Empowered Voices: The Experiences of Left-Behind Women in Rural Morocco

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ABSTRACT

Our comprehensive interviews and observational research highlight a crucial disparity between established theories of empowerment, such as those by Naila Kabeer, and the perspectives of left-behind women in rural Morocco. This gap underscores the need to bridge academic discourse with the real-life experiences of these women. Our study aims to develop a theoretical framework that explains these differences, emphasizing previously overlooked factors. Specifically, our findings reveal the significant role of family ties and the importance of creating an environment for dignified living—elements often marginalized in empowerment discussions. This nuanced understanding is essential for evolving the concept of empowerment to better reflect the realities of these women.

Keywords- empowerment, left-behind women, intersectionality, rural areas, Morocco.

I. INTRODUCTION

At the culmination of our comprehensive interviews and meticulous observational research, a compelling imperative emerged, one that necessitates rigorous examination – that of elucidating the pronounced disparities between the extant conceptualizations of empowerment, as eloquently articulated by Naila Kabeer, and the distinct perspectives articulated by the left-behind women inhabiting rural locales. This urgent issue requires thorough examination as it delves into the complex relationship between academic discourse and real-life experiences, particularly in the context of empowerment as understood and expressed by the women left behind in these rural areas. This pivotal revelation laid the foundation for our secondary objective, an ambitious endeavour geared towards formulating and enhancing a theoretical framework. This framework strives to elucidate the underlying factors responsible for the marked disparities in the conceptions of empowerment as expressed by women residing in rural locales.

Therefore, it was imperative for us to undertake a comprehensive investigation of previously understated factors that surfaced during our fieldwork. Specifically, the study led to a more nuanced grasp of the central importance these women placed on family ties and the creation of a conducive environment for dignified living. These aspects, formerly marginalized in discussions about empowerment, emerged as significant elements deserving careful examination and inclusion in our evolving understanding of the complex concept of empowerment.

II. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LEFT-BEHIND WOMEN EYES

In line with this, the theoretical framework of empowerment as elucidated by Naila Kabeer (2005) is observed to require additional dimensions to encompass the experiences of women residing in rural environments. Her conceptualization lacks inclusivity, as it does not encompass women residing in rural areas,

who possess divergent perspectives and experiences related to empowerment and its dimensions. Lack of a clear definition of empowerment has given a space for scholars to explore the concept in action before defining it. As a result, scholars have been able to generate multiple interpretations of the concept.

Thus, from their clay houses and iron chimneys, wearing their pyjamas, plastic boots, traditional aprons, and scarves, women left behind in the rural regions of Morocco articulate their unique perspectives on familial and societal institutions, their interpretations of specific norms and values, their assessments of the prevailing living conditions that shape their daily lives, and the coping mechanisms they cultivate to confront situations of disempowerment that may impede their overall empowerment.

The revelation that left-behind women residing in rural areas were unaware of the concept of empowerment and had never encountered it before provided them with the liberty to express their genuine thoughts and opinions on the various issues explored in this study.

Given that our objective was to establish or expand insights into the notion of empowerment, grounded theory was deemed indispensable. In particular, we adopted the constructivist approach to grounded theory as developed by Kathy Charmaz (1990, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2006) because it facilitated effective communication between us and the participants and allowed us to construct "a collaborative knowledge from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). This approach enabled us to synthesize the ideas derived from the experiences shared by the left-behind women, the information gleaned from our close relationship with the participants, the participatory observation, and the semi-structured interviews conducted throughout the research.

In such a way, we had the opportunity to generate new ideas, insights, and thoughts about empowerment as a term. The use of this theory required us to continually explore the intricacies and specifics linked to "empirical data" and to devise a method for conceptualizing them. In spite of the complexity that governs its practicality and despite the different variables that have been taken into account throughout the research (which intersectionality theory suggests), grounded theory helped a lot to develop a more comprehensible, straightforward, and practical definition of the term empowerment. We analysed the behaviour and reactions of individuals in various situations, including forest wood-cutting, household chores, social gatherings, phone conversations with their husbands and relatives, interactions with their children, visits to the health centre, and visits to the souk. We also endeavoured to provide an explanation for these actions.

