# CHALLENGING AGRIBUSINESS AND BUILDING ALTERNATIVES IN TUNISIA AND MOROCCO

WORKING GROUP ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TUNISIA AND ATTAC MAROC

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Working Group on Food Sovereignty in Tunisia and ATTAC Maroc

Written by: Ghassen ben Khelifa
Edited by: Hamza Hamouchene and Sam Harris
Cover image: Ali Aznague

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# 1. OVERVIEW

The famine and 'bread uprisings' that have erupted in the early part of the last decade in many southern areas of Tunisia and Morocco revealed the extent of the failures of the global food system. Large corporations have monopolised food production with a focus on their own profit where mono-cropping, export to higher paying markets, biofuel production, basic foodstuff speculation and land grabbing are rife. This industrialised agricultural extraction is having an increasingly detrimental impact on already scarce water resources[1]; as mass production, mono-cropping and heavy water consumption within arid zones such as deserts leads to the diminishing of valuable, non-renewable groundwater. Meanwhile the conversion of arable lands from food production to use for energy production (biofuels) and the growing of crops for use in European cosmetics such as Jojoba (Simmondsia chinensis) in Tunisia can be seen as virtual water exportation[2].

This new form of colonialism, driven by corporate profit, exploits a food system in North Africa and the Maghreb which itself was the result of 19th century colonialism when an extractive process of accumulation and seizure was instigated in southern states to support urban centres in the north.

New systems of dependency and dominance are being forged. A focus on raw materials exportation puts food sovereignty at risks in two ways: either through rentier regimes[3] that reinforce food dependency and reliance on food imports, like in the case of Algeria; or through the exploitation of land, water and other resources - mainly for the sake of commercial, industrial and export farming – like in Tunisia and Morocco.

This development model, which most impacts poor villagers in marginalised regions, results in serious tensions, leading to resistance and protests. Communities attempt to resist the plundering of their mineral resources, the seizure of their lands, the severe exploitation of their workforce and the loss of their livelihoods. However, it is clear that this form of development is not compatible with transitional justice due to its disastrous social and ecological consequences[4]. Meanwhile, the situation has worsened in recent decades in the aftermath of the neo-liberal reconfiguration of the region's economy and the increase of cross-border capital flows.

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1 Study: Extractive pattern and fighting against it in North Africa; Hamza Hamouchene (TNI), November 2019.

2 Allan, J.A. 2003, "Virtual water - the water, food and trade nexus: useful concept or misleading metaphor?" Water International -1 28: 4-11

3 In a Rentier Regime, all or an important portion of a State's national revenues derive from the rent of local resources to external clients.

4 Gudynas, E. 2013. "Transitions to post-extractivism: directions, options, areas of action." In Beyond Development: Alternative – 6 Visions from Latin America, edited by M. Lang & D. Mokrani,165-188. Quito & Amsterdam: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation & Transnational Institute.

Studies by the Working Group for Food Sovereignty in Tunisia[5] and ATTAC Maroc[6] about the state of the agricultural sector in each country focused on small food producers: small farmers and agricultural workers. These studies confirmed that food access and food production are undeniably political issues.

This report summarises the results, shedding light on the struggles and concerns of small farmers, fishermen and agricultural workers in Morocco and Tunisia from a grassroots and social change perspective.

5 Report: "Our Food, our Agriculture, our Sovereignty", Working Group for Food Sovereignty, June 2019, Tunis.

6 Report : Pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire au Maroc: étude de terrain sur les politiques agricoles et le pillage des ressources, ATTAC Maroc, October 2019.

# 2. FOOD SECURITY OR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

Food security and food sovereignty are defined by multiple layers of economic, social and political understanding. In this section we look at what we mean by each term and address the question of whether small farmers, and we as people, should support food security or food sovereignty.

## A- FOOD SECURITY

The concept of food security emerged during the late 1960s[7]. It is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as follows: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life"[8].

From this definition, it is clear that the core of food security is associated with food provision, without dwelling on the ways and means to provide it. This is where the major problem lies: the concept of food security suggests that it is not necessary for a country to produce its basic food needs as long as importing them from other countries would ensure an adequate and secure provision of food[9].

