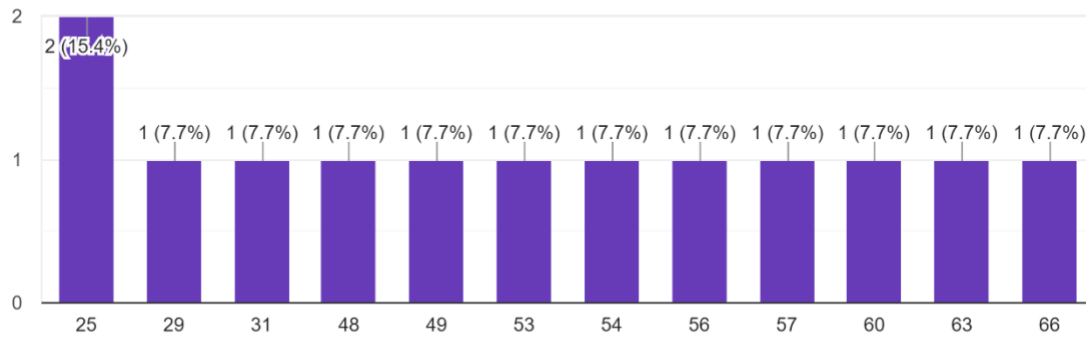
16 responses



ii

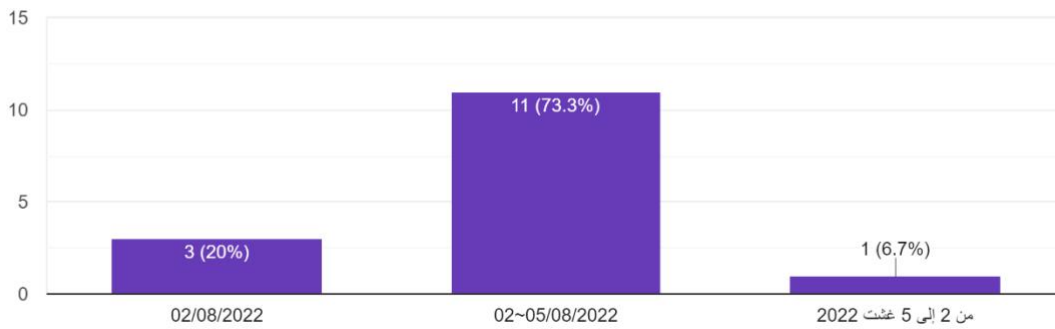
Age

13 responses



Workshop date

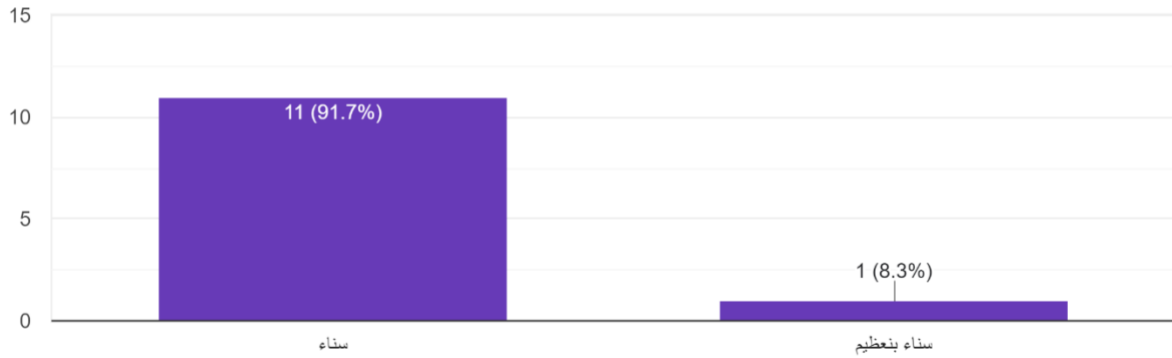
15 responses



2

