

Groups We Are Visiting in Morocco

September 14-22, 2024

The Fund's Grant-making Program in Morocco, 2004 – 2024

Morocco has long projected an international image of a rights-respecting country, particularly with regard to women's rights. Meanwhile, local activists continue to highlight the failure of national policies to translate into improved conditions for women and other marginalized groups across the country.

When the Fund first started working in Morocco in 2004, a core aspect of its grant-making strategy was to build on recent, hard-won reforms to the Family Code by funding emerging, young women's rights organizations to educate women and others about their rights under the revised code and help them realize those rights.

In 2011, the 20 February movement, led by young people (as part of the "Arab Spring"), took to the streets, calling for dignity, social justice, and effective equality. The regime used a carrot and stick approach, coopting older groups with a more traditional approach and placing harsh restrictions on others, to try to weaken social resistance and reinforce the state's controlling narrative on rights, equality, and justice. As a response, the Fund shifted to support youth groups that employ new forms of activism, including arts and theater, to support a vibrant and diverse movement for social justice, gender equality and rights of LGBTQ people.

Twenty years since the Fund started working in Morocco, the Family Code is again up for reform, and the movement for human rights is shifting. This is a potentially transformative moment as young people push the envelope and demand their rights. We will meet with grantee partners to learn about their plans and priorities and how the Fund can best resource their activism and achievements.

Rabat

Prometheus

Prometheus focuses on human rights advocacy, reporting, and awareness-raising on issues affecting Morocco's youth. The group uses various forms of cultural expression – photography, social media, and other platforms – to engage young people in policymaking. Prometheus promotes a vision of a freer society, including unfettered access for youth to education, health, public space, and employment. The Fund has supported the group to create a network of young activists who work to combat all forms of discrimination in Morocco.

GADEM (Groupe Antiraciste d'Accompagnement et de Défense des Étrangers et Migrants)

GADEM was founded in 2006 by a group of activists representing three regions that migrants have historically crossed: sub-Saharan Africa, Morocco, and Europe. The Fund provided seed funding to GADEM, and it quickly became the anchor of the migrants' rights movement in Morocco.

GADEM's work includes documenting and reporting violations of migrants' rights. Its staff regularly visit police stations when arrests of migrants are reported. In so doing, GADEM prevents abuse, collects testimonies of migrants abandoned at the border, and brings media attention to particularly egregious violations. Because of its strong relationships with European organizations, GADEM feeds this documentation into campaigns to pressure European governments to improve their immigration policies. In 2013, following international pressure generated by GADEM, Morocco announced an overhaul of its immigration policy—introducing new pathways for migrants to obtain legal status.

Nonetheless, abuses continue. To remedy them, GADEM educates migrants, activists, lawyers, and social workers on migrants' rights. The group also works to make Moroccans more comfortable with migrants and to raise awareness of endemic racism in Moroccan society. Having once been a startup, GADEM now mentors other human rights organizations in the Maghreb region and supports the creation of new organizations, including ALECMA mentioned below.

ALECMA (Association Lumière sur l'Émigration Clandestine au Maghreb)

Founded in 2012 by a courageous group of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, ALECMA aims to raise awareness of the human rights challenges facing migrants and to promote their rights. ALECMA, composed entirely of migrants, first reported on discrimination and abuse in a poor area of Rabat where migrants live in overcrowded apartments. It has since gathered and disseminated first-hand information on police abuse through the country and in neighboring countries.

ALECMA also reported violations to the regional human rights commission when hospitals in Fes were refusing migrants access to even basic health care. As a result, hospitals positively changed their practices. ALECMA worked with GADEM in Morocco to produce a major podcast exposing and denouncing transport companies that refused to sell tickets to sub-Saharan African migrants traveling to northern Morocco. Following this campaign, several other associations were mobilized and within 48 hours the transport companies reversed their position.

Despite these achievements, sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco continue to be very vulnerable and at constant risk of violence, mistreatment, and expulsion.