III. EMPOWERMENT AND THE INTERSECTING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE IT

Furthermore, as a concept that intervenes and intersects with other elements, empowerment was approached from an intersectionality perspective. The latter perspective posits that the analysis of women's oppression should encompass not only gender but also various other factors, including age, race, ethnicity, family status, household size, colour, agency, among others. It asserts that gender, while a significant factor, is just one element within the broader constellation of factors that contribute to the oppression of women and their relegation to second-class citizenship. Thus, through the identification of the factors that impinge upon and impact the empowerment of left-behind women, this theory was instrumental in rendering visible and audible the lives, requirements, ambitions, experiences, and afflictions of left-behind women. It also helped to unveil the main reasons behind their oppression. To elaborate, this study comprehensively examined the entire milieu - beyond just the gender factor - in which left-behind women reside, with the aim of comprehending how these women conceptualize empowerment and the underlying reasons for their particular interpretations.

Consequently, the research identified the main impacting variables that intersect with the term empowerment and its perception by women. The variables found were ordered from the most repetitive to the least repetitive as follows: (1) family bondage; (2) living conditions; (3) the geographical location; (4) the dominant social norms; (5) agency; (6) level of contentment; (7) solidarity; (8) availability of alternatives; (9) and family dynamics (in-laws). These findings provide substantiating evidence for the assertion that these variables hold significance in shaping the lived experiences of women left behind and their understanding of the events that affect them. Furthermore, these variables exert a notable influence on the way in which these women perceive and assess these occurrences. This underscores the intricate interconnection between these contextual variables and the interpretations and evaluations made by these women regarding the various events and circumstances that shape their lives.

IV. FAMILY BONDS AND LIVING CONDITIONS: TWO KEY DIMENSIONS OF EMPOWERMENT

As previously mentioned, our research uncovered that the primary factor that impacts the agency and empowerment of left-behind women is family bondage. This familial bond is perceived as the

primary source of motivation, stability, and great achievement for all women, regardless of whether they are left-behind or not. This study uncovers an unexpected revelation: the fulfilment of familial responsibilities and the attentive care given to both children and husbands play a pivotal role in strengthening and empowering women who have been left behind. Furthermore, their active participation in these familial duties is the result of deliberate and well-thought-out decisions rooted in rationality and practicality. It's important to note that the concept of "sanity," as defined by Asad (2003) is closely linked to a pragmatic understanding of the world. It represents a deep and experiential comprehension of the world through tangible actions, real-life experiences, and direct engagement. In this context, left-behind women engage rationally and pragmatically with the world they live in, which is reflected in their interactions and experiences with their family members. This extends to the language they commonly use to clarify, defend, and rationalize their interactions with the world, as described by Asad (2003).

Moreover, the findings of this study reveal that left-behind women perceive themselves as active agents within their families, actively engaging with and navigating the world in which they reside. They operate within the framework of established norms and traditions that exert influence over their lives. These findings are highly congruent with Mahmood's (2001) notion of agency, which postulates that the capacity to interact with preexisting social norms and traditions is a shrewd form of agency for avoiding conflict. As per Mahmood, individuals who endeavour to challenge or undermine established norms may encounter substantial opposition and retaliation, which can curtail their potential to effect change. By operating within the boundaries of existing norms and traditions, left-behind women have been able to exert their agency in a more astute and strategic manner. This approach allows left-behind women to navigate complex power dynamics and achieve their goals without necessarily challenging the status quo. Assertiveness and effective communication, for example, have emerged as notable coping strategies employed by women with the intent of intelligently addressing opposition and potential retaliation. Hence, with an acute awareness of the entrenched traditional gender roles and the associated societal expectations, left-behind women have effectively demonstrated their capacity as adept agents in diagnosing their circumstances and formulating innovative solutions to address various challenges.

