

Chapter 34

A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON IN SITU CONSERVATION OF ON-FARM CROP GENETIC DIVERSITY IN MOROCCO

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1. INTRODUCTION

This case study presents the sociological work of the Moroccan component of a global project on “strengthening the scientific basis of in situ conservation of agricultural biodiversity” coordinated by the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) and implemented in nine countries. The main objectives of the global project are: (1) to support the development of a framework of knowledge on farmer decision making processes that influence in situ conservation of agricultural biodiversity; (2) to strengthen national institutions for the planning and implementation of conservation programmes for agricultural biodiversity; and (3) to broaden the use of agricultural biodiversity and the participation in its conservation by farming communities and other groups.

The project’s objectives and methodologies were the result of several discussions between IPGRI and national partners; they were agreed on at the first participants meeting held in Rome in July 1995. Two years later, the second participants meeting provided the opportunity to national partners, IPGRI staff and technical experts to discuss and agree on the types of needed information, focal areas and methodological tools to achieve agreed upon objectives. More importantly, within the global project framework there was an emphasis on integrating key socioeconomic variables such as gender,

ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in data gathering efforts as well as in decision making.

The participation of Moroccan scientists from the two leading national research and teaching institutes in the Rome meetings and in the global project preparation over the period 1995–1998 was instrumental in helping the national project team to develop the necessary national and international partnerships for project implementation. In addition, Moroccan researchers increasingly gained knowledge and understanding of a new research area where methodologies and models were yet to be developed. In fact, the preparation of the country component was undertaken as a joint venture between IPGRI and the national team (Jarvis and Hodgkin 1998).

Effective implementation of Morocco's component started in May 1998 with the signature of the memorandum of understanding between IPGRI and directors of the Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II (IAV–Hassan II) and the National Agricultural Research Institute (INRA). Target crops include durum wheat, barley, faba bean and alfalfa. Selected sites include: (1) Bouhrazen and Lahrouna farming villages in the province of Azilal (Atlas Mountains), (2) several villages in the High Ziz Valley in the Errachidia province (Oasis area), and (3) several villages in the province of Taounate (pre Rif mountains).

The main goal of Morocco's component was to develop the scientific basis for setting up a national strategy of in situ conservation of genetic diversity of cropped plants. Specifically, the three main objectives of the project were: (1) strengthening the national capacity in the area of in situ conservation of cropped plants, (2) understanding the factors and processes affecting crop genetic diversity, and (3) identifying adding value options for target crop landraces and associated local knowledge.

Preparation and planning are crucial elements to project success. Two planning workshops were held in Morocco before the project was implemented. The organization of these meetings was facilitated through the National Plant Genetic Resources Committee (NPGRC), a consultative and coordination body for research activities on plant genetic resources. The first five-day workshop was held at the end of February 1998. Participants included IPGRI global and regional staff, representatives of Morocco's the funding agencies, several national and local nongovernmental organizations, and scientists. The workshop focused on stakeholders' analysis, problems analysis, and objectives identification. A major output of the workshop was a consolidated document with agreed upon objectives. Another important output was the participatory process itself through which most participants became acquainted with the project and contributed to the definition of its objectives on the basis of the country specificity. The participation of the funding agency of the country component in the workshop was useful since