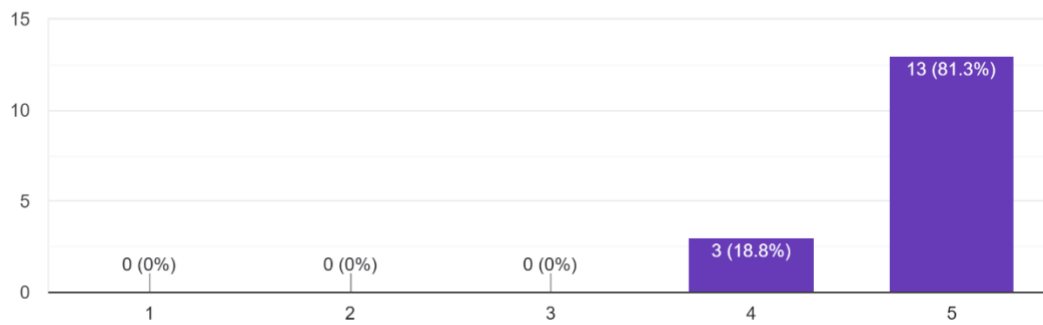
trained

12 responses



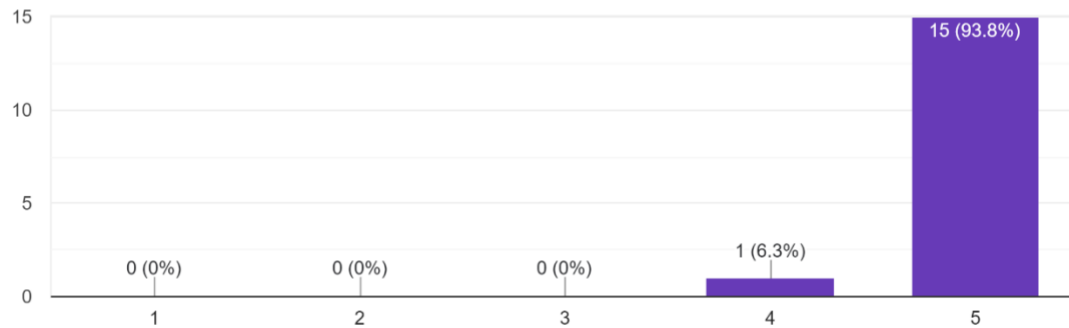
1) Were the objectives of the workshop achieved to a large extent?

16 responses



2) Was the workshop valuable to you?

