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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK. A TRAINER OF TRAINERS EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: The main aim of this article is to report the experience of the international Project “Trainer of trainers in Social Work in the Eastern region of Morocco” which has been carried out from 2009 to 2011 and was undertaken at the request of the Mohamed I University of Oujda and the social institutions of this region. This project is framed in the ART GOLD programme of UNDP, in accordance with the Millennium Goals, with the participation of the Spanish universities of Malaga, Seville and Granada, the Italian universities of Perugia and Siena, and the social partners from Spain and Italy.

One of the aims of this multilateral international collaboration project is to support Mohamed Premier University in developing Social Work as a discipline by using Social Work’s distinctive areas and methodologies. Furthermore, as a social approach and as a local reinforcement, contributing to the training of social partners from local institutions and civil society. This experience highlights the risk, in the area of international cooperation in social work, of keeping Western influences, dominant positions and emphasizes the need to develop indigenous theories and practices in the developing countries. The conclusions invite us to reflect on the epistemological and methodological dimensions that identify Social Work worldwide and its suitability to different international contexts.

Key-words: International Social Work; ‘trainer of trainers’ in Social Work.

1. The context where the project “Trainer of Trainers in Social Work in the Eastern Region of Morocco” was created

According to the 2006 UNDP Human Development Report (HDR), Morocco was ranked 124th in 2005 out of the 177 countries. Despite significant progress made over the last decade, the rate of relative poverty was still high and the income inequalities were visible for any observer: the rate of relative poverty which used to exceed 50% in 1960 had fallen to 14.2% in 2005. However, due to the demographic growth, the absolute number of poor people remained at an average of 5 million; three quarters of whom live in rural areas. Human development indicators showed that the country was lagging behind other countries in the Mediterranean region. The Human Development Index for

Morocco indicates that life expectancy at birth is 69.7 years; the adult literacy rate (% of the population 15 years old and over) is 50.7 percent, with a combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools of 58 per cent; and the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$4,004.

Although this data indicates progress made by the country, the situation, concerning key issues such as education and health is alarming, and regarding other issues like gender and equality is extremely negative. As an example, 78% of the women living in the rural areas of Tetouan are illiterate and only 12.5% of Nador women work outside the home; another example, that can be found in rural areas, just 15.4% of Chefchaouen homes are supplied with drinking water.

In view of this situation the National Initiative for Human Development (l'Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain, INDH) was created as a strategic response that started with the speech made by the King Mohamed VI on 18th May 2005, when he urged the nation as a whole to participate in the development of their own country:

« [...]Nous entendons par là la problématique sociale, qui constitue, pensons-Nous, le défi majeur à relever pour la concrétisation de notre projet de société et de développement. En effet, Nous avons décidé, avec l'aide de Dieu, de Nous y atteler en lançant une nouvelle initiative qui se veut novatrice et ambitieuse, à savoir : " l'Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain ".¹

In this way, the INDH was introduced as an innovative and ambitious initiative which incorporated a new approach to development and a new model of government – decentralized governance. It was structured in four main programmes, two of them would target certain regions – those regarding rural poverty and social exclusion and the other two would cover the whole nation – the fight against precariousness and the Human Development transversal programme.

As a result of the royal speech, fight against poverty and social vulnerability acquired new importance. The INDH provides the intervention in 264 urban districts and 403 rural municipalities with the aid of multisectorial public investments as well as those which support the income-generating activities, whilst focusing on the most vulnerable areas. The program is based on bottom-up participatory planning and it gives a central role to local elective representatives and the network of NGOs. The funding of the INDH is \$1 billion US dollars over five years. The program is undertaken by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in collaboration with three other important ministries (Social Development, Rural Development and Finance). The government contacted other funding sources such as The World Bank which then would play an advisory role in the programs that would be implemented.²

¹ King Mohamed VI speech to the nation available in <http://www.indh.gov.ma/fr/discours.asp> [accessed September 2011]

² A good related documentation is available in INDH www.indh.ma [accessed September 2011].
World Bank :

In this line, the University of Morocco would play an essential role in this initiative as one of the driving forces. To achieve this, several reforms in Higher Education would be launched in order to strengthen knowledge, taking into account the professional fields relating to employment. Furthermore, it would try to narrow the gap between the Academic and Business worlds by bringing the social and the higher education systems together as a key part in the local development strategies, achieving the necessary synergies between the different departments to make it possible.