Importing food to meet local needs could be seen as a magical solution to food problems in the world, and an example of solidarity between peoples. In reality, it entails mechanisms aimed at impoverishing, starving and depriving people of their sovereignty for the purpose of subduing and controlling them. The agricultural production system has witnessed a fundamental change based on the duality of productivity and profit. This has led to the loss not only of livelihoods founded on subsistence agriculture, but also the social and human benefits of self-sufficiency and production, in favour of so-called 'agribusiness'. This new production pattern is nothing but a dispossession, seizure and subduing mechanism. This philosophy has direct catastrophic consequences on the national and local structures of agricultural production, especially on small and medium-sized farmers, including:

- Destroying the local agriculture potential by privileging imported over locally produced food and weakening local competition. As a result, local farmers find themselves on the brink of bankruptcy, with some forced to quit agricultural work while others attempt to adapt to the workings

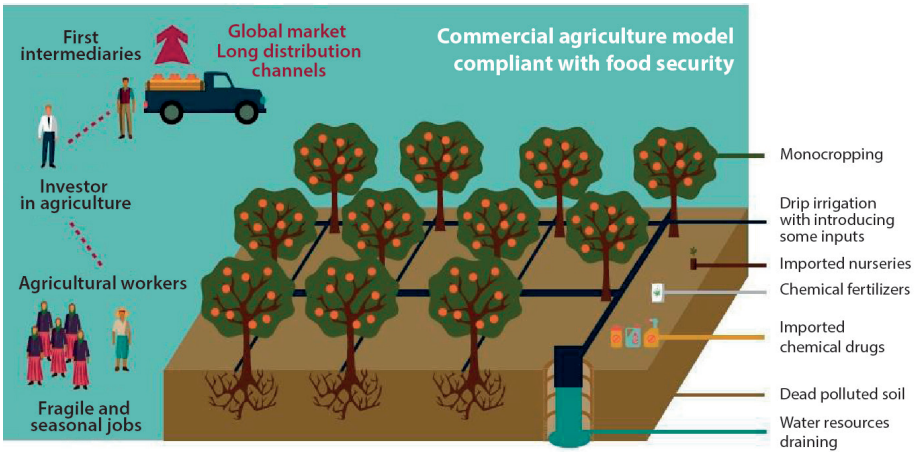
7 Ajl, M.; peasantries, food sovereignty and environment; Interview of Habib Ayeb, on 4th March 2018 in Tunis; Observatory of Food Sovereignty and Environment; 2018.

8 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/faoitaly/documents/pdf/pdf_Food_Security_Cocept_Note.pdf

9 Colin A.; Food sovereignty, agricultural collective mobilisations and multiple instrumentations of a transnational concept; Revue Tiers Monde, 2011.

of the challenging market.

- Substituting the local agricultural production pattern, which is based on the provision of the basic needs for local supply, by other secondary products that are more profitable.
- Diverting national agriculture focus from meeting local needs to the task of draining local natural resources in order to increase the volume of exports and transactions.
- Replacing the national stocks of local seeds in favour of imported and genetically modified seeds.
- Perpetuating the state of economic dependency, especially food dependency, through a reliance on importation and global food markets.




## B- FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

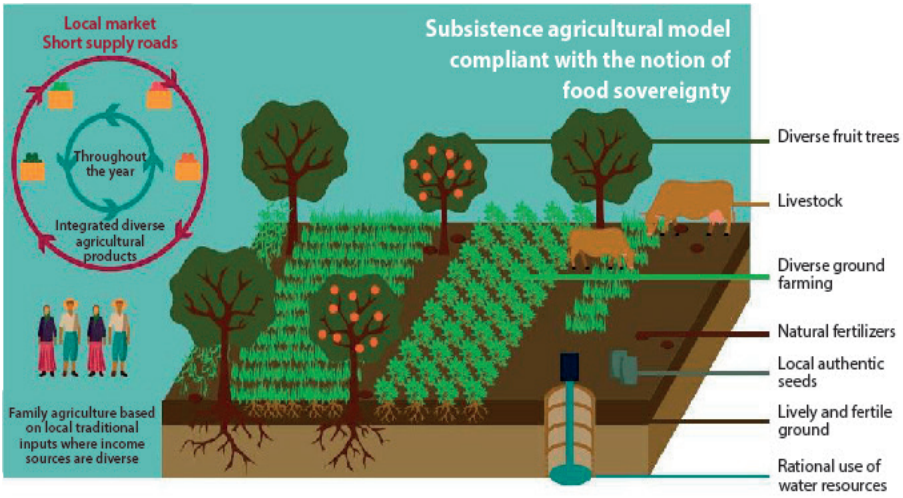
The concept of food sovereignty emerged in 1996, coined by the movement of farmers' during the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) food summit. Food sovereignty was defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems"[10], which encompasses the following principles:

- Prioritising local farming to feed people, and making water, lands, seeds and loans accessible to landless farmers. This recognises the need to create pathways for agricultural reform in order to combat genetically modified organisms (GMOs), to ensure free access to seeds, and to preserve water supplies as a public asset and a shared interest, ensuring sustainable distribution.

10 https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/

- The right of farmers to produce food, as well as the right of consumers to choose the quality, producer and production method of what they want to consume.
- The right of states to adopt protective procedures against low-priced imports.
- Associating agricultural product prices with their production costs, so that states would have the right to impose taxes on low price imports, be committed to a sustainable agricultural product and to monitor production within the internal market in order to prevent the surplus.
- Involving people in the choices and directions of future agricultural policies.
- Recognising the rights of farmers that play a major role in agrarian and food production[11].

It is significant to note that the concept of food sovereignty is an expression of the challenges faced by small and medium-sized farmers, supporting their vision of agriculture which benefits farmers and people in general. In fact, the concept of food sovereignty is in stark contrast with that of food security. Food sovereignty recognises the necessity of supporting local production. Therefore, the concept of food security is based on the central role of global markets in the issue of providing food, whereas food sovereignty promotes the nations' rights to involve farmers to set their agrarian policies and food priorities.



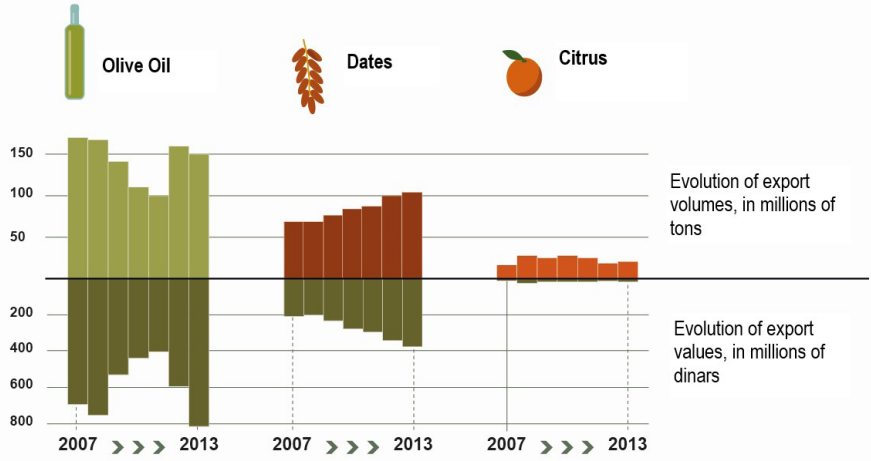

11 Maaras Kh., What is food sovereignty? Website Attac Maroc, 12th December. See also: http://www.fao.org/3/a-ax736e.pdf

# 3. IMPACT OF THE CURRENT AGRICULTURAL MODEL ON EXPORTS IN TUNISIA AND MOROCCO

The theory of food security is based on the concept of specialised agriculture encouraging patterns of agricultural production known for their quality and productivity for export. Meanwhile, the most consumed agricultural products at the local level are abandoned under the pretext of high costs or the incompatibility of this type of production with agricultural infrastructure. In Tunisia and Morocco, the policy of food security has encouraged the production of specific agricultural products such as olives, dates, citrus, tomatoes, and argan, in order to benefit from their export revenues, at the expense of essential produce such as wheat, dairy, meat and vegetables.