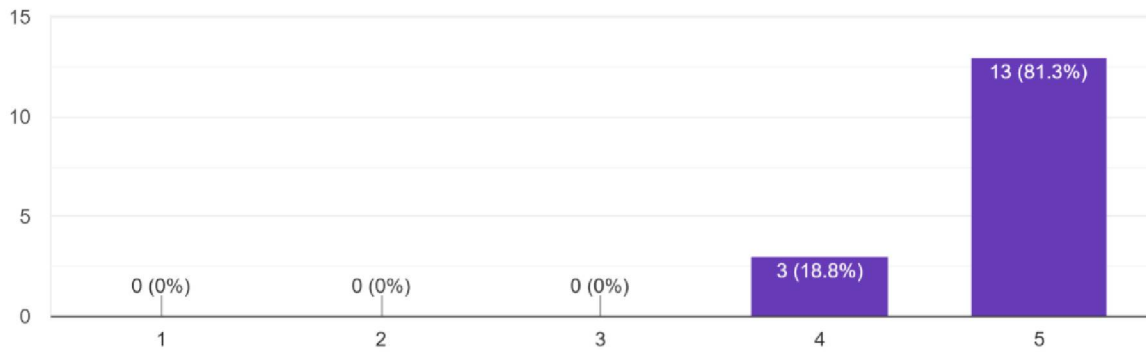
16 responses



² Proper Translation: Trainer/Facilitator Name

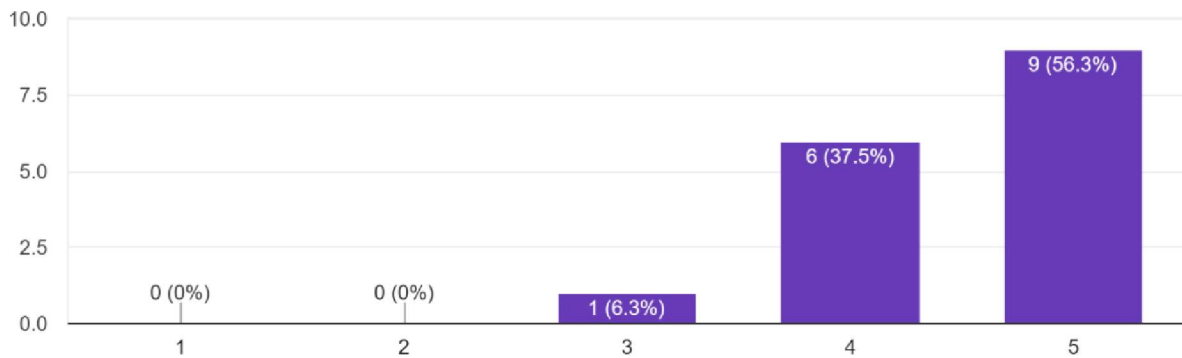
3) Were the exercises completed during the workshop satisfactory?

16 responses



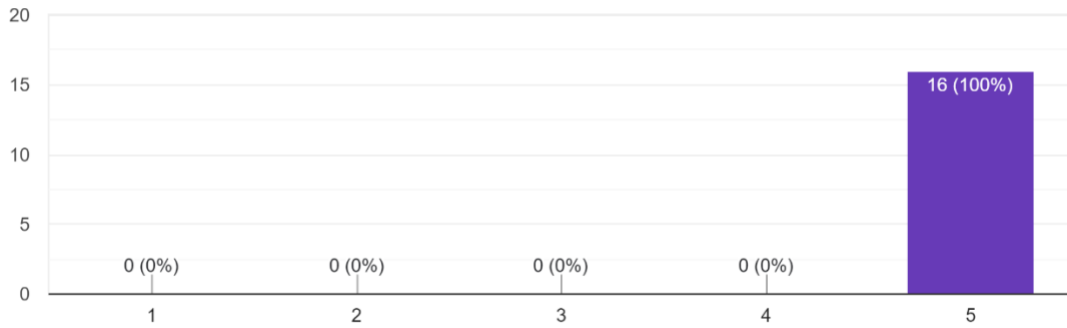
4) Do you think you will be able to implement the empowerment techniques you learned during the workshop in your life?

16 responses



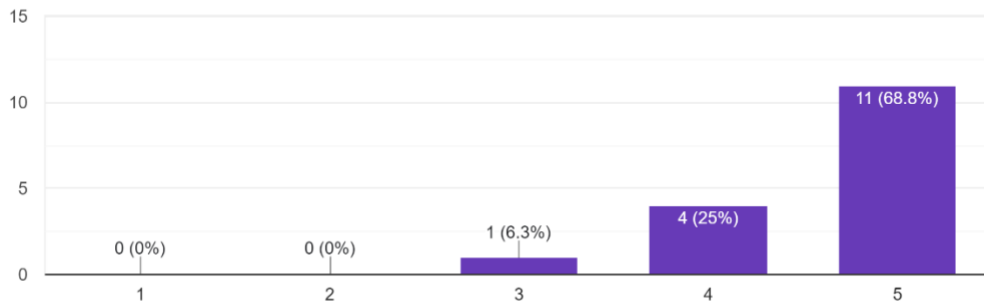
5) What is your assessment of the usefulness of the workshop content?

16 responses



6) Did you gain any new ideas or concepts after attending the workshop?

