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## Sweet Success: Scrutinizing the Nexus between The National Initiative for Human Development and Women's Empowerment in Morocco through Lalla Moulati–Fez

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### ABSTRACT

The current article explores the contribution of Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) to women's economic empowerment and integration in society through the art of cooking. With targeting *Lalla Moulati*, it is a pastry-specialized institution which works under the supervision of the NIHD. This means that they share a common objective. Simply put, *Lalla Moulati* aims at encouraging women to take part in the job market and become financially independent rather than remaining a dependent burden who needs to be taken care of. In this regard, this article targets unveiling the multifaceted impact of such initiatives on women's personal, societal and economic status. Using the qualitative approach solely, this study provides a detailed examination on how this institution's plans and accomplishments align with the objectives of the NIHD. Using interviews, this article aims at examining the extent to which *Lalla Moulati* plays a pivotal role in not only changing women's lives, but also challenging the traditional mindset that bounds women to specific gender roles. By examining the experiences of women in the domain of pastries through this institution, this research highlights the major role of vocational training in the advancement of women's socio-economic position in Moroccan society.

### INTRODUCTION

As any other country, Morocco pursues the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment via adopting multiple plans and approaches, one of which is the National Initiative for Human Development. This initiative has made Morocco a prominent example of progress and development. To put it differently, a fundamental emphasis on advancing the position of women in society lies as a major goal within the NIHD's agenda since societal development cannot be achieved without women's contribution. In order to achieve modernization and socio-economic development, Morocco, through its initiative, recognizes the vital role of empowering women as they are the backbone of societal prosperity and progress. Though Morocco has started a journey for such social change, it is crystal clear that achieving gender equality cannot be void from obstacles as Morocco is bound by its culture and traditions. In other words, societal norms have dictated the roles and opportunities based on gender for generations, yet the NIHD plays a pivotal role in reshaping these norms by advocating for women's inclusivity in society as well as equal participation in all domains. Morocco's emphasis on women's empowerment as a keynote part of its overall agenda attempts to create an inclusive society as it is believed that every individual can contribute meaningfully regardless of their gender.

This article, therefore, explores the impact of the National Initiative for Human Development on women's empowerment in Morocco. By adopting various strategies and plans, the NIHD addresses the urgent need of integrating women in society as independent

individuals so as to guarantee a sustained progress and change. Through the lens of empowerment, the current article examines the transformation of women's personal, economic and social status in Morocco. Through women's stories of determination, this article illuminates the extent to which investing in women yields profits that enhance the Moroccan society.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Unveiling Gender Dynamics: Exploring Societal Constructs and Progress

For ages, the definite distinctions between gender and sex have sparked various debates, as gender was synonymous with sex. Yet, in recent decades, the debate surrounding sex versus gender has found resolution. That is, influential feminists assert that sex pertains to biological characteristics while gender is a social construct intertwined with power dynamics. As a result, this perspective posits that societal norms and power relations shape gender roles and identities. In this regard, sex means "a biological term referring to people, animals, etc., being either female or male depending on their sex organs or genes" (Gordon, 2000). In contrast, gender refers to "the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology" (Hornby, 2010). In simple terms, it is argued that sex designates the biological make up of human beings while gender is "the process through which differences based on presumed biological sex are defined, imagined, and become significant in specific contexts" (Nightingale, 2006). This indicates that gender is a collection of cultural norms and actions that are

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connected with an individual's biological sex.