## A- TUNISIA: MASS PRODUCTION FOR EXPORT AS A PRIORITY

**Evolution of the most important exported agricultural products between 2007 and 2013. In volumes.**
*Source: National Institute of Statistics - Tunisia.*




## SPECIALISED AGRICULTURE: THE CITRUS SECTOR AS AN EXAMPLE

Water availability has been a decisive factor in shaping the agricultural map in Tunisia throughout history. The uneven distribution of water resources has spawned a natural specialisation for each region according to its climate.

In the guise of attempting to modernise agriculture and maximise profits, colonial agricultural policies pushed this specialisation to its limit, paving the way to mono-cropping at the expense of diverse subsistence farming. In the north east of the

country, specifically in the peninsula of Cap-Bon, the farming of citrus intensified under colonialism and after Independence, promoted by the Tunisian authorities through multiple subsequent public policies.

In Cap-Bon, citrus farming covers over 70% of the available land – around 19,000 ha of plantations, representing half of the irrigated land in the area. Farms in Cap-Bon account for 80% of Tunisia's citrus production[12]. Exploiting the land in this way consumes huge quantities of water, which raises the question of sustainability for this model.

Over the last decade, citrus production has increased by 55%, yet in 2016 the percentage of citrus exports was low at less than 5% of overall production. This is despite the State's efforts to maintain competition over the Tunisian Maltese orange in the global market. However, at the level of the local market the production increase has led to a 33% drop in the price of Maltese oranges between 2011 and 2016[13], while production costs keep growing due to the rise of imported assets and electricity prices. Consequently, small and medium-sized farmers are no longer able to compete.

*The machine used for sorting and packing at the Co-operative Company for Agricultural Services in Beni Khaled. It is now rented to a private company due to financial difficulties – Nabeul.*

12 A look at the global and Tunisian market of citrus; observation note of the National Observatory of Agriculture; ONAGRI; 2018.

13 IBID.

## STATE-OWNED AGRICULTURAL LANDS: PROBLEMS OF PRIVATE OPERATION IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

The trend of nationalisation of agricultural lands and the re-acquisition by the State began in the 1960s. The philosophy of nationalisation of agricultural lands was dedicated at that time to the principle of national sovereignty over agricultural resources and to the objective of achieving food self-sufficiency. Today the State owns approximately 500,000 ha[14] of land in Tunisia.

However, in 1986, the implementation of agricultural structural reforms was the catalyst for the Government's withdrawal of support of the agricultural sector in exchange for opening the path for private investments. Ever since, those State-owned agricultural lands have been subject to privatisation and transfer to the benefit of private investment companies in the agricultural sector. The most notable consequence has been the change in function of State-owned agricultural lands from local food production to agricultural production primarily for exportation.

## THE VILLAGE EL IITIZEZ 3 AS AN EXAMPLE: DRAINING LAND AND WATER TO PRODUCE OLIVE OIL FOR EXPORT

El Iitizez 3 in the Menzel Bouzaiane region (within the governorate of Sidi Bouzid) is a tangible example of agricultural investment methods that are severely depleting natural resources, particularly land and water.

In 2017 a new investment of 18 million TND (approximately 5.7 million EUR) in El Iitizez 3 instigated a development plan to plant 660,000 olive trees over an area of 440 ha (with an ultimate goal of planting a total of 1,000,000 olive trees), together with an oil mill and packing plant at the farm.

The plan reportedly[15] also calls for drilling five groundwater aquifer wells[16], in order to meet the vast water needs of the new olive trees. While Tunisian olive tree plantations are essentially rain-fed, the development plan calls for the planting of non-native cultivars from Italy, Greece and Spain which tolerate being densely planted, and as a result require significant additional water resources. Such dense olive plantations also exhaust the soil of nutrients and reduce its fertility, in exchange for increased productivity.

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**14** Ben Saad A., How to restructure State lands to serve workers in the Tunisian rural areas, Civilized Dialogue, 2nd November 2015.

