

INTEGRATING WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES AS A MEANS OF SUSTAINING CONSERVATION OF CROP GENETIC DIVERSITY ON SMALL- FARMS IN MOROCCO

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In Morocco, women's perspectives and views on plants, particularly food crops, are often overlooked because of the prevailing assumption that male farmers are the unique experts on these crops and the ambiguous relationship between women's acquired knowledge of agricultural production and women's status in the farm-household. As a consequence, women are seldom approached or solicited to contribute to agricultural research. The participatory gender approach adopted in investigating *in situ* conservation of agricultural diversity on-farm has attempted to ensure that women's views are identified and taken into account in the research and work agenda of collaborating communities. One activity in this direction consisted of conducting focus groups discussions with women in communities where *in situ* conservation project activities were implemented. The objectives were to 1) examine the aspects insufficiently covered in an earlier socio-economic baseline conducted with male farmers, and to 2) to determine women's views and perspectives regarding the use and maintenance of target crop landraces. A total of 89 women participated in group discussions. The focal themes included the role of women in target crop production and use, their contribution in crop selection and seed management practices, their knowledge of target crop varieties and their participation in decision-making regarding crop and variety choices. Important findings were the substantial contribution of women to crop production, particularly in the case of alfalfa and faba bean, the elaborate nature of women's knowledge of crop landraces, and the extent of variability between sites in terms of women's involvement in marketing. Women were found to be as informed as their husbands or their fathers regarding the differences between landraces and improved varieties, seed prices on the local market and crop growing conditions. Women's responsibility for livestock, crop processing, and food preparation across sites made them very knowledgeable about quality aspects. Most importantly, women knew more than male farmers with respect to the relationship between on-farm use, quality and food products from selected crops. Equally important was the result that women's views were consistent with those of male farmers, which had been collected through an earlier formal survey conducted with farm-household heads. Understanding and consideration of women's views and programming women's effective participation in project training opportunities could contribute to sustaining conservation efforts of agricultural biodiversity on-farm.