The idea that resonates in the above statements and definitions help understand the difference between gender and sex and the way culture as a powerful institution shapes its people's thinking, beliefs and behaviors. The construction of gender of both sexes not only serves to trace the differences in preferences and attitudes of men and women but also constitutes a cultural discourse that bounds people to specific roles. To simplify, society unequally and unfairly divides human beings into men and women and imposes on them certain behaviors and characteristics that they should abide by that are well known as gender roles. The latter designates "society's evaluation of behaviour as masculine or feminine, e.g., cooking is feminine, while fishing is a masculine role in most societies" (Gordon, 2000). The concept of 'gender roles' refers to the tasks that are assigned to individuals on the basis of their differences. That is to say, men are typically regarded as the breadwinners who provide their families with their needs. Moreover, men are expected to acquire a variety of skills such as independence, decision-making as well as taking the public sphere as their working area. On the contrary, women are imprisoned in the private sphere where they are associated with domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, ironing in addition to rearing children and pleasing their husbands. Besides, women are expected to fulfill the role of a supportive, dependent, and compliant spouse.

Like a multiplicity of feminists, Simone De Beauvoir argued on this matter. In her famous book *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir defines women as the 'second sex' because they are all the time defined in relation to men. To put it differently, the French feminist argues that men are considered as the embodiment of self, the focal point, and the ideal whereas women are diminished to the status of the other, the object and the margin. De Beauvoir (1949) argues:

If I want to define myself, I first have to say, "I am a woman"; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth. A man never begins by positing himself as an individual of a certain sex: that he is a man is obvious.

This means that "humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being." In this respect, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) contends in her famous quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" that gender is not inherent or predetermined but rather learnt throughout childhood. She emphasizes that individuals adopt their gender roles and identities from an early age. That is to say, girls are socialized into feminine behaviors and roles primarily through the influence of their families particularly from their mothers and by society. Similarly, boys undergo a similar process of socialization where they acquire masculine behaviors.

To sum up, Simone de Beauvoir's arguments are very insightful in critically defining and differentiating between sex and gender. She indicates that sex is the biological makeup of humans while gender is a product of social

and cultural influences as emphasized by the American Feminist Judith Butler (1990) who argues: "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." The construction of gender serves in dividing human beings into opposite categories namely males and females with the former enjoying privilege and dominance over the latter. This division results in making women suppressed and marginalized in practically every aspect of life, be it in the job market, politics, education, media, etc. The portrayal of women as the second sex in De Beauvoir's book always ranks at a low level because, as Simone de Beauvoir mentioned, women are considered as the second sex and second-class citizens.

Having provided an overview on the concept gender, one can easily notice the challenges and obstacles that hinder women's progress inside societies. Yet, a variety of countries, one of which is Morocco, have adopted several plans, approaches, and strategies to guarantee the rights of women and encourage them to take part in society's development. This article, therefore, moves to explore the National Initiative for Human Development in Morocco and its role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through "educating women and providing them with the necessary skills to compete in the labour market and use their acquired skills and income to develop their families and the country's development" (Niyonzima & Bayu, 2023).

### **Empowering Communities: An Overview of Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development**

Morocco, like many other countries, has implemented various strategies and initiatives to encourage "the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality (Asad, 2024). Among these efforts, The National Initiative for human Development stands out as a development program that was launched by His Majesty King Mohammed VI on May 18th, 2005. This program aims at fighting poverty and social exclusion across the Moroccan country. This means that it focuses on promoting human dignity, citizen empowerment and sustainable development by establishing several projects that are more likely to improve Moroccans' socio-economic conditions. The initiative operates through various programs targeting different sectors and geographical areas, with an emphasis on enhancing infrastructure, basic services, income generation, and human capital development (Moroccan Government, n.d.).

The establishment of this initiative went through multiple phases. Starting with the initial phase which lasted 5 years (2005-2010), there were four programs that had a focal concern which is helping vulnerable people. These programs focused mainly on alleviating poverty in rural areas and social exclusion in urban areas. Moving to the second phase (2011-2015) which experienced a boost

in financial resources, it targeted rural communities, resulting in positive impacts for approximately one million individuals residing in 3,300 villages spread across 22 mountainous and remote regions. Under the presidency of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the third phase of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) (2019-2023) was initiated on September 19th, 2018. It seeks to build upon the successes of preceding phases and centers around four programs. They aimed at addressing infrastructure and the absence of service in disadvantaged regions, assisting individuals facing difficult circumstances, enhancing the economic prospects and the integration of youth, and fostering human development for upcoming generations by investing in human capital. (Ibid)