The Project "Training Social Work Trainers" (Formación de Formadores de Trabajo Social, FFTS) takes place within the framework of the INDH in order to train 10,000 social workers by the year 2012. This initiative is presented as a priority and of primary concern to the Social Development Ministry as well as the Family and Solidarity Ministry of Morocco. In this regard, there is a Royal commitment to support the 2005 INDH goals, especially that concerning the Social workers training, for the period of 2005 – 2012.

This Project is the result of the networking between UNDP ART GOLD Morocco and the INDH. These institutions believed that the political initiative of social development launched by Morocco and the very large and complex social needs found in the field were seriously weakened due to the lack of social workers, inadequate training and the ineffectiveness of the authorities responsible for the Social Services.

Since the initiative ART Universitas was one of the partners, a multilateral cooperation with European universities seemed to be appropriate.³ ART universitas is based on the premise that universities and research institutions have an important role to play in local, national and global development processes and a strong alliance among universities, governments and United Nations is central to the production and circulation of knowledge for human development. In this respect, ART Universitas was conceived as a means for universities to engage constructively in multilateral development programmes oriented towards the objectives of human development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and that adhere to the principles of Aid Effectiveness as put forward in the Paris Declaration.

The training of these future professionals would be entrusted to the Moroccan universities and the number of students would depend on each region's requirements. Moroccan universities were very interested in an exchange of experiences and knowledge with European universities in order to build competence in social intervention practices in the fields of participatory methodologies carried out in their institutions, regarding both teaching and social intervention.

<http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=64283627&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P100026> [accessed September 2011].

³ Please refer to: http://www.art-initiative.org/images/users/10/files/toolkit_8_Brochure_ART_UNIVERSITAS.pdf [accessed September 2011].

From the talks between ART GOLD and the Moroccan authorities the Mohamed Premier University of Oujda was chosen as a pilot for the project "Training Social Work trainers". The project would have to be finalized in the working sessions taking place in Oujda (Eastern Region) by the Spanish and Italian commissions, the ART Universitas and ART GOLD representatives together with the Mohamed I University of Oujda, the Wilaya and other civil society representatives.

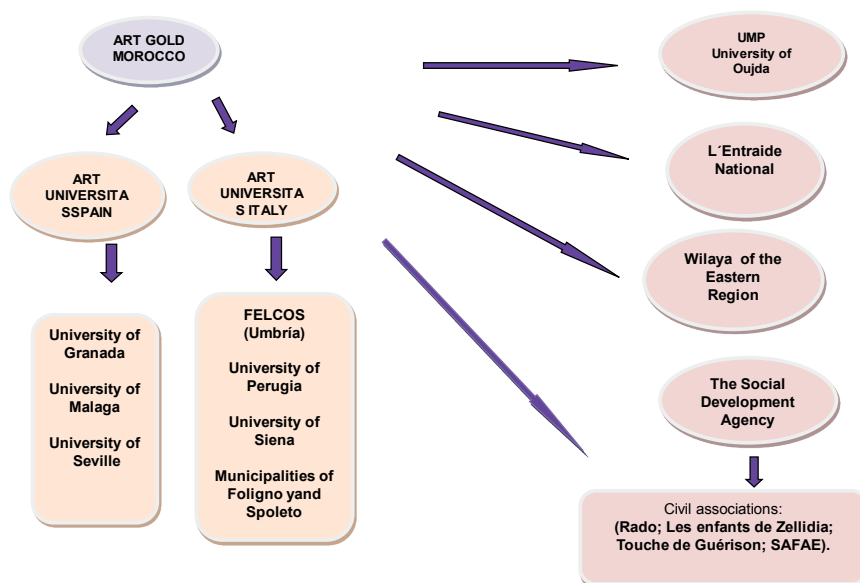
Since its creation in 1978, the Mohamed Premier University of Oujda, the only university in the Eastern Region, is a key player in the development of the region. Moreover, it has introduced several degrees relating to the discipline of social work as well as a Masters in Social Engineering. However, the following deficiencies detected in the development of this discipline contributed to establishing this project: i) inadequacy of the pedagogical profiles and the practice of identifying new social needs in this field, ii) lack of professional training of the social workers, inadequate to enhance students' employability within the labour market.

Future social workers' profiles were determined by taking the French and Belgium models as references in the field, so that they would consider a range of specialties involved in the area of professional social action like i) local development agents, ii) social institutions managers, iii) social mediators, iv) social coordinators and , v) specialized educators.