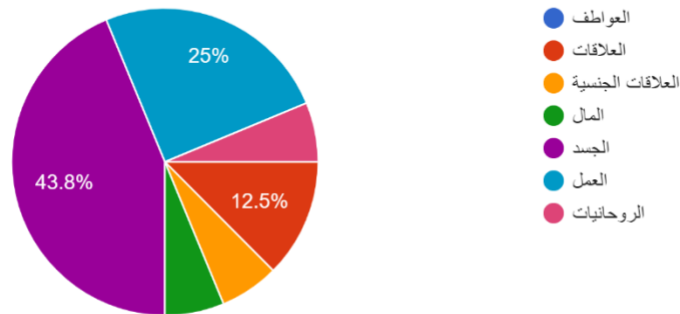
16 responses



iii

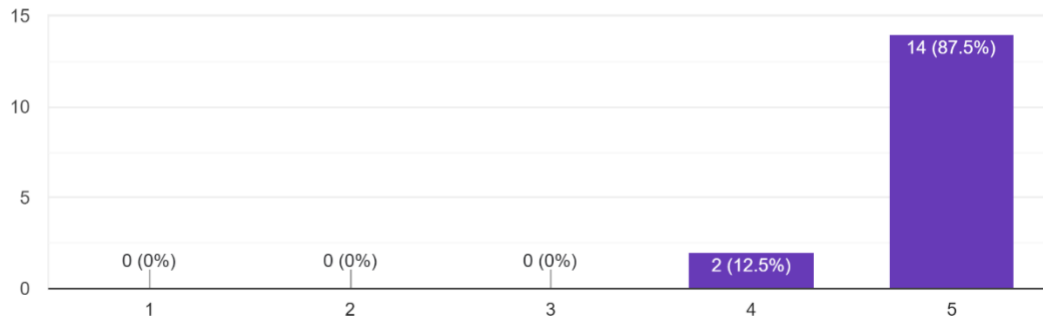
7) In your opinion, which of the following seven areas have you seen the most improvement or gained the most understanding about?

16 responses



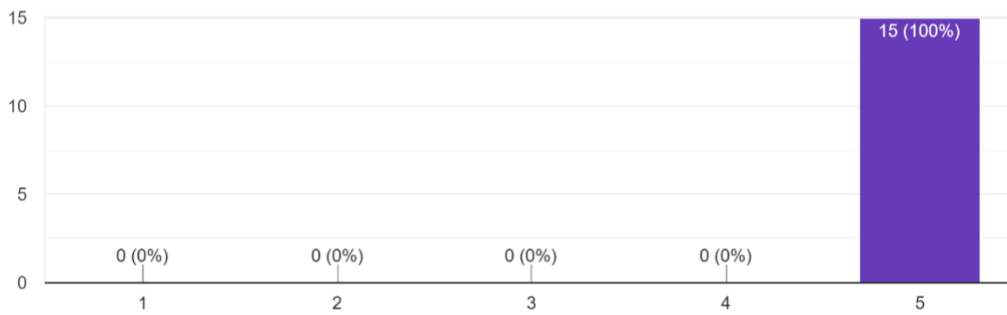
8) Was participation and interaction encouraged during the workshop?

16 responses



9) The march was familiar with the topics of the workshop.

