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.