The beneficiaries of this project would be directly related to the social intervention field: university professors and other government agents connected to local development policies together with social agents, civil society representatives, directly related to groups that are vulnerable and at risk of social exclusion.

They would all include this training in their professional curriculum regarding social work matters and methodologies. This ensures that the expected impact of this project would fit with the aims of strengthening the University in building the discipline of Social Work and its social approach in the practice fields and the reinforcement of the social area by contributing to the training of the social partners from local institutions and civil society. Finally, the participants involved would be as shown in the table below:

Table nº1: PARTNERS FFTS



Source: prepared by the authors.

The table below, on the one hand, shows the direct beneficiaries of this project and also those who would be indirectly affected by its contribution: ⁴

⁴For further information please refer to the 2009 Periodical Report of Activities - Morocco
http://www.art-initiative.org/images/users/10/files/countries_342_gold%20morocco%202009%20report%20%20eng%20.pdf
http://www.art-initiative.org/index.php?p=mod_countries&i=90
http://www.art-initiative.org/images/users/10/files/countries_394_morocco%20eng.pdf

TABLE Nº 2

Participants Students Institutions	Direct Beneficiaries	Indirect Beneficiaries
Decentralized state services: professionals 8 professionals	Social Action Division (SAD) Social Development Agency (SDA) Community social services	Staff responsible for various services, students and social workers Eastern Region population
University: teachers 18 teachers	Specialized teachers Graduates with a specialized Masters degree	Undergraduate, postgraduate and other further education students.
NGO: Professionals 8 professionals	NGOs members	NGOs members Vulnerable groups at social risk served by NGOs

Source: prepared by the authors

The trainings content was appointed with the agreement of the representatives of the institutions. The MP University, professionals and entities of local and regional development (SAD, SDA and NGOs involved) admitted a lack of appropriate training in order to address social intervention and decided the topics that would be in the training course:

- Social Intervention Methodology
- Specific techniques in Social Work
- Mediation, negotiation and social conflict approaching management
- Psychology and social development
- Project management
- Methods and Techniques in oral and literacy skills
- Linking professional practice and activities in the Social Workers Teachers Training Course
- Co-development policies contribution with the cultural mediators in Spain and Morocco.

TABLE N° 3

Training	Responsible Institution	Starting date	Training location
Introductory presentation about the concepts, theories, models, principles and foundations of Social Work (one day)	University of Granada	26/10/09 (*)	MPU Oujda
Seminar I Human development and social integration	University of Siena	26-30/10/09	MPU Oujda
Seminar 2 Active and participatory methods and techniques	University of Seville	9-13/11/09	MPU Oujda
Seminar 3 Social and communicative skills for Social intervention	University of Malaga	15- 19/02/10	MPU Oujda
Seminar 4 Methodology and techniques of participatory action research	University of Perugia	15-19/03/10	MPU Oujda
Seminar 5 Relationships between individuals, groups and communities.	University of Granada	12-16/04/ 10	MPU Oujda
Seminar 6 Elaboration and participation in social projects	Municipality of Foligno Municipality of Spoleto FELCOS-Umbrie	5-9/07/10	MPU Oujda

Source: ART GOLD of UNDP Morocco (2011) Capitalisation de l'expérience de formation de formateurs de travailleurs sociaux de la région de l'oriental du Maroc: 130

The above table shows the training modules and the responsibility of each of the universities in carrying out their implementation.

2. The implementation of global standards in the teachings of Social Work as an objective

Decentralised cooperation is being imposed as a way to overcome the traditional limits of development in developing countries by bringing together local institutions and municipalities from North and South and playing an important role in collaboration with the stakeholders.

In Spain, decentralized cooperation covers regions, municipal funds for cooperation as well as individual institutions like universities or research centres. ART (Articulating Territorial and Thematic Networks for Human Development) is an initiative of international cooperation that supports national and local governments in the implementation of their national decentralization policies. For this purpose, it supports and promotes the creation of a legal, operational, administrative and planning framework. The Framework Programme facilitates the articulation among those involved in the international cooperation which are interested in supporting the process of human development of the countries, such as national governments, regional and local communities, civil society, universities, non-governmental organizations or the private sector.