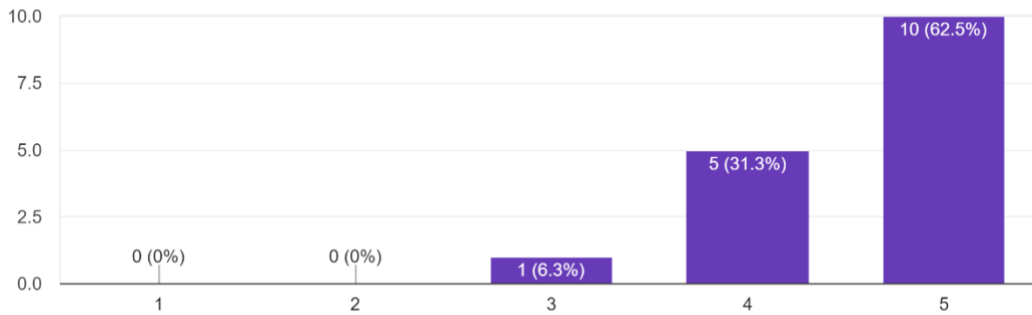
15 responses



iv

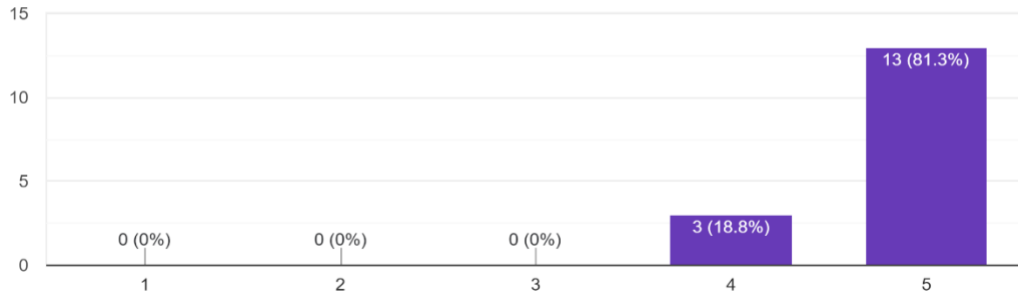
10) I know what I need to change to get where I want to be.

16 responses



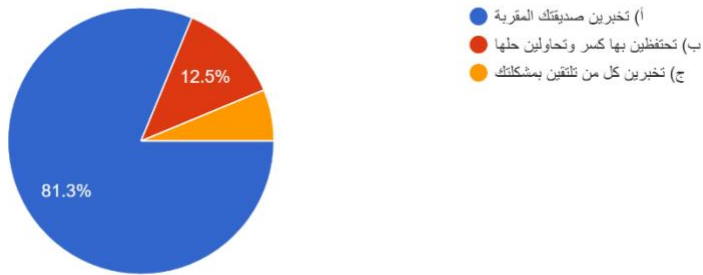
11) During the workshop, I had the opportunity to speak and express my feelings/support for the group

16 responses



12) What would you do if you had a personal problem?

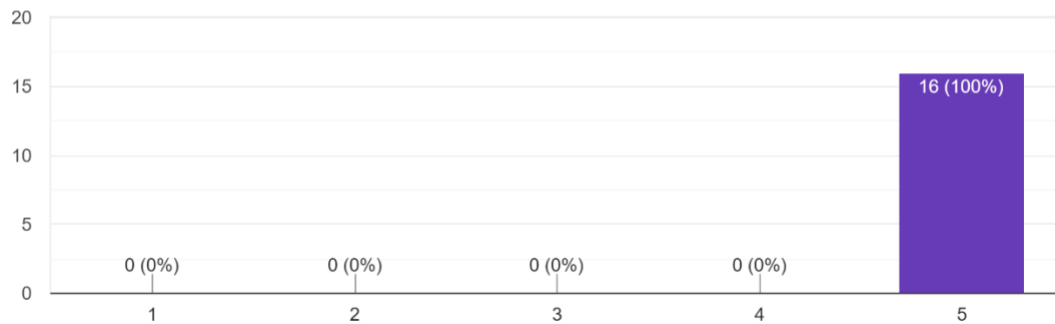
16 responses



v

13) Did you feel comfortable sharing your experience with your female colleagues?

16 responses



ⁱ The survey questions were translated into Arabic for workshop participants by Fatima Zahra.

ⁱⁱ Locations: Timolet and Timolet Azilal

ⁱⁱⁱ Pie Chart: (Blue) Emotions, (Red) Relationships, (Yellow) Sexual relationships, (Green) Money, (Purple) Body, (Light Blue) Work, (Pink) Spirituality

^{iv} Proper translation for Question #9: "The facilitator was familiar with topics from the workshop."

^v Pie Chart: (Blue) Tell your best friend (Red) You keep it to yourself and try to solve it (Yellow) You tell everyone you meet about your problem

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