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# LiA Projects Report - UM6P - SIL

LiA Project in Morocco within the Social Innovation Lab: Engaging in Projects on Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship



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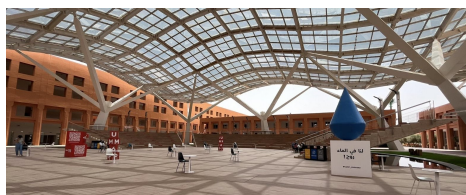
## 1 Introduction

When I learned about the Laidlaw program and their action in sustainable development which takes in consideration the education, environmental issues and the reduction of inequalities in the world, I feel like it was the right thing for the evolution of our societies toward a better future together. Since I had the honor to become a Laidlaw scholar an important matter to me was to take action for the education for all and the valuation of women in entrepreneurship. Thus, for my LiA project, the Social Innovation Lab at UM6P campus in Morocco was the ideal destination to implement and participate in such projects for the communities.

The SIL is indeed a start-up of University Mohammed VI Polytechnic which is focused on finding innovative solutions to social issues on merely all domains, should it be agriculture, entrepreneurship or education. With more than 26 ongoing projects, SIL works directly with local partners and populations to meet specific socio-economic needs, and ensures that the actions implemented are sustainable and long-lasting.

I chose a similar project as Alixe Kirbihler (la polonaise), another EPFL Laidlaw scholar who quickly became my friend after I met her through the program a year ago. As my first project 'alone' to another country I was glad to be with Alixe for this journey filled with discoveries or uncertainties that are part of the fun of traveling. I quickly had the pleasure of realizing that some stereotypes about Moroccans are true; they truly are the most welcoming and sympathetic people, which ensured our arrival on campus under optimal conditions.

Over the 6-weeks, Alixe and I worked as an independent team on various projects aimed at supporting emerging local cooperatives, educational excellence, improving the employability and mental health of young people. Therefore, we decided to write this report collaboratively, with the exception of the personal reflections on our individual experiences.



## 2 Massarates Cooperative Program

We kicked off the internship by working directly in the field at “Plateforme des jeunes de Rhamna”, located outside the campus at Benguerir, where the Massarates project takes place.

The Massarates Project program is an ambitious and innovative initiative targeting cooperative groups consisting of at least five persons from the Rhamna province. It is intended for individuals with project ideas (autonomous associations) or cooperatives established within the past year.

The program Massarates Coopératives aims to promote economic development and entrepreneurship. By supporting the formation and growth of cooperatives, the program seeks to empower local communities, especially women, by providing them with the necessary skills and resources (legal recognition...) to succeed.

The program runs over 18 months, during which participants undergo various stages, including candidature, on-boarding, pre-creation, creation of the cooperative and post-creation support. Once selected, participants attend workshops that include themes such as integration, initiation to the cooperative model, profiling and diagnostic sessions.

Alixé and I were present with one group at “la Plateforme des Jeunes” where participants received thematic training and engaged in prototyping of their cooperative creation. During the various stages of the process, they benefit from personalized coaching and technical assistance.



Indeed, we assisted and supported the candidates in identifying and addressing the specific needs of each cooperative. The creation stage then focused on the legal aspects and formal establishment, ensuring that the cooperatives operate within the legal framework.

Contributing to the Massarates Cooperatives Program was really rewarding, as our efforts had visible impacts in the field, but this experience was also demanding. However, this experience was also demanding due to the participants’ diverse age groups and educational backgrounds. The main challenge was thus making the training accessible to everyone.

The most difficult aspect of the project was overcoming the language barrier, as most participants did not speak French. Nevertheless, I managed to communicate effectively by engaging in open discussions about cooperative creation and their various goals.



### 3 Educational Xcellence

We were then given the opportunity to work on an entire project independently, even selecting its name: Educational Xcellence. EX aims to provide support and educational programs to students at four different Moroccan universities, helping them achieve excellence in teaching.