By adopting such approach, these women engage in strategic thinking and negotiation, thereby exercising their agency and achieving substantial change, even within the constraints of pre-existing norms and traditions. In a similar vein, Braidotti (2008) posits that agency "need not be aimed solely at the production of radical counter-subjectivities" (p. 19).

That is to say, agency can serve purposes beyond the contestation and subversion of dominant power structures. Rather, it can be employed to accomplish other aims or objectives, such as enhancing one's own life or the lives of others, without necessarily confronting the existing state. For this, the majority of the left-behind women expressed no will to challenge or be liberated from the external control (social norms and cultural traditions). They rather view these norms and traditions (tending to the needs of their offspring and spouse, as well as undertaking household responsibilities) they grew up in and with as an integral part of their, rather than an obstacle to their empowerment. These women are regarded themselves as agents, as they exert their own volition and free will and make decisions based on their personal convictions. This underscores the notion that agency is not intrinsically political or revolutionary, but can be employed in diverse manners.

Hence, the provision of service and care for family members emerges as a source of empowerment for left-behind wives. These actions are not merely routine obligations but rather deliberate choices rooted in rational decision-making, imbuing these women with a profound sense of well-being. This empowerment is distinguished, as articulated in the words of women who have been left behind, by emotions such as "Joy", "success", "personal fulfilment", "emotional well-being", and "serenity". Contrary to perceiving the caregiving responsibilities as burdensome constraints, this perspective recognizes them as a potent reservoir of empowerment. What sets this viewpoint apart is its unwavering focus on the well-being and future prospects of their children. This underscores the notion that agency is not intrinsically an individual accomplishment but a collective one. It illuminates the intricate interplay between individual agency and the pursuit of familial well-being, thus offering a more nuanced and profound understanding of empowerment within this specific context.

Diverging from prior investigations (de Haas & Rooij, 2010; Wrigley-Asante & Agandin, 2015; David & Lenoel, 2016), which often depict the domestic labour undertaken by left-behind women as an onerous and burdensome task (Maher, 1974), especially in the context of their husbands' internal migration, the present study presents a contrasting perspective. It reveals that the responsibilities assumed by women, encompassing both domestic and external domains, aimed at securing their children's well-being, serve as a primary source of empowerment for these individuals. This newfound agency, grounded in left-behind women's conscious choices and active commitment to securing their children's future, challenges previous portrayals of their domestic roles as oppressive. Building on the aforementioned assertion, this study indicates that while women perform their domestic duties as a result of their profound emotional bond with their family members,

these tasks necessitate significant physical and mental capabilities. Our findings indicate that, despite the emotive nature of the tasks that left-behind women undertake for their children and husbands on a daily basis, these duties such as collecting firewood from the forest and transporting it via donkeys, preparing food, baking bread, and tending to livestock, necessitate significant physical exertion. Moreover, the execution of these tasks requires that women possess a high level of mental acuity, given the complex skillset necessary for managing multiple responsibilities. Typically, left-behind women tend to employ a hierarchical approach, ranking tasks from the most immediately pressing to the least, with a particular emphasis on those tasks conducted outside the confines of their homes.

Relatedly, the above findings demonstrate that the concept of empowerment, for left- behind women, is primarily centred on family, as it provides them with a sense of "comfort", "fulfilment", and "self-realization". Therefore, it is worth highlighting the correlation between family and empowerment, as this relationship underscores the vital significance of family within Arab culture. The act of family members gathering around a single table to share a meal, or around a fireplace to keep warm, holds immense cultural significance within Moroccan society, symbolizing unity and solidarity (Bourquia, 2002). Our results reveal that family is the most significant institution within society and that the provision of care within the family unit serves as a source of self-realization for many women. One interviewee said, "I feel more powerful and secure when my husband and children are next to me, in front of my eyes, happy and comfortable. I can do anything to see them happy".