After providing an overview on the National Initiative for Human Development, it is important to explore its goals which are clearly stated by his Majesty King Mohamed VI while delivering his speech on May 18th, 2005. This speech has clearly demonstrated the strategic vision of his Majesty to guide the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) towards social progress and the inclusivity of people. According to His Majesty:

This initiative will target the social rehabilitation for 360 of the most marginalized communities in rural areas, as well as 250 impoverished urban neighborhoods, including old medinas and shantytowns, where glaring signs of social exclusion, unemployment, delinquency, and destitution are evident. It also aims to progressively rehabilitate both the absorptive capacity and the quality of existing reception centers, or to establish new specialized ones capable of accommodating and assisting individuals in difficult situations, such as the disabled, abandoned children, homeless individuals, vulnerable women without support or shelter, the elderly, and orphans who have no means of support (INDH Ben Slimane, n.d.).

The extract from the Royal Speech demonstrates the objectives and target areas of the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD). It shows that the NIHD aims to address social issues namely exclusion, unemployment, and poverty in marginalized areas. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of not only improving existing reception centers, but also establishing new specialized facilities to assist vulnerable individuals, particularly women. All in all, the passage above reveals the approach the NIHD adopts to address social challenges and provide support to those in need across various regions and areas. Through the NIHD, Morocco acknowledges that empowering women does not only revolve around achieving gender equality, but also about harnessing their potential to contribute equally to the society's progress and prosperity. In order to investigate whether the National Initiative for Human Development has achieved its goals, a fieldwork will be conducted in one of its projects called *Lalla Moulati*. In this respect, the following section will be concerned with presenting the hypothesis, questions, variables, sample population, approaches and data collection procedures used in this article.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Hypothesis and Objectives

In this article, it is hypothesized that the more the National Initiative for Human Development's branches and projects are set on the ground, the more women are integrated in the job market, the more they become financially independent, the more they develop self-confidence, and the more they serve in the promotion of local economy.

In order to measure the validity of the hypothesis, this article targets exploring the extent to which the National Initiative for Human Development, through its branches and projects, has reached its major goal which is empowering vulnerable people, particularly women. That is, it aims to investigate the extent to which the National Initiative for Human Development in general and the institution Lalla Moulati in specific empowers women's personal, economic and social status.

### Research Questions

This article attempts to answer the following questions

1. What are the profiles of the female trainees?
2. What does the project of 'Lalla Moulati' entail?
3. Why did female trainees choose 'Lalla Moulati' in specific rather than other projects?
4. To what extent does the National Initiative for Human Development via the project 'Lalla Moulati' empowers women economically?
5. To what extent do female graduates serve in fostering the local economy?

### Participants

The present study targeted the headmaster as well as twenty female trainees from one of the National Initiative for Human Development's projects called Lalla Moulati. Being the focal concern of the study, the targeted females have different ages that range from 21 years old to 46 years old. Furthermore, these females have different social status; there are females who are single, married and divorced with children under their responsibility. Moreover, the educational level of these females ranges from illiteracy to high school. Yet, the solely common element between these women is their background as they all come from popular neighborhoods. Concerning the headmaster of this project, he was of great value in presenting and providing a general overview on the project Lala Moulati.

### Instruments

In this study, only the qualitative approach is used because it is highly effective in extracting detailed insights from participants, particularly those who are either illiterate or low educated, and thus, find a difficulty in filling in questionnaires.

### Data Collection Instruments

Interviews were used in this study. 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the project's headmaster as

well as its female trainees. This data collection instrument facilitates rapport-building between the researcher and participants, which helps the former extract detailed and insightful answers. Moreover, interviews are more flexible in questioning and examining. Thus, they help in making responses clearer and enabling researchers to delve deeper into topics of interest.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Lalla Moulati: A Closer Look at a Leading Institution

The current section is devoted to provide a closer look and a general overview on the project Lalla Moulati. In other terms, this section explores the meaning of the project's name, the subjects taught during the training, the duration of the training, the extent to which it empowers women and lastly, its diploma. As previously stated, the headmaster was asked a series of questions to offer a summary on the project.