Based on the needs they provided, we focused our program on four main objectives:

1. **Social, psychological and academic support tools for students:** We established “*cellules d’écoute*” in each of the four universities, where students can meet with social professionals, such as psychologists and therapists, both in-person and through confidential online consultations. Monthly conferences will also be organized to raise awareness about mental health, covering topics like recognizing signs of depression and managing anxiety. Additionally, first-year students will benefit from coaching groups led by older students who will organize social events and campus tours. A mentorship system will also provide academic support and guidance.
2. **Promotion & monitoring of entrepreneurial projects:** Competitions in computer science, agriculture, and architecture will encourage innovative projects. The most promising ones will receive both financial and academic support through entrepreneurial guidance and subsequent training from professionals to aid their development and implementation.
3. **Enhancement of student employability:** Internship opportunities with both industries and laboratories will be listed in a system to facilitate the application process for students. In parallel, company visits will be arranged to broaden students’ perspectives and provide insights into various fields of work.
4. **Sustainability & durability of projects implemented:** To ensure the continuity and durability of the projects, EX will train professors and educational staff to enable them to take part in and maintain the initiatives, thus ensuring long-term impact.

For each goal, we designed workshops and infrastructures that can be sustainably implemented in host universities, detailing the necessary resources and providing a comprehensive step-by-step implementation plan for swift enactment.

As mentioned earlier, we were entirely responsible for this project. I really enjoy being independent on the development of a new project and feel like doing something useful not just collaborate on project that are already in place. However, while it was thrilling to be entrusted with such a significant task, I sometimes felt unprepared and regretted the lack of oversight we experienced. I believe our project could have greatly benefited from the insights of more experienced professionals such as professors, psychologist,....

However, this experience underscored that stepping out of our comfort zone is crucial for learning. I was able to develop my management skills, and learned how to implement social innovation effectively, ultimately realizing how to make a genuine impact.

## 4 Impact Academy

The Impact Academy project initially aimed at enhancing the employability of youth, women, and people with disabilities across eight communes. It was structured with several formations providing training in soft skills and collective intelligence to support the professional integration of beneficiaries. The goal was to achieve a 15% employability rate by the end of September.

However, the project faced significant challenges, including a very low participation rate, with only 1 to 5 people attending out of 25 registered. This resulted in no measurable impact on youth employability, demotivation among the trainers, and losses in financial, human, and catering resources.

To address these issues, after a brainstorming session, the project manager asked us to implement an urgent action plan. We designed a new project proposal under the project manager's supervision. The revised plan included conducting three consecutive days of training sessions each month for each group from the eight communes directly at the UM6P campus. Each training session, consisting of six modules (two per day), would span a total of three months, with accommodation, meals, and evening cultural activities fully covered.

The new approach ensured guaranteed attendance and follow-up for each participant by providing an attractive training environment, passive publicity through returning beneficiaries, a concrete increase in employability, and quick project implementation with easily accessible facilities.

Following the success of this proposal, which received positive feedback, we were asked to create various forms to collect feedback from the participants and propose individual assignments to be completed during the training. These were organized into a comprehensive drive with explanations, content, and templates that provide instructors with useful resources for designing and teaching the modules.

The project provided valuable experiences in project management, proposal defense, and the development and participation in the training content, leading to a successful and impactful outcome.

## 5 Project proposal: Mental health in Morocco

During our stay in Morocco, we took the opportunity to travel outside of Ben Guerir on weekends. During these trips, I engaged in conversations with Moroccans from diverse backgrounds. One recurring topic in these discussions was the handling of mental health in the country.

I discovered that mental health remains a taboo subject in Morocco, both publicly and privately. Friends shared how individuals with mental illnesses are often labeled as crazy and not taken seriously when they seek help. This lack of psychological and medical support leads to their exclusion from society and a worsening of their symptoms.

