

**WORKSHOP: RURAL WOMEN- BIODIVERSITY- DEVELOPMENT  
IN NORTH AFRICA  
MARRAKESH 25-28 APRIL 1995**

GENERAL REPORT

The workshop on Rural Women, Development and Biodiversity was organized by IUCN in collaboration with the Moroccan Association for Environmental Protection (ASMAPE) for its members and partners in North Africa from 25 to 28 April 1995.

Her Highness Princess Lalla Fatima Zahra, President of the National Moroccan Women's Union (UNFMC) honored the official opening of the workshop with her presence. She gave an address, which told of the actions undertaken by the National Moroccan Women's Union to promote rural women's development, and referred specifically to the national symposium on rural women and development held in 1975, as well as to field studies and research, and literacy, training and income improvement campaigns.

This important statement was followed by speeches by Dr Mohammed Ali Abrougui, IUCN Regional Councillor for North Africa, and Mr Abdelhadi Bennis, chairman of the workshop organizing committee, whose introductory presentation stressed the aims of the workshop which were:

- to exchange information and experience among the countries of the region,
- to identify options and, especially, concrete actions for the national and regional levels.

**The inaugural session was chaired by Mme Hayat DINIA** and introduced the key themes for the workshop, namely biodiversity, rural women and development in North Africa.

The introduction was followed by presentations of the experience acquired by such international organizations as FAO, UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF.

Mr Benzine spoke on behalf of the first three named organizations (FAO, UNFPA and UNDP). He emphasized the interrelations between population, environment and development and stressed the point that UNDP-financed projects must comply with both UNDP and Agenda 21 directives. He also referred to the biodiversity study which was being prepared in Morocco, a project managed by UNDP and financed by GEF (Global Environment Facility).

Ms Isabelle Bardem, speaking on behalf of UNICEF, introduced the basic concept of alternatives for development, an essential factor in the success of any environment conservation project in general, and of biodiversity in particular.

**The second part of the inaugural session was reserved for presentations by IUCN representatives.**

Ms Irena Dankelman IUCN's Women Programme advisor, used testimony obtained from women in various regions to show how aware women are of the environmental degradation occurring around them and emphasized their psychological and physical readiness to take part in rehabilitation projects in the environment they live in.

Ms Martha Rojas, Biodiversity Programme coordinator, used her statement to address the primary role of women in managing biodiversity, as referred to specifically in the preamble to the biodiversity convention, and the value of women's skills which can be used as seed capital for work to conserve and sustainably use nature's riches.

**The first part of the second session gave national representatives the opportunity to give their country presentations.**

The reports confirmed the unity and diversity of North Africa, and showed how beneficial it is to take these environmental, cultural and socio-economic similarities and diversity into account.

Each speaker stressed women's capital role not only in the management of natural resources but also in their unintentional degradation.

The work of the first two sessions laid the foundations for the discussions held in the four working groups which started their deliberations.

The first working group, which had to analyze the relationship between rural women and development, identified wood and water as essential elements in the lives of rural women. Women's dual function as managers of the family circle and of the environment mean that their activities are vital for sustainable development, and they must therefore participate in rehabilitation programmes in their own environment, drawing on the valuable store of skills that they have built up over generations, providing appropriate technologies, and combatting the insidious evils of ignorance, illiteracy, isolation and economic dependence.

The second working group on biodiversity diately highlighted the setting up of a strategy to approach biodiversity with women's participation, and stressed the need for a diagnosis of the situation concerning biodiversity in North African countries with regard to research into documentation, cartography, and national legislation.

The third working group emphasized the need for an inventory of animal and plant species in order to rationalise the link between human beings and nature.

It stressed the benefit of activities which create jobs and generate income and which are solely targeted at rural women, and urged that women be involved at the project planning, management and execution stages.

The fourth working group, entrusted with the drafting of a list of projects, accepted the idea of combining demonstration projects in pilot regions in each North African country with environmental education. It also showed the need for biodiversity mapping which must be based on socio-economic and environmental studies with a view to protecting endangered species and stressing alternative options.

A new idea which emerged in this working group was ecotourism and its impact on the situation of women.

Finally the group recommended the publication of a liaison newsletter, the creation of an information network, and the establishment of environment education centres.

In his statement following the presentation of the results of the working groups, Mr Mustapha Telili, representing UMA (Union du Maghreb Arabe), spoke of his organization's experience in environment. He referred to the evaluation of the Maghreb Environment Charter for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development and the international meeting on desertification. He emphasized the role of NGOs and coordination between NGOs and governments, whilst stating that ecosystems protection was the focus of UMA's concerns.

Finally, participants in the meeting singled out three projects:

- The selection of a pilot zone for demonstration activities,
- The creation of a network and the publication of a liaison newsletter,
- The creation of participatory income-generating activities for women.

The workshop designated IUCN focal points, who are to specify and formulate in detail the adopted projects and their methods of application.

A "Marrakesh Declaration" suggested at the beginning of the proceedings closed the work of the

workshop and provided an account of the general principles adopted by the meeting.