

Fatima's Story



**An Excerpt from the HIGHLIGHTS OF THE
IWGCL REPORT**

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FOREWORD

Children's right to participation is a new concept to both adults and children. It is difficult to understand and apply in practice. However it is important that we do so as this right is the foundation for children to realise all their other rights. We therefore need to find ways to understand exactly what it means.

Children's right to participation also has implications on the nature of relationship between children and adults. It implies a partnership that is continuously negotiated and ever expanding.

This is one of several stories that have been designed to help understand these questions better and equip both adults and children to prepare for a meaningful partnership.

Fatima's Story

Introduction:

Morocco is country in Middle East. In Morocco, more and more women and girls are coming out of their homes to work. Due to several reasons such as financial problems in the family and exposure to the modern world, girls no longer necessarily want to follow their mother's path into early marriage.

Despite these changing roles girls are still expected to perform household tasks like cleaning the house, cooking, looking after younger ones from an early age and are given less freedom than boys. Their aspirations for the future are narrower than those of their brothers and they feel greater obligation to help their families.

It was in these circumstances that twelve-year-old Fatima lived with her two brothers, two younger sisters, her parents, her aunt, uncle and her grand mother in a slum in Meknes, Morocco.



Meknes, a medium-sized city of about 8,00,000 inhabitants, is an important urban centre in the Centre-South region of Morocco. It is located in a rich agricultural area of the country. Apart from agriculture, its main industries are agro food processing, textiles and mining.

Fatima went to the nearby school with her siblings, but when she came home she and her sisters had to help their mother with cooking, cleaning, washing and shopping. Fatima also had to collect water from the community water tap every morning and take the bread her mother made to be baked at the public ovens.

School was hard for Fatima and her sisters. It did not



teach them the things they wanted to learn like how to take care of themselves, how to get jobs, how to handle marriage, how to make household chores easier and how to be more independent.

The only thing they liked about school was that it took them outside the house and gave them a break from the daily chores. However, the boys seemed to enjoy school. They could concentrate on their studies, as they did not have to share the housework.

One day her grand mother fell ill and needed treatment. They had to spend a lot of money on her and family had to borrow money.





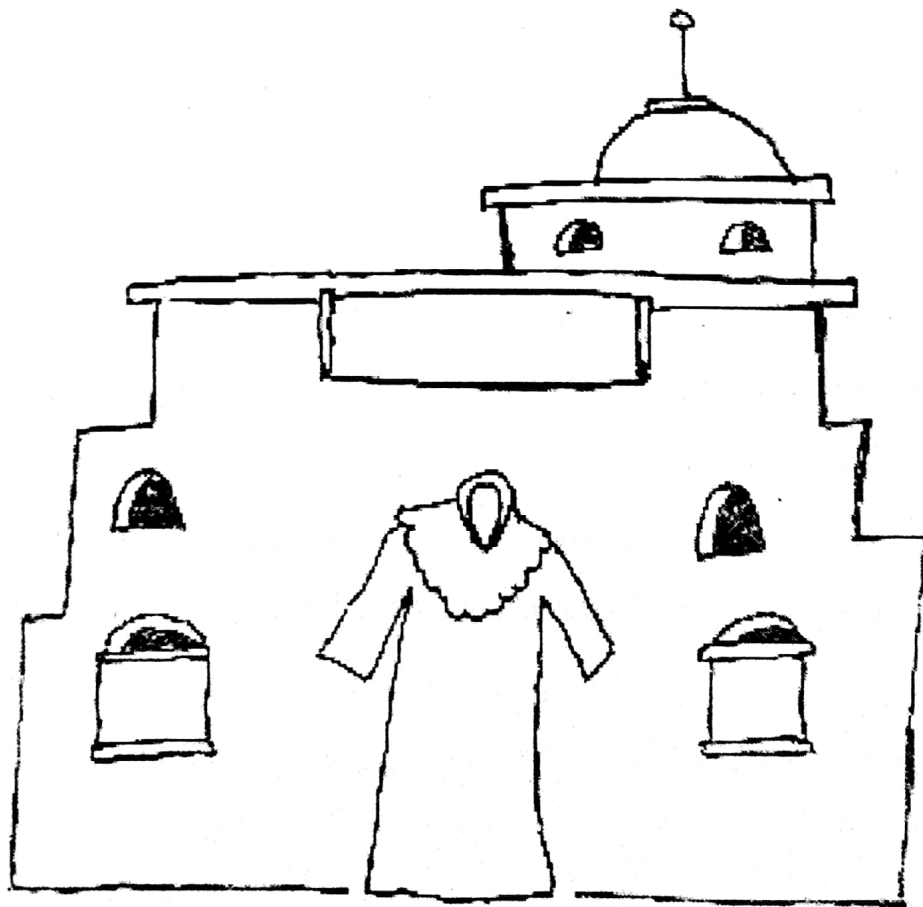
Soon Fatima's father began to look very worried. He had earlier taken a loan to build their house and now he was finding it very difficult to pay back both his debts. They could lose their house.

