

**Protecting traditional property
rights under conditions of change:
Production of plant oils as a
community-based enterprise in
the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco**

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Content

- Background
- Historical background
- Traditional customary law
- Projects in recent history and outcome
- New context
- Analysis and conclusion

The Agoundis Valley



Source: B Montanari (2008)

Background

- Agoundis Valley: Natural resources decline, population pressure, chronic poverty, increasing demand for essential oils, natural herbal products
- Lack of secure land tenure, political representation of locals, lack of empowerment
- Small scale and informal income from aromatic plants, over harvesting *Thymus satureoides*, *Salvia aucheri*
- Decentralised project for natural resources conservation, poverty alleviation. Installation of *Alembic* (distillation unit) for essential oil distillation, pilot project in study area

Historical background

- 1942: Toubkal National Park, protected area for flora and fauna, state owned, controlled by local Dept of Water & Forestry
- 1976: Promotion of the participation of the locals for economic forestry development
- 1980 onwards: Funding from GEF, GTZ, UNDP, IFFAD to support biodiversity programmes, inclusion of natural resources conservation, poverty alleviation

Traditional customary law

- Traditional Jamaa constitution
Flexible system, complete integration of decisions and actions of the tribe, a traditional autonomous, internal management
- Access to the land for personal needs and herd grazing, harvest of medicinal plants, wood collection for cooking and burning, extremely important way to manage resources

Failed projects in recent history

- 1961: Gharb Valley, Western Rif. TARGET: Land erosion, local migration (Intl agencies, Moroccan Govt). Restoration of local economy, Modification of land uses, modernisation of agricultural techniques
- 1980: Ifrane, Middle Atlas. TARGET: Better production of land management, better quality herds (Int agencies, Moroccan Govt) Limits to forest access to reduce its over-exploitation, herds prohibited from using depleted areas, introduction of new techniques (tractors, seeds pesticides). Intensification of agriculture, implementation of culture rotations
- 1985-1993: Tabant, Central High Atlas. TARGET: Development of local employment, promotion of tourism (Franco-Moroccan partnership). Network of structures with the inhabitants to welcome tourists on the strength of mountain treks

Outcome

- 3 projects: FAILED
- CAUSES: Lack of coordination, national (inter-ministerial) or territorial administrations, local level. Incomprehension, hostility of local people. Gaps in initiatives, allocated budgets, local implementation

New context

- 2003-2004: Local NGO, Village diagnostics. Purpose: To assess the potential for local development, identification of local exploitable resources, community involvement
- 2004-2005: Local NGO, involvement of local commune. Creation of village associations. Acquisition of Alembic. Visits to similar projects.
- 2006: GTZ, Local NGO, Local Commune, National Park Toubkal, INDH, Dept of W&F: Creation of Cooperative. Purpose: Autonomy of local population
- 2007: GTZ, INDH, Dept of W&F: Construction of a building for *alembic* under way. Forbidden harvesting to study, assess thyme regeneration
- 2008: GTZ, INDH, Dept of W&F: Completion of building for alembic. Contract with Coop for harvest

New context

- Dept of W&F allocates new plot of land under contract with the Coop, restriction of harvest on limited parcels of land within surrounding mountains
- Target: Sole access and exploitation of aromatic plants by Cooperative

Analysis

- Informal and anarchic harvesting in the whole valley, including higher and poorer villages: desperate financial need of local population
- Arising conflict between institutions: delay of project implementation, withheld results. Case of appropriation of the project. Pressure from higher agencies
- Handful of local actors acting on own accord: Exclusion of all other interested members
- Issues of interests and motivations raised

Conclusions

- Choice of suitable local candidates: crucial leaders not seeking own interest, a difficult task
- Full integration of suitable local actors seeking the interest of all into active participation
- Flow of actions impeded by administrative burden, lack of coordination, communication between institutions
- Authorities must take decisions accounting for prevalent poverty of local populations
- Alternatives should be considered to strike a balance between a traditional system and newly designed directives?