To start with, the headmaster was asked to provide an overview on the project Lalla Moulati. According to him, Lalla Moulati is a vocational training institution which specializes in making pastry and confectionary. Supervised by the NIHD, this project primarily focuses on assisting disadvantaged and vulnerable women. Male respondent n1 states

The project Lalla Moulati for vocational training in pastries is a project that falls under the supervision of the National Initiative for Human Development. It aims to meet the demand of the local population, as we have observed a vulnerability among the uneducated or partially educated females in this area.

Concerning the name of the project, it originates from the Fassi culture and signifies competence and capability, as it is understood that a woman cannot be referred to as Lalla Moulati unless she meets certain qualifications. The same respondent argues accordingly: "in the traditional Fassi manner, we say that one must be Lalla Moulati, and if a woman wants to become so, she must be qualified in every sense of the word." Concerning the subjects taught at this institution, female trainees are exposed to a range of theoretical and practical ones. That is to say, in the class, female trainees learn pastry-making skills and then put their new knowledge into practice at the institution's kitchen. Moreover, they study communication to enhance their ability to interact with others, being their employers, colleagues or customers. In addition to this, female trainees delve into group work to improve collaboration among peers. Lastly, they explore marketing concepts to develop the skills necessary to successfully promote and sell their products. The same interviewee asserts here:

we aim to empower women in every sense of the word. We work with women in theoretical and practical pastry-making training. Secondly, we focus on the art of communication, teaching how to interact with others. Additionally, we emphasize teamwork, teaching how to work effectively in a group. Lastly, we provide marketing skills, teaching how to promote and market your product to others.

Concerning the duration of the training, candidates used to spend 2 years upon the project's inauguration. However, it was later shortened to 1 year after the headmaster noticed a high dropout rate among trainees after the completion of the first year, particularly after summer holidays as the trainees don't return in the second year. Male interviewee n1 completes:

in the past years, the training lasted for two years because pastry making is not easy, it is like navigating in a sea. However, we noticed that many trainees dropped out after completing the first year. Therefore, we were forced to reduce the training period to one year and intensify all the subjects.

In response to inquiries about whether Lalla Moulati empowers women, the headmaster asserts that it undeniably contributes to women's empowerment. He notes that each year, a great number of women successfully complete their training at this institution. For him, women become economically empowered because they acquire diverse skills as well as obtain a diploma. This qualification opens doors for them in the job market, enabling employment opportunities in pastry shops and companies, participation in cooperatives, or the establishment of their own entrepreneurial projects. He answers the question by claiming:

yes, indeed, Lalla Moulati empowers women economically. Every year, if you have from 50 to 70 women graduating from the training, it is empowering in itself because they have the skills to start a project and earn an income. Secondly, they can establish cooperatives. In this regard, we have established a cooperative for them to start their careers. Additionally, some may choose to work in the public or private sectors after graduation.

When questioned about the possibility for trainees to become trainers, he mentioned that many trainees, especially those from the first generation of graduates, now serve as instructors within the institution. Male interviewee 1 argues: "of course, there is the possibility for a learner to become an instructor in Lalla Moulati. The available evidence is that the current instructors at the center are originally graduates who obtained their diplomas from this institution." As far as the diploma is concerned, the institution Lalla Moulati has established a partnership with the National Cooperation which is a public institution with legal personality and financial independence and placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In this arrangement, Lalla Moulati focuses on providing training, while the National Cooperation handles certificates which are officially recognized by the state. The same interviewee contends: since this is a center under the National Initiative for Human Development, we have a partnership with the National Cooperation, which provides diplomas for these trainees. We focus on guidance and training, and the National Cooperation brings diplomas that are recognized by the state. This diploma enables trainees to establish cooperatives and enterprises.