V. DISEMPOWERMENT: A CRUCIAL STEP TOWARD EMPOWERMENT

A careful reflection upon the aforementioned findings, it becomes evident that the oppression experienced by women, the adverse effects on their livelihoods, and the impediments to their empowerment do not emanate from familial responsibilities or the tasks they undertake within their households. Instead, their grievances stem from the absence of access to financial resources, marginalization in decision-making endeavours, limited job opportunities, and the dearth of essential facilities. In this regard, if we are to embrace Kabeer (2005) paradigm of empowerment, wherein she asserts that disempowerment can serve as a precursor to empowerment, it follows that certain disempowering circumstances have the potential to lead to empowerment. According to Kabeer (2005), empowerment is intricately linked to the preceding experiences of disempowerment, establishing a challenging context for women.

Kabeer's (2005) conceptualization of disempowerment, including factors such as exclusion, marginalization, poverty, frustration, miserable living conditions, closely aligns with the experiences of left-behind women. Despite these formidable challenges, these women actively confront and navigate these circumstances within adverse living conditions to attain empowerment. Essentially, these women regularly contend with a multitude of challenges encompassing exclusion from participatory decision-making, societal marginalization, financial constraints, limited opportunities, and the pervasive adversities inherent in their circumstances. These circumstances align with Kabeer's (2005) characterization of disempowerment situations. However, left-behind women demonstrate a remarkable capacity to judiciously harness the limited resources available to them, effectively transforming these adversities into opportunities for empowerment. This is often accomplished through a nuanced assessment of their social and economic conditions, the formulation of non-confrontational solutions, such as negotiations with their husbands and in- laws to improve their financial status, active pursuit of supplementary income sources, and engagement with supportive networks for guidance. Remarkably, they manage to strike a balance between these pursuits and their continued affiliation with their families and communities. In such a way, left-behind women attain certain degree of independence, exercise agency, and ultimately achieve empowerment. This alignment underscores the intricate interplay between the states of empowerment and disempowerment, thereby providing valuable insights into the multifaceted path toward empowerment experienced by left-behind women in their unique context.

Moreover, as illuminated by the lens of intersectionality theory, the complex interplay and intersection of numerous other multifaceted factors contribute to left-behind women marginalized status. It was elucidated through the course of interviews and observations that these factors encompass a broad spectrum, including, but not restricted to, geographical isolation, the absence of essential life requisites, the absence of paved roads, the paucity of employment opportunities for both genders, the lack of nearby markets, limited medical facilities, insufficient pharmacies and medicine, exclusion from participation in associations and cooperatives, marginalization in developmental initiatives, and the inadequacy of recreational facilities. Similarly noteworthy, the heavy rainfall and floods that damage the clay houses, combined with the lack of government support to renovate these homes, also contribute to the difficulties faced by left-behind women. These circumstances are significant impediments to the empowerment of both left-behind women and other women in the village.

While it is plausible to interpret the aforementioned factors as conditions characterized by

disempowerment, it would be premature to assert that left-behind women can readily surmount these challenges and effectively utilize them as stepping stones toward empowerment. This is due to the fact that the trajectory towards empowerment is not instigated by the autonomous agency of the left-behind women themselves; rather, it is meticulously coordinated by governmental representatives of the country. This intricate process unfolds through the intricate interplay of diverse factors and multiple actors, extending beyond the individual determination of the women in question. The interviews conducted during this study unveiled the resolute determination of left-behind women to amend their circumstances and enhance their quality of life. However, regrettably, this aspiration lies beyond their immediate reach and requires interventions at a broader societal and policy level. The prevailing sentiment among the interviewed women is that the obligation to honour commitments and carry out projects geared towards enhancing the living conditions of rural residents rests squarely on the shoulders of the government and its appointed representatives. As one of the left-behind women interviewees puts it:

Look at the roads, look at the transportation we use, look at young people sitting the whole day in the corners of their neighborhoods doing nothing; they have no work. Look at women too. There are no cooperatives. Have you seen a health care centre? Go and have a look. You won't find a doctor; there is only one nurse. This hurts a lot, trust me. It is all the responsibility of authorities. They don't care about us because we are just peasants!