During my BA1 at EPFL I had to accompany a first year friend in psychiatry issues due to pressure, anxiety and stress in Lausanne and it touched me profoundly how mental health should be a priority during our education and afterwards as adults. Thus we had discussions with Alixe who experienced similar issues and it seems to be an important matter to delve in.

Together with Alixe, we decided to conduct a case study on mental health in Morocco. We gathered information on relevant statistics, national research, existing action plans and current challenges.

With an understanding of the situation, we designed a project proposal to promote mental health in secondary schools (middle and high schools). This involved health professionals leading interactive awareness and communication workshops. The main objectives of our campaign, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, are to define good practices in mental health, de-stigmatize mental disorders, encourage teenagers to seek help, recognize when they need support, and inform them about available resources.

To ensure our project's sustainability, we planned to train teachers and educators on mental health. This would enable them to provide continuous support and quickly identify and assist teenagers experiencing difficult family situations or those who are victims of violence or harassment.

Finally, even if this project is still a proposal to the Social Innovation Lab for further partnership and collaboration with the educational and health minister and call for project tenders. I am very glad of this proposal as it is an important matter to me in the society as it impacts considerably the youth and the adults of today.

## 6 Leadership Development

Working in Morocco was both enriching and challenging. I was glad to participate in the Massarates Cooperatives program and projects like Educational Xcellence, Impact Academy, and to submit our own project design advocating for mental health. Beyond having a concrete impact on education and employment, these experiences enabled me to further develop my leadership skills such as communication, problem-solving, and project management.

On the first hand, these experiences taught me to take initiatives, identify community needs, and offer help proactively. Taking on significant responsibilities without constant oversight was challenging but pushed me to grow and learn. I realized that every idea is valuable when aiming to have a positive impact, although professional or more experienced one guidance remains crucial for personal improvement.

These projects emphasized the importance of communication and fostering a cohesive team atmosphere. I gained valuable insights into the complexities of social innovation and the necessity of effective collaboration.

Immersing myself in a new environment allowed me to appreciate diverse perspectives, highlighting the importance of respecting and valuing different cultures and viewpoints. But also when you have to address to people with a significant diversity of background.

On the other hand, I had to face some challenges regarding the language barrier which led to some communication issues. However, as mentioned earlier, Moroccans are extraordinarily welcoming and warm and the interactions we had with team members went very well. We even had the honor of participating in a three-days team-building event a week after our arrival in Ben Guerir.



## 7 Acknowledgements

I cannot stress enough how grateful I am for my friend Aïda and her family who have welcomed us during a week-end in their home and made us feel as if we were a part of Morocco. We spent an unforgettable weekend immersed in Moroccan culture, from visiting a luxurious hostel and the animated Jemaa el Fna square at night to exploring the Atlas Mountains and their local honey and Amlou (almond butter with argan oil) productions. I am deeply grateful for this hospitality, which filled our stay with moments of joy, discovery, and profound sharing with the family and the rich history and culture of Morocco.

I would also like to thank Nisrine Lmariouh and Ismail Bellakridi, two colleagues from SIL who became friends and showed us Rabat and Marrakech most beautiful places that are off the tourist trails. The moments we shared together immersed us completely into Moroccan culture which represents an inestimable gift.



Furthermore, I would especially like to thank Alixe with whom I spent an unforgettable 6 weeks LiA. We have created a strong bond, not only as she is an exceptional project partner, but also as the beginning of an amazing friendship which will remain in the future and in our next adventures.



Finally, I would like to thank the SIL and more particularly Pr. Bouchra Ramouni, Hanane Driouich, Soumia Kassou, Hiba Sedouane and Safae Assimi, for these amazing and enriching weeks, and the Laidlaw Foundation which has made this growth and learning journey possible.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the LaidLaw foundation for this opportunity and to the Social Innovation Lab & UM6P that allowed me to live this incredible experience and welcomed me. Indeed, all these projects and discoveries of a new

culture was extremely enriching and allowed me to grow, learn and improve my personal values especially when you have to step out of your comfort zone.