Talking about the reasons that encouraged him to take

full responsibility of this institution, the headmaster expressed his satisfaction in working in the domain of pastries. This satisfaction emanates from his own background as a chef in this field. This means that he finds fulfillment in sharing the skills and experiences he acquired through many years with others. He claims:

I am very satisfied with working here because I love this field, and I am passionate about it. I have skills that I want to share with others. Since we are working in a team, it is essential to share what you have with others, and this is what His Majesty King Mohamed VI has encouraged.

In the light of all what has been mentioned, the headmaster of 'Lalla Moulati' was of great help as he provided a comprehensive overview on this project.

### **Deciphering the motivations for selecting 'Lalla Moulati'**

Having explored the project Lalla Moulati, this section aims to examine the motivations that encourage female trainees to choose the institution over alternative options. When questioned about their decision to enroll in this institution, respondents emphasized several key factors namely easy access criteria, the institution's good reputation, the availability of free training, opportunities for self-empowerment, no educational level is required and good treatment from the staff.

Indeed, this study's respondents chose the institution of Lalla Moulati over others due to several factors. Many respondents express their willingness to enhance and develop their skills by choosing this institution, as stated by female respondents number 4 and 18 respectively; "I came here for the sake of learning and progress, God willing", and "I came here to improve my skills and expand my capabilities in the field of pastry." Others argue that this institution has tolerant and easy criteria for application, as mentioned by female interviewees number 2 and 3 respectively; "no educational level is required" and "they don't demand any fees, in fact, they understand your circumstances as a mother with responsibilities towards her children." Moreover, many interviewees emphasize on the fact that the reputation of the institution Lalla Moulati is highly favorable, not only within local communities but also on social media platforms. Female interviewee n17 asserts: "I gathered information and found out that in this area, Lalla Moulati is the most appreciated institution in the neighborhood and on Facebook." In the same vein, interviewee n 20 asserts that her friends who were former trainees at the institution, provided positive feedback on both the institution itself and its administration and teachers by stating: "My friends were trainees here, and they are the ones who praised this institution." Another factor influencing the choice of this institution is the favorable treatment provided by the staff. Female interviewee n 9 emphasized this idea by stating: "the staff have a welcoming attitude and treat us like family to the extent that you feel like you are at home among your own family." This opinion was further highlighted by female interviewee n 14 who claims that

"the communication is good and in a polite manner, both from the administration and the instructors." The positive treatment from the staff towards trainees extended beyond training to encompassing personal and familial issues. Female interviewee 8 contends that "they even help in solving personal and family problems." Finally, some individuals chose this institution because of their passion for the pastry field. Female interviewee 11 contends: "I love the domain of pastries and I love to shine in this field."

### **Unlocking Economic Opportunities: Exploring the Financial Impact**

The previous section delved into the factors that encouraged female trainees to choose the institution Lalla Moulati over others. However, the present section aims to evaluate whether the NIHD & Lalla Moulati in particular contribute to empowering female trainees on different levels namely the personal level (personal self-esteem, respect, self-confidence) and the economic level (independency and self-reliance) in addition to exploring the extent to which this project serves in developing the economy locally.

This section began by asking respondents, "Do you believe that this training can improve your economic situation?" Their responses were affirmative as they believe that learning new skills in addition to graduating with a state-recognized diploma will provide them with the opportunity to work and gain a salary. This idea is clearly manifested in female interviewee n 1: "if we work hard and earn the diploma, surely our financial situation will improve." Likewise, female interviewee n13 shares the same opinion as she clarifies: "of course, learning certain skills will definitely enable me to make money." Moreover, it should be noted that their economic situation has already improved thanks to their participation in exhibitions and shows. By taking part in these public events, female trainees not only gained visibility but also established recognition within their communities. This notion was mentioned by female interviewee n15 by claiming: "surely, we aspire to improve our economic situation, which has started to improve recently, through participating in exhibitions. These exhibitions enable us to earn some money." Consequently, they moved from invisibility to visibility. Thus, they made a huge transition from the periphery to the center.

