

**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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The 12th Biennial Conference of the International  
Association for the Study of Commons, 14-18 July  
2008, Cheltenham, England

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# The Agoundis Valley



# 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
- 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?