As mentioned above, Universitas, designed as a tool to promote the exchanges between universities from the North and South of the country, and the Framework Programme of Art International support the involvement in innovative practices of international cooperation for human development. They also design and offer university level courses and training for people involved in the programmes and conduct research to collect and disseminate knowledge about high quality experiences.

This experience of multilateral collaboration has allowed us not only to observe the strengths usually found in decentralised cooperation described so far, but also it has led to a reflexive and communicative process among the knowledge agents linked to the universities involved, building an experience that has encouraged the development of strengths in multilateral cooperation at a university level.

However, the training of social workers trainers in an international cooperative partnership is not without discussions that for years have been shared, among others, by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). It is a federation consisting of seventy six national associations or organizations, which represent more than four hundred thousand members from countries in the five continents.

This heterogeneous composition, with members from different social, political, cultural and economic backgrounds, shows the complexity that involves a multilateral training like the one that is being presented here. The definition of Social Work that addresses this complexity is the one adopted by the IFSW and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in July 2000:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.”⁵

In this regard, the establishment of minimum standards in the training of social work trainers, is a concern that has accompanied the implementation of this experience. The concern regarding the possibility of transferring a Western domination into the teaching planning stage became part of our reflections, which is also a matter of deliberation in the debate about Social Work worldwide. Given the Western hegemony in social work education and practice and that “Western European countries and the USA perhaps have fairly settled views of what social work is and what it means to provide good social work education” (Payne, 2001:41), such fears are not merely speculative in the decentralized multilateral cooperation context.

The possible ways to prevent the Western authority, were ensuring that the social work education and practice take into account the country's unique historical, political, cultural, social and economic contexts; the unique developmental needs of the country; the professions developmental needs in Morocco and finally, facilitating an open dialogue across national and regional boundaries, North-South.

On the other hand, this formulation of the global standards necessarily ensures an approach to education and training that supports human rights, social justice and an essential commitment to caring for and the empowerment of individuals, groups, organizations and communities in the context where the experience takes place. This complex dialogue is not without contradictions that were considered from the perspective of global and essential standards in the training of social work trainers.

It should be noted that the open discussions in the countries of the South about what is distinctive in Social Work, as a discipline and profession, as well as about the warnings in implementing Western models of intervention in highly developed in the northern countries, in contexts that are totally different and with developments linked to social processes from the recent colonial era and its consequences in the post-colonialism. (Gray, 1998, 2002; Mupedziswa, 1992; Osei-Hwedie, 1995).

Hassan Hakim (2011: 137-143)⁶ follows this when he questions if the social work values, as universally designed, could actually be a set of neutral tools that wouldn't work when they face local realities, where power relationships are being constantly tested.

In his article, he clearly expresses his concern about what he calls the logical

⁵This definition is available in : <http://www.ifsw.org/p38000208.html>

⁶Professor of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the MP University of Oujda and student in the FFTS Project.

dependence on colonialism, pointing out that history shows us that the way to development is not handed out on a plate but on the contrary, taking the easy way, that is depending on foreign countries to administrate strategical resources and address the needs of the population, paradoxically, creates an even wider distance between rich countries and developing countries such as Morocco.

The author proposes that the social work professionals should undertake a social analysis in order to adapt their objectives to the social needs identified in the contexts they aim to change; this way, priorities should be centred in their own human and social resources, before resorting to other means, where proposals on social models might differ and be in conflict with those from the social background. Therefore, resuming models already implemented in other conditions in Western countries would be, according to the author, epistemologically unacceptable because this approach, which is mainly ethnocentric, firstly causes non-Western societies to take on Western culture before obtaining their own significant development for themselves.

We cannot forget what Frantz Fanon (2002-1961) shows us when he talks about the disastrous mental effects of the colonialism on the behaviour of the colonized people, the conceptions they have about themselves and their realities. Certainly, these effects are linked to the unequal relations that govern the political, economical and social life as well as the vertical power relations in the field of developmental aid (Engia Mahayub, 2008).

In this respect, Osei-Hwedie (1995), cited by Morante, Morata and Juan (2011), reminds us that a significant number of African countries cannot afford this type of Western social work, which is mainly focused on disadvantaged people and groups that represent, by definition, a small proportion of the total population. Moreover, poor countries don't have a developed infrastructure to support social workers to provide social services, hence the need for social workers to overcome this context, the prevailing management paradigm and the professional elitism in the organizations where they develop their work. Issues that are all easily extended to social, economical and political situations in Morocco.