Moving to the second question where respondents were asked: "Can you earn an income by working in the institution 'Lalla Moulati'?" The respondents indicated that there is no direct financial benefit associated with their work in this institution. However, they highlighted that the supervisor encourages them to participate in exhibitions where they have the opportunity to gain an income. The majority of the interviewees share the same opinion as reflected in female interviewee n 16: "up to this moment, the only income we have obtained was from participating in exhibitions." However, some respondents assert that they have gained what is more

valuable than money; it is the opportunity to network and establish connections with potential employers. In addition to this, they learn various income generating skills which help them transform what they learn into a home project. Female interviewee n 6 claims: “no, but we gained something even better than money. The institution provided us with opportunities through which we got to know employers,” before female respondent n 10 completes: “there is no income, but everything I learn at the institution I apply it at home and sell what I make. It means that I started to earn an income thanks to the skills I learnt at the institution.”

As far as the third question is concerned, the respondents were asked: “Is there a chance to receive financial support from the NIHD upon graduation?” the majority of respondents answered affirmatively as they believe that the NIHD may assist them in launching their own projects. This idea is clearly expressed by female interviewee n19; she argues: “there is an opportunity where I submit the documents that demonstrate the opening of my own business, the thing which pushes the National Initiative for Human Development to support me.” Along with helping novice graduates in launching their own projects, the NIHD supports those who choose to collaborate and establish a cooperation. Female respondent n7 states: “the headmaster promised us to establish a cooperation after graduation, which will be supported by the initiative.”

Regarding the fourth question which pertained to whether female trainees are intended to launch their own projects or work for others, some expressed a desire to establish their own ventures to achieve independence and self-reliance. Female interviewees n5 asserts: “I prefer to start my own project to feel that I have achieved something and I am capable of providing for my children’s needs.” Female interviewee n4 shares the same idea by arguing: “I came for this training to become more than just an employee working for others, in fact, I aspire to be more than this.” Besides independence and self-reliance, some participants prefer to launch their own business in order to escape potential exploitation by employers. Female interviewee n8 argue: “I don’t prefer to work under others’ authority because they exploit and burden you beyond your capabilities without a fair salary.” Additionally, many participants opted for the same choice with the intention of embracing those who are interested in the field of pastries and sharing their expertise with them, thereby passing on the skills they have acquired during their training. Female interviewee n6 claims: “I want to start my own project to prove myself and teach others what I have learnt.” In contrast, others indicated a preference to work for others so that they can gain additional experience. This idea was mentioned by female interviewee n19: “When I graduate, I prefer to work for others in order to gain experience and new knowledge.” Yet, some respondents did not choose either option. Instead, they prefer to launch a cooperation and collaborate with others rather than adhering to traditional boss-employee hierarchy. In other terms, these respondents are inclined

towards establishing a cooperative structure where decision-making and responsibilities are shared among all members. Female interviewee 12 contends: “I prefer not to give orders to people or work under their authority. What I prefer is establishing a cooperation and have the same rights and responsibilities as others.” Irrespective of their decision, these women are provided with the opportunity to become active participants in society.

When questioned about whether they know any successful graduates, the majority of interviewees reported knowing numerous individuals who have been empowered by the institution Lalla Moulati through launching their own projects as mentioned by female interviewee n10: “I know a woman from this institution who owns her own project.” Likewise, a female trainee asserts that she knows a female graduate as she was previously employed in her own project; female interviewee 3 contends: “I used to work in the project of one of the graduates from this institution.” In addition to this, some respondents assert that they are acquainted with numerous graduates who pursued opportunities abroad. That is to say, many have ventured to Europe or Gulf countries for employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. This idea was mentioned by female interviewee 14: “I know a woman who graduated from this institution and now works in Saudi Arabia in the field of pastries thanks to the skills and the diploma she obtained.”