Given the aforementioned testimony, women appear to harbour a great deal of frustration about the conditions in which they live. They possess a strong desire to improve their circumstances and those of their village, but as the interviewee mentioned earlier, this is not within their control. They urge the government and its appointed representatives to intervene because they perceive them as capable of effecting change. This study supports Kabeer's (1999) assertion that the provision of "proper nourishment, good health, and adequate shelter" (p. 439), or what she refers to as the "basic fundamentals of surviving" is necessary to promote women's empowerment.

The preceding discussion prompts us to consider the roles that policies, action plans, and strategies should play in improving the lives of those residing in rural areas of Morocco.

This includes enhancing women's empowerment and economic independence. As previously noted in the literature review section, various initiatives such as structural adjustment programs, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Action Plan for Integrating Women in Development (PANIFD) developed in 1999, the National Human Development Initiative (INDH) (2005), the CLCs (Community Learning Centres), and the ICT projects (Information and Communication Technologies) proposed by UNESCO were established with the primary goal of empowering women in all aspects of life. These initiatives aimed to bring about economic, political, social, and cultural change for women, as well as promote awareness, development, and income-generating projects among the rural women's community.

However, the findings of this study reveal that women residing in rural areas of the Middle Atlas region in Morocco are entirely excluded from national and international empowerment programs and development projects. Despite making progress towards their goals, women in rural areas continue to experience significant challenges that impede their empowerment.

Our research has identified that this marginalization is primarily attributed to a deficiency in accessing financial resources, governance, or effective management, along with two other key contributing factors. Firstly, women's needs, experiences, and aspirations are often approached from a cosmopolitan or urban middle-class perspective. This finding aligns with Abu-Lughod's (2009) perspective. She expressed discomfort with what she saw as a cosmopolitan or urban middle-class perspective on women's lives, aspirations, and everyday conditions. The second rationale underpinning the omission of women from participation in these programs is contingent upon their geographical settings and a lack of awareness regarding the existence of such initiatives. Despite the pervasive effects of globalization and the strides made in technological advancements, women residing in rural areas frequently find themselves isolated from information dissemination channels that would acquaint them with these undertakings. Consequently, these women have remained beyond the reach of awareness campaigns facilitated through media outlets, sensitization efforts, workshops, consultations, conferences, or meetings. In fact, it is noteworthy that the women residing in the village are entirely unfamiliar with the aforementioned programs.

Moreover, the organizations instituted to intercede in exigent circumstances, supervise program execution, and advocate for women's rights, have remained conspicuously absent from the milieu for extended durations. Left-behind women recount instances where certain associations and cooperatives arrived in the region, convened an inaugural meeting, only to subsequently vanish as though they had never been present. Upon closer examination, it became evident that a majority of these associations lamented their dearth of access to essential funding, effective governance structures, and proficient management. They continue to grapple with barriers impeding the efficacy of their endeavours. Additionally, it was discerned that most associations operate without coherent and result-oriented strategies to monitor the progress of their initiatives.

Concerning women's awareness of their rights, the research findings suggest that their comprehension of women's rights predominantly revolves around the provisions delineated within the family code or Mudawana. These rights encompass aspects such as the right to divorce, child custody, and their indispensable consent in the event their husbands contemplate entering into a second marriage. Nevertheless, given the case of interviewee 11, there are still violations and issues related to the implementation of the family code, as also highlighted by Elliott (2009). Elliott notes that the implementation of the family code remains incomplete and unsatisfactory, representing a significant challenge. The husband of interviewee 11 married a second wife without her consent, and due to her dire financial circumstances, she was unable to take any action. Notwithstanding her circumstances, she did not receive any support from any organization that could have facilitated legal representation to assist her in pursuing her entitlements from her husband. He had deserted her and her children, leaving them without any financial sustenance.