Hence the focus, during the development of this project, was on the need of conceptualizing social work as a contextual practice, not just about how we can work with people in these contexts but also with the contexts themselves. With this kind of approach (working "in" and "with" the contexts), social workers would need to do a reflexive understanding of their own perspective, practices, capacity to work with the contexts as a whole and reframe the skills in contextual terms, taking the population of the places that are in those contexts as a reference (Fook, 2002).

3. Searching for strengths through participative methodologies

From our responsibility as trainers from the University of Granada, we always tried to develop an open and continuous adjustment in the process of

training, so that it was shown not just as a “philosophy” but also as a “procedural technique”. Hence the importance of participation and negotiation in the teaching curriculum, regarding its different elements and dimensions: goals, contents, organization systems, communication systems, assessments processes. The emphasis on the formative evaluation was a constant in the whole process of this module.

From the introduction, we started with a presentation of the general principles that guide the specific pedagogical methodology in a training of trainers course, that were developed later on:

- a) Design and implementation of the curricular project based on the initial and then permanent negotiation, the formative evaluation and group techniques: of work, pooling and animation.
- b) Cognitive theory of significant learning that leads the interventions of the pedagogical team “a posteriori”, subject to the work on the group’s preconceptions.
- c) Ongoing reflection on the situation of the training of trainers (contents, methodologies and techniques, attitudes and values), taking into account the ultimate goal: training social workers and other agents of social intervention.
- d) Reflection about the isomorphism of the situation of learning-teaching of social workers trainers, teaching of social workers and the professional practice of social work.
- e) “Alternation practice”: a constant display of how the contents, the procedures and the teaching and group methods of the situation of training of trainers can be transferred to the situation of the classrooms of an initial training of social workers and the situations of the professional practice of the social controllers (social workers, social managers, etc.).
- f) Diversification of techniques, to show the availability of a wide range of tools– and the need for them, in the teaching practices and in the professional practices of the social activity; of learning-working, group dynamics, formative activity, intervention with individuals, groups, communities and evaluation.

The strong heterogeneity of this group, pointed out by the trainers of other modules, became one of the strengths of this training of trainers group. In this respect, it must be noted that the participation of the female social workers in the small teams had a significant relevance, firstly because of their rich contributions regarding their experiences in the professional practice on the ground, and secondly, because this active participation led to their voluntary distribution in the smaller groups, which mainly consisted of male teachers and professional planners. In this way, within the participative philosophy and methodology of this module, the female students and the male students were able to see how, with the appropriate methodological tools, it is possible to facilitate the participation

of representatives of groups with apparently unavoidable difficulties, such as gender, status or social position.

Our main concern, as trainers of social worker trainers, was to be able to overcome these difficulties by using participative methods with the aim of developing the teaching modules from the student's own demands and from their own ideas about the needs of the contexts where they were working with everyday, therefore, incorporating what was internationally agreed regarding the implementation of minimum standards in the social work teachings.

4. Conclusions

The project of "Training of Social Work Trainers" has been a long process where the reflection about what Social Work means and its essential connection with the development processes of the countries has always been present; where the horizontal relationships have been searched as a point of departure and of arrival, as a basic and fundamental element. The extensive list of agencies involved from three different countries, Morocco, Spain and Italy contributed to the enormous richness of this project but also its huge complexity.

The experience carried out has led to the debates and reflections shown in this article, but with a shared purpose, according to which future actions taken in this context of collaboration should be developed to consider that social work is not a neutral concept. It implies that in the training of future professionals we must take into account their capacity to be agents of change in society and in the lives of people seeking their welfare. A capacity built through knowledge, practice and values that guide the professional ethics.

We share with our colleagues in this project that the main reflection, that was in all the debates and courses, was about what social work is and what it is for and what it means in terms of human development, academic, research and professional agenda. This is why another achievement of this training experience has been the importance of working together, in order to bring together the Moroccan situation of professional and academic emergency regarding social work as a specific field of practice and knowledge and the international discourse and practice as a common and global effort to develop social Work.

The comparative exercises, the exchange of experiences as part of the training, from our Spanish side as well as that shown by the Moroccan students from their professional practice, led us to the "discovery" of what must be at the heart of any international collaboration in the field of social development and in particular, of social work: through an honest and consistent attitude we can learn from each other, the concept of shared learning. This has been probably one of most notable consensual conclusions at the end of this training process.

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