Lastly, upon being empowered by the skills acquired during their training, female trainees were questioned about their intentions regarding the empowerment of the economy in their local neighborhood or their consideration of relocating to other areas. Opinions vary among respondents. On the one hand, some express a preference for remaining in their neighborhood due to familiarity with the community, shared cultural backgrounds with customers, and the belief that communication and business transactions would be easier compared to more upscale neighborhoods. Female interviewee 2 asserts: “I prefer to stay in this neighborhood because I know people here and they know me, so communication and the selling process will be easier.” Others selected the same option because they feel they have no alternative; they wish to remain close to their children. Female interviewee 10 says: “I prefer to work in this popular neighborhood to stay close to my children.” On the other hand, some individuals aspire to relocate to more affluent districts in order to enhance their living conditions and increase their earning potential. Female interviewee n19 argues: “I don’t want to work here, I prefer to work in elegant neighborhoods so as to move forward and earn a higher income than I would in this neighborhood because I will sell my products at a higher price.” Female interviewee n11 shares the same view: “I want to work in an elegant neighborhood for higher income, and you know that the consumer spending ability in those neighborhoods is higher than here.” Regardless of their workplace, these women will undoubtedly contribute to the country’s economic development.

Based on the analyzed data, Lalla Moulati is a project that is supervised by the National Initiative for Human Development. Its name is derived from the Fassi culture, and symbolizes capability, qualification and excellence. Besides, female trainees are exposed to a comprehensive curriculum that covers both theoretical and practical subjects including communication skills, marketing, and techniques for effective group work. In addition, the duration of the training was reduced to one year from two in response to a high dropout rate after the first year. Furthermore, the headmaster emphasizes the economic empowerment of women through the acquisition of skills and a diploma which enable them to generate income. In the same vein, he asserts that the diploma holds state recognition which demonstrates that graduates have a great opportunity to secure a decent profession. Second, several factors have encouraged female trainees to specifically select the institution Lalla Moulati rather than other options. To start with, many respondents start enrolling in this institution so as to improve their skills. Others highlight the institution's lenient application criteria as a motivating factor. Additionally, numerous interviewees agree on the positive reputation of the institution under study, both locally and on social media platforms. Former trainees, who are friends of current trainees, have also spoken favorably of the institution, its administration, and trainers. A treatment of high quality from the staff is another influential factor cited by trainees. Lastly, some individuals are drawn to the institution due to their passion for the pastry industry. Third, female trainees express a positive opinion and a sense of empowerment gained from their involvement in the institution Lalla Moulati. They believe that this training is going to enable them to improve their economic situation by equipping them with skills and a diploma that can lead to employment opportunities. While there is no direct financial compensation, the supervisor encourages trainees' participation in exhibitions where they can gain an income. Empowerment for these women extends beyond gaining money to valuing the networking opportunities through participation in exhibitions. Moreover, there is a belief among respondents that the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) will support them in launching their own projects or cooperation. However, there is a divide among respondents concerning their career. In other words, some opt for establishing their own projects to enjoy independence and self-reliance whereas others prefer working for others to gain more experience. Talking about whether women's empowerment through Lalla Moulati is real or just ink on paper, respondents cite that they know successful graduates who have launched their own projects or found employment abroad. Moving to the promotion of the local economy, some prefer to remain in their neighborhoods due to familiarity and easier communication, while others seek to relocate to sophisticated areas so that they can improve their living conditions and double their earning. Irrespective of their

employment location, these women will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in advancing the country's economy.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the main argument of this article is that the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD) plays a significant role in empowering women. To measure the validity of this argument, a fieldwork was conducted to question the economic, social, and personal effects of the NIHD on women. The findings of this research show that initiatives like Lalla Moulati, under the NIHD, contribute to the empowerment of women across various levels. However, one has to acknowledge that the NIHD is still limited to some areas, and perhaps to guarantee the benefit of a wider number of women, institutions of the NIHD should be further established.

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