Khemisset

AJAK/AJAM

AJAK's work focuses on women's rights, migration, and community radio to address these two major issues. The women's rights program, for example, uses a participatory approach, supporting the creation of women's rights networks in remote areas. AJAK held activities in markets to reach the most women and surface issues that women themselves identify, such as child marriage, which persists in parts of Morocco. AJAK raises awareness about child marriage among parents and youth. They have radio programs in local languages and conduct advocacy to ensure the eradication of child marriage. AJAK also collaborates with a family planning association in Morocco to disseminate evidence-based information about sex to Moroccan

youth. The organization enables women and youth to talk to one another, in person and through radio, and, as such, promotes healthy dialogue about topics that might otherwise be considered taboo. In addition, those who participate gain valuable skills in social work, health, communications, and the like.

Mohammedia

AJR (Actions Jeunes Regionale)

AJR works to promote the voices of youth in neighborhoods around Casablanca, particularly in Mohammedia, northeast of the city. The group emerged in 2011 out of a realization that young people did not participate in decision-making in their communities. The Fund began supporting the group in 2015.

AJR believes deeply that popular education, and non-elite grassroots work is the key to sustainable social change. The majority of its members come from poor communities; despite this disadvantage, they have the ability to become board members of the group.

AJR follows a participatory approach in its work, consulting with community members about what is needed to enhance their quality of life and meet their basic needs for survival. Often, residents point to the absence of social security, employment, and health care, for example. AJR works with the community to develop an action plan to remedy these deficiencies.

For example, in one neighborhood, young people said the local market area was an eyesore – neglected and filled with garbage. The youth wanted to create places to play. Girls, in particular, wanted safe spaces to engage in recreational activities. As a result of their organizing and advocacy, AJR was able to create a safe space that youth could enjoy for sports and other activities.

Casablanca

Gorara

Gorara is an association for arts and welfare. Its members are actors, dancers, singers, comedians, and others who work with young people to promote their social engagement and political participation in Morocco. The group emerged out of the 20 February movement when citizens challenged their governments to end corruption and impunity and provide residents with greater democracy and economic opportunity. Since then, Gorara has worked to channel young peoples' interests into creativity and social change. Because freedom of expression is circumscribed in Morocco, the arts are often the most palatable and effective way to discuss sensitive issues.

Gorara believes that access to culture is important to building a free, critical citizenry. It has decidedly resisted accepting any funding that would silence its artists and instead has pursued edgy forms of communications through graffiti, videos, and carnivals. The youth who participate find this expression to be liberating and educational. After performances, even in public spaces, the participants sit with audience members to discuss the productions' messages with one another, defying the Moroccan government's restrictions on space.

Marrakesh

El Amane

El Amane is a community center for women and youth in Marrakesh. It provides vocational training, education on women's and girls' rights, and opportunities for learning and connection. The organization began in 2003, largely because there were so few places where women and girls could gather in the community. Halima, the current president, founded El Amane, by working for free and offering classes to children after school. The group offered literacy classes and worked to support school leaders. People in the community then started attending more regularly, and the organization blossomed.

Inspired by Halima's ambitions and accomplishments, the Fund was one of El Amane's first supporters. She used her grant from the Fund to create a listening center for women, particularly for those who were survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence. Halima attempted to promote women's rights in public and high-level settings but found that basic education at the community level was the key to changing culture around the treatment of women. Building on this model, El Amane has expanded its offerings to include legal accompaniment for women and livelihoods training to women and youth to promote greater economic autonomy.

Each year, some 500 people take advantage of El Amane's offerings – taking classes in fields as diverse as dance, dentistry, and cooking. The center has placed countless students into internships and jobs in Morocco. The center also offers training in running a radio station, which produces shows on social problems. The right to access information is the basis of all that they do; they have hosted programs on education, migration, labor rights, and Covid-19. El Amane meets the needs of residents in ways that the government simply does not.