Hence, within the complex backdrop of these multifaceted circumstances, an essential question arises: how do these women contemplate the prospect of empowerment through decision-making, resource procurement, or contributing to the macroeconomic landscape of their nation, is spite of the coexistence of households grappling with extreme poverty and a dearth of access to fundamental necessities? During the winter, for instance, families were observed in situations where they did not have access to any kind of food, which led to a critical state of malnutrition. They would heat a loaf of bread, mix it with olive oil, and eat it with tea to reduce hunger. This is to say that even in the midst of extreme poverty, these women exhibit resilience and adaptability, leveraging their determination to overcome disempowering circumstances and progressively work towards empowerment.

They frequently contemplate the concept of empowerment through their active engagement in decision-making processes, utilizing methods such as consultation and negotiation that have a direct impact on their lives and communities. Additionally, they employ strategic thinking to secure resources, exploring options like alternative income sources, seeking support from networks, and engaging in negotiations with family members. Their broader vision of contributing to the macroeconomic landscape of their nation encompasses seizing existing opportunities and initiating small-scale businesses as part of their empowerment strategy.

To elaborate, for the process of making decisions, the data collected in this study unveiled a prevailing tendency among the majority of women left behind in rural settings, which indicated an inclination towards actively engaging in decisions encompassing what Kabeer (2005) terms "strategic life choices". These decisions encompass a spectrum ranging from determining residential locations, choices related to marriage, childbearing decisions, custody arrangements for children, personal mobility and associations, and other akin determinations. Furthermore, it was notable that these women demonstrated proactive efforts in actively seeking pathways to make and realize their strategic life choices. Nevertheless, it is worthy of attention that these women did not seem to harbour concerns about their husbands assuming decision-making authority in various dimensions of their lives, which encompass the acquisition of vital resources. This observation is rooted in the recognition that, while they do display an interest in making decisions related to strategic life choices, resource procurement, and the pursuit of these objectives, these activities do not hold the utmost significance in their hierarchy of priorities.

Subsequent to the aforementioned statement, a contributing factor that elucidates why these women regard decision-making as important yet not of primary significance is the dearth of suitable options available to them. The absence of suitable choices dissuades left-behind women from engaging in competition with their husbands regarding decision-making or the selection among available alternatives. The study's findings reveal a scarcity of alternatives across various domains, encompassing labour opportunities, leisure activities, recreational sports, and lifestyle choices. This finding aligns with Asad's (2003) notion of "the impossible choice", which refers to a choice between terrible alternatives that have been pre-scripted for an individual, but it is still possible to choose and to act on that choice. The left-behind women in the village are indirectly deprived of the right to choose a particular lifestyle, labour, activities, or spots for recreation, which significantly hinders their empowerment.

The perspective of left-behind women is that the identity of the decision-maker (whether the wife or the husband) is of little importance. What is of utmost importance is the common good of the whole family. Typically, the method of "consultation" represents the preferred approach that couples commonly employ. Additionally, the process of searching for resources is considered by these women to be a journey that concerns men more than women. The man is perceived as the primary provider for the entire family and is expected to expose himself to the public space and make sacrifices for his family members. In this regard, one participant commented:

I do not mind having my husband make decisions because we are one. He consults me from time to time, but I always tell him to do what he sees as best for us. He sacrifices everything for me and the children. The most important thing for me is doing good things for the whole family.

Therefore, our findings suggest that husbands and wives in the rural areas of the Middle Atlas work collaboratively, each from their respective positions, toward the betterment of the family. This outcome lends

support to Wharton's (2005) argument, which challenges the notion of portraying men and women "as either villains or victims— oppressing, exploiting, or defending against each other" (p. 10). These types of representations also prompt Crenshaw (1989) to question: "How can the claims that 'women are', 'women believe', and 'women need' be made when such claims are inapplicable or unresponsive to the needs, interests, and experiences of (...) women?" (p. 154). However, in situations where women encounter constraints that limit their access to money management or similar aspects, they deem it imperative to explore alternative income sources.

