

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

SUMMARY REPORT

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN NORTH AFRICA

The presentations made in the afternoon described the current situation of women and biodiversity in North Africa. The country representatives described relevant action undertaken: they spoke of problems encountered and suggested possible solutions to achieve better equilibrium in biodiversity.

Country reports showed both the similarity and the differences which exist both among and within individual countries. There are other diversities apart from biodiversity: ecological, cultural and socio-economic differences have also to be taken into consideration.

All speakers emphasized women's role in the unintentional degradation of natural resources through abusive utilization for survival.

The speakers then addressed the problems that their individual countries face.

ALGERIA

Unlike other countries in the region, information provided by Algeria showed that women take very little part in agricultural activities, particularly in the north. This can for the most part be explained by the agricultural strategy adopted in the past under socialism.

The study conducted in ecologically differing areas showed that:

Women in mountainous regions (Aures) mainly carry out unpaid activities (housework, helping on the family farm, fetching water and firewood), whereas women on the high plains have a somewhat easier life following government actions (installation of basic utilities) and work by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to integrate women into socio-economic development in the region.

Finally in Hoggar, changing lifestyles and the sedentarisation of nomads have had a negative impact on women and reduced their scope for action.

In this latter region, women are more active in the "domestic" economy, which calls on a wide range of plant species for food and medicinal purposes. Women in this region are considered to possess substantial knowledge about traditional healing by plants, which is handed down from mother to daughter.

In conclusion, Algerian researchers suggested a series of proposals to help women to achieve better management of local biodiversity.

EGYPT

The Egyptian presentation drew a distinction between (i) government policy on rural women and biodiversity, (ii) the additional input from NGOs on the subject, and (iii) the generic approach which had been adopted to achieve global integrated development and to maintain and develop natural resources.

To ensure better coordination among all those concerned with environmental protection the government has set up a structure to design and implement an environmental strategy. It has also adopted Law 102

to protect animal and plant biodiversity in 16 zones, which are distributed throughout the country to ensure that the various ecosystems are represented.

A commission of experts from many different fields (research centers, universities, NGOs) has been created within this institution to discuss environmental problems and to limit the list of species requiring rehabilitation or protection.

Recently, the Ministry for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, in cooperation with other bodies, has tried to create a unit responsible for natural resources.

The unit's main aims are to collect, classify and conserve gene stocks of indigenous varieties. These varieties are interesting because of their adaptability to the local environment and their resistance to drought and disease. At the same time, a data bank has been set up to help conserve better the national animal and plant heritage.

Apart from government, action is being taken by NGOs and universities on women and biodiversity. Much research is being done into the generic approach which provides better coverage of the family unit in development studies.

The report described the important role played by women in agriculture and their close link with everyday resource use. This is why programmes on biodiversity conservation have been built in to agriculture extension services programmes.

The NGO, "Tree Lovers Association", spoke of its activities. It concentrates mainly on (i) environmental education in schools (for pupils and teachers) using simple non-traditional methods, (ii) planting trees and gardens in schools and unbuilt land in towns.

LIBYA

Whilst describing the three ecosystems characteristic of the Libyan environment (coastal strip, mountains, Saharan zone), the speaker referred to the decline of biodiversity in Libya. This is due to several factors, mainly: drought, deforestation, overgrazing, the disappearance of some oases, pollution, and transfer of inappropriate technology.

However, the recent construction of the artificial Annahr Assinai River would make it possible to restore equilibrium and to rehabilitate disappeared species.

Following intensive urban development, Libya has a very low rural population. This situation sets aside the important role and place of women in biodiversity. Libya differs in this respect from the other countries of the region.

However, women are still present in the economy (30%). While only 0.45% work in agriculture, 27.7% are employed in the services sector, and 1.85% work in industry.

Women's substantial presence in services (particularly in teaching and health care) could be used to develop a public awareness and training strategy at all levels (schools, hospitals, community centers).

Agencies working for biodiversity conservation include the Environment Protection Center and numerous NGOs.

In conclusion, the report addressed priority activities for IUCN to develop for North Africa.

MOROCCO

Because of its geographical situation and geophysical conditions, Morocco is a country of wide biodiversity.

The country is especially fortunate as a point of transit for migratory birds between Africa and Europe (200 species have been counted in addition to native birds).

The country report highlighted the links between rural women and natural resources (utilization and degradation). It also described the policy adopted by the Ministry for Agriculture and Agricultural Development for the management of these resources. The policy is intended to diversify and boost agricultural development on an ecosystem basis to obtain greater value. This policy might well alleviate the intensive exports of natural resources from the regions.

The role of women in natural resource exploitation was described. There are socio-economic causes for irrational use by women of natural resources as well as problems which prevent their integration into the development process: women find it impossible to obtain credit and to acquire land on the one hand and on the other hand they have problems with their employment. These problems force women to turn back to nature and to survive by using and abusing resources.

The close link between rural women and the environment leads the Moroccan report to a sector-based quantitative approach to women's activities and to demonstrate the correlation between such activities and natural resource degradation (deforestation, overgrazing, agro-ecosystem imbalance, etc).

Before describing future prospects, the report highlighted actions to promote women taken by national and international agencies. Such actions have direct or indirect effects on biodiversity.

The report emphasized that constraints on the integration of women into the development process needed to be removed before support for women could be strengthened and increased.

Finally, a set of complementary actions was presented. The actions are seen as a means to solve biodiversity problems to achieve sustainable development.

TUNISIA

Tunisian work on women and biodiversity stressed the problems of animal and plant resource degradation, and explained the role of marabou nesting grounds in maintaining certain plant species: "if plants are maintained then surely animals are also maintained".

This work had drawn attention to plant species which had disappeared years before, were endangered, or required protection.

Tunisian women's rights were also dealt with. Emphasis was placed on programmes introduced for women to ensure their integration into the development process. The link between development and biodiversity was underlined because of the connection between women's activities and natural resource utilization.

Women's participation in agricultural production (crops and husbandry) is important, and can be as high as 60% (eg. Kebili). Women are important as a labour force (51%) but are underpaid (50-70% less than men).

A list of projects for rural women was presented. There are many projects, which have differing objectives and approaches. They include diversified and integrated approaches, and projects at the local

level which are planned to meet more specific needs.

Despite the efforts that have been made, speakers stressed the need for a programme of action aimed in particular at environmental protection. They presented the national strategy for biodiversity conservation, which essentially consists in preserving, rehabilitating and regulating the utilization of natural resources.