



FIRST PERSON

Literacy Changes a Rural Woman's Life

A literacy class helps a woman become an entrepreneur



Photo: USAID/Taoufik Bakkali

Rashida and other members of her farm animal cooperative show off the sheep that they buy and sell.

“Through this program we women have paved the way to a new life,” said Rachida, a wife and mother who opened a successful business with other women after completing a USAID training course.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Rachida was born in 1973 in a rural Moroccan village. She is married and has four children. Her husband is a seasonal agricultural worker who earns about \$75 per month when he works. She once described her life as a tapestry woven from dashed expectations and frustrations, but also hope.

Her optimism was well founded. When USAID offered a literacy class in her village, Ain Jdid, she immediately recognized that a world of opportunity was suddenly within her grasp. The class signaled a new beginning for Rachida — if she took classes, she would be able to read and write, add and subtract, and acquire skills that were always reserved for others. When she first learned how to write her name on a slate, and then on paper, she was overjoyed. Although Rachida and her classmates endured taunts from some villagers as they walked to school each day, they ignored them and found pride in their accomplishments.

The course went a step beyond providing basic literacy training to the women of Ain Jdid. Those who performed the best on the final exam were also offered support in starting a business — a farm animal cooperative. Armed with their newly acquired numeracy and literacy skills, and with technical assistance from USAID, they started a successful business. Their example gave rural women a new image — that of independent female entrepreneurs who could manage their own businesses and daily affairs. They were no longer mere field workers.

Rachida now purchases and sells farm animals through the coop and earns enough income to support her family. More importantly, she can share the joy of learning with her school-aged children and help them with their homework.

As a testament to the program's success, now even some of the men in the village who had taunted Rachida and her classmates want to attend literacy classes.

Rachida is confident about the future. She says her new skills have given her more than just an income. “Through this program, we women have paved the way to a new life,” she said.