Moreover, the results of this research shed light on the understanding that gender dynamics and patriarchy are not the primary factors suppressing or impeding the empowerment of left-behind women in the rural regions of Morocco. Furthermore, it is not solely the authority exerted by their husbands that poses a hindrance to their empowerment.

The authentic sources of oppression and disempowerment for these women lie in the persistent misrepresentations that categorize them as victims of male dominance and cultural subjugation, the systemic neglect of their environment and cultural context, the oversight of their unique experiences, interests, needs, and priorities, the inattentiveness to their indigenous comprehension of their surroundings, and the pervasive assumption that all women universally endure gender-based oppression.

The findings of our study illustrate that, to a certain extent, the concept of "empowerment" has fallen short in comprehensively addressing the nuanced, culturally embedded, and prioritized requirements of women inhabiting rural regions. This inadequacy stems from the presumption that empowerment is universally applicable to all women, as well as the underlying assumption that women should invariably hold paramount decision- making authority concerning strategic life choices, and the prevailing notion that economic self-sufficiency stands as the sole avenue to attain empowerment.

Nonetheless, the findings of this comprehensive study, which scrupulously examined the cultural, belief, normative, and prioritization facets of rural women, underscore the necessity to re-evaluate Kabeer's established three dimensions of empowerment—namely, agency, resources, and achievements. The findings unveiled that women who have been left behind perceive themselves as competent agents, both within and beyond the confines of their homes. However, their approach does not necessarily entail overtly challenging prevailing power dynamics. Instead, they tend to adopt an approach that emphasizes intelligent coping mechanisms as the means to address disempowering circumstances effectively. Regarding resources, our findings reveal that these women often contend with resource limitations, they have managed to attain specific objectives, such as

enabling their children to access quality education. From their perspective, this accomplishment is a substantial achievement that hinges not only on financial resources but also on the elements of care, time, and support.

VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the study advocates for the inclusion of two supplementary foundational dimensions that are embedded within the daily experiences of rural women. The first dimension pertains to family bondage, which holds the utmost significance in the context of these women. Researchers must grasp the value that these women place on their social circle and the attachments they maintain with their family members, whom they nurture with affection, devoid of any misconceptions regarding gender roles or associations. To gain a comprehensive understanding of empowerment in rural locales, it is imperative to account for the women's contextual milieu and the values they have internalized within their surroundings. Our findings reveal that this familial bond serves as a source of empowerment for these women, endowing their actions with meaning and motivation. In other words, the greater the degree of familial cohesion, the greater the level of empowerment experienced by these women.

The second dimension of this study pertains to the provision of appropriate resources and the support of government policies, which is predicated on two levels. Firstly, the support of governmental and authoritative bodies responsible for empowerment programs is imperative. Women who have been left behind expect political authorities to furnish, at a minimum, the basic necessities required for decent living, such as access to potable water, well-paved roads, sufficient health centres and schools, adequate transportation, local markets, recreational facilities, and viable employment opportunities for their husbands and children. In essence, if the country intends to empower women, women who have been left behind suggest that political authorities and action planers should visit their region, assess the requirements on the ground, and take action, rather than remaining ensconced in their offices, removed from the realities of the region. Secondly, women left behind firmly believe that men are the primary providers for their families. Hence, it is imperative for men to fulfil their responsibilities by providing for their wives and children. In conclusion, any examination of empowerment in rural regions must duly consider the pivotal role of familial bonds and the establishment of favourable living conditions. Ultimately, it is essential to encourage empirical research in these villages, as well as others throughout Morocco, to determine the root causes of women's oppression and the ways in which they can be empowered, while considering the context in which they live and the values they hold towards various aspects of life, including traditions, family, priorities,

gender roles, access to resources, healthcare, and community involvement.

In summary, this article began by examining the definition of empowerment and its multifaceted dimensions. It also scrutinized the effectiveness of certain initiatives and policies aimed at enhancing women's empowerment and ameliorating their circumstances. Moreover, the article introduced novel dimensions of empowerment that are pertinent to rural regions.

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