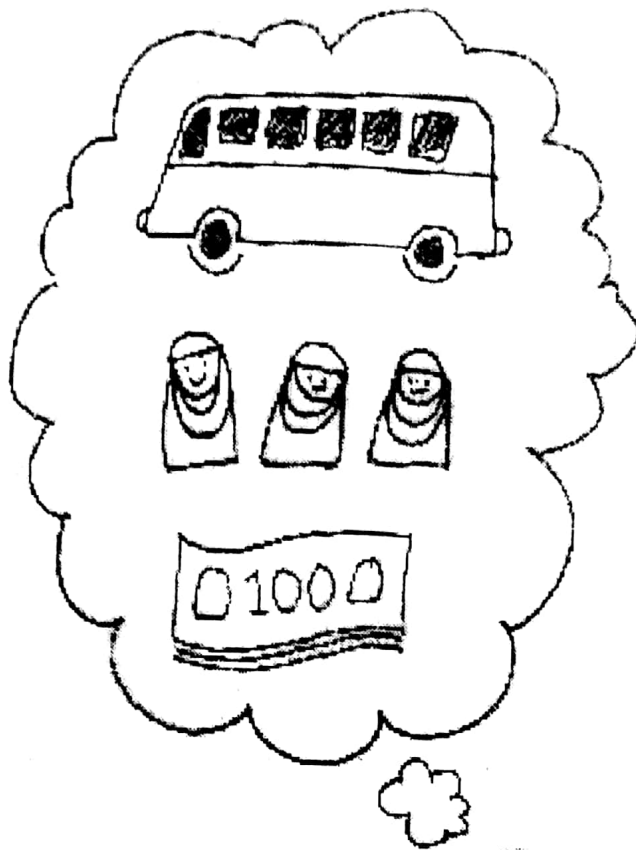
Fatima's mother called her one day and asked her whether she could leave school and get a job. There were jobs available in an export garment factory nearby. The textile industry was the second most important activity in the area. Due to the rapid growth of textile exports in Morocco, this industry had become a secure and promising option for young girls in the country.

The wage, 300 Dirhams (DH) a month that Fatima could earn would help the family. Fatima did not enjoy school. She also knew that she would never be able to get in Baccalaureate. Very few children made it to that stage and even those that did complete like her uncle were unemployed.

She wanted to join the girls from her slum that dressed up and went all to the factory every morning in the factory bus. She wanted to earn a little money of her own. This way she could help her family get out of the house and have a little pocket money to buy things for herself.

Fatima decided to quit school and join the girls outside the factory gates waiting to be hired. Under Moroccan law girls aged 12 and 15 years can be employed as apprentices in factories. As a result, Fatima was lucky to be hired as an apprentice and began work, trimming and cutting threads on the finished garments. The work was hard and tedious, but not as bad as working at home and going to school. She enjoyed the company of other girls, the new status she had at home and the fact that she could now buy a few nice things for herself.





She was also proud to be helping her father. She also knew that if she worked well she would be made a permanent employee in a few years, be able to work on the sewing machines and get a very good wage, 1,500 DH. Her future was secure.

One day a group of foreigners came to the factory. Fatima saw them talking to her boss in the air conditioned glass cabin. Then they visited the shop floor and talked to some of the girls about their work. They seemed nice and friendly. When she left that evening these foreigners were outside the gates.

One of them came up to her and asked her age. She shyly replied that she was 14. On her way home on the bus she wondered why these men were interested in talking to the girls, nobody had taken an interest in them before.

A month later Fatima and her young colleagues were called by their supervisor . They were told not to come back to work, as they were too young. Fatima and her friends were shocked. They were legally employed as apprentices and they had contracts that had been signed by the labour inspector, their employer and their parents. What had gone wrong? Their future had been shattered. What would she tell her mother? How would they manage? What would she do?

Fatima was also called aside and scolded for having talked to the foreign men. She was told that they secretly videotaped her conversation. These men were from a British TV station who had used these interviews to accuse a multinational store of using children to produce their garments.

As a result all the girls below the age of 15, an age set by the multinational, had been sacked. Fatima felt cheated. Who were they to decide what she and girls like her should do. They could have helped them if they had insisted on better wages and conditions for apprentices, demanded that they be given an education while learning a skill. "They had never asked us what we want," she thought with bitterness.

That evening there was gloom in Fatima's house. Her father decided that they would have to leave and move in with her mother's father. They would have to sell some of their belongings. Fatima would have to sell the one piece of jewellery she had bought for herself.

Life was hard again. Fatima could not go back to school and there was no use doing that anyway. She tried to find another job, but the options were very limited. She could do embroidery at home, but the payment was bad, 100 DH for a months work, it spoilt the eyesight and it did not get her out of the house. Fatima settled down to her earlier way of life, cooking, cleaning, washing and scrubbing. She still hopes that she will find a job, but her hopes are dying out.

About CWC

The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) is a secular, democratic national private development agency working in partnership with children and their families for the realisation of their rights through their participation and to address the issue of child labour. The organisation is operating in the State of Karnataka in India. However, because of our training, consultancy and advocacy activities our work expands globally and we are a well recognised and reputed agency in the arena of children's rights and protagonism, and rural and urban development.

CWC has shown that the harmful aspects of child work can be eradicated and that working children themselves can play a major role in the process. The foundation of CWC's work is the development of child protagonism; i.e. the empowerment of working children so that they may be their own first line of defence and participate in an informed manner in all decisions concerning themselves.

CWC works with local governments, communities and working children themselves to implement viable, comprehensive, sustainable and appropriate solutions in partnership with all the major actors so that children do not have to work.

CWC originally began its work in the city of Bangalore in 1975 with working children, most of who had migrated to the city from the rural areas of Karnataka. CWC, however, recognised that it was not sufficient to work with children who had already migrated and that it was also important to try and do some thing to address the reasons why these children left their villages. Consequently from 1989, CWC began to work in Udupi District in the South Canara Region of Karnataka State, one of the major feeder blocks of child labour to the vegetarian restaurants all over India.

Based on our extensive experience of working with marginalised children and their communities, we have facilitated the formation of Bhima Sangha, a union of working children, Namma Sabha, an association of young crafts persons, artisans and entrepreneurs and women's and men's self help groups. Currently we work in five districts of Karnataka, namely Bangalore City, and the rural districts of Udupi, Davangere, Bellary and Uttara (North) Kannada.

For further details go through our websit <http://www.workingchild.org>



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