**15** Ben Saad A., How to restructure State lands to serve workers in the Tunisian rural areas, Civilized Dialogue, 2nd November 2015.

**16** Extract from a dialogue between the Technical manager of "El Iitizez 3" farm and our researchers on 3rd December 2018.

While an agricultural investment project that aims to plant one million olive trees might immediately appear attractive, increasing production toward food self-sufficiency for Tunisians, the reality is that the increased production is intended for export. The investor in El Iitizez 3 is a successful businessman and owner of the CHO Group, whose businesses include global olive oil brands such as "TERRA DELYSSA". He is also an investor in similar plantations geared solely towards exports.

It is ironic that the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fishing has announced a development in olive oil exports by 150% in terms of quantity and by 180% in terms of revenue since the beginning of the last export season, while referring to the inability of most Tunisians to benefit from this basic foodstuff, considering its high prices in the local market (10 TND per litre)[17].

## THE DATES SECTOR: DEGLET NOUR

During the nineteenth century, colonial policy sought to encourage nomadic tribes to form permanent settlements through several mechanisms, including limiting rangelands spaces and imposing mobility permits within and outside of the Nefzaouan territory. Another was to offer land grants to nomadic inhabitants, sometimes by 'al khammassa' - where the tenant would work for the landowner, earning one fifth of overall production. Colonial authorities also improved infrastructure by digging artesian wells, which created supply points for drinking and irrigation water, encouraging the nomads to settle near these wells, especially in the event of droughts in the desert region.

The provision of artesian wells was also intended to produce Deglet Nour dates in order to fulfil the needs of the European market, especially the French one. Therefore, a Commercial and Agricultural Company was created in the Tunisian south, situated over 45 ha in the region of Oued El Maleh. Between 1926 and 1947 around 4500 Deglet Nour palm trees were planted, making this area the foundation of a specialised agricultural production pattern, namely Deglet Nour in Nefzaoua[18].

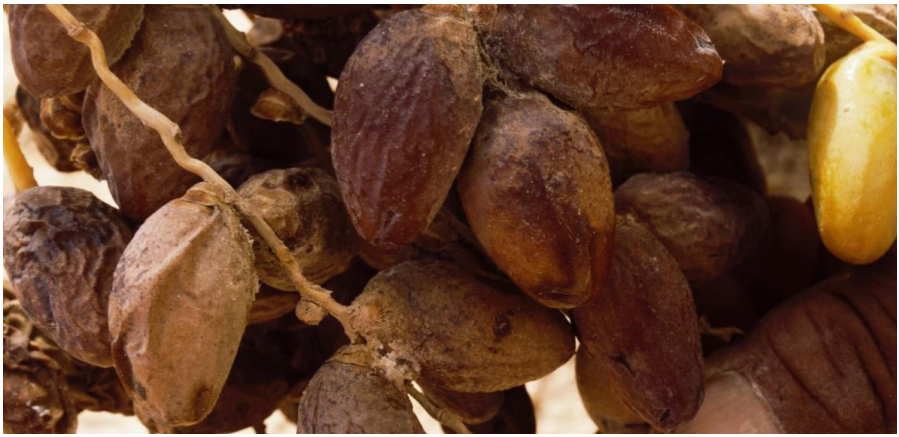
Following independence, the Tunisian authorities continued the colonial era policy of specialised production, boosting output and focusing on global exports for their significant revenues.

However, a major drawback of this agricultural pattern is the progressive extinction of other, native, types of dates, thanks to the dominance of

17 Website of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries.

18 Kassah A. F., Sector of dates in Tunisia at the time of adjustments, economic and strategic agricultural policies, 1995.

Deglet Nour. Over 300 date cultivars were formerly the foundation of Tunisian oases[19], supporting a rich biodiversity and providing food for oases populations thanks to their affordability and their nutrient value.



*Impairment of the dates due to the water salinity in Lazala oasis – Kebili*

These specialised production patterns have caused most Tunisian oases to diminish in vitality and lose biological and production diversity. An example is the decline of the three-layer planting style, which was a fundamental feature of the Tunisian oases as it included three production levels: planting palm trees in the first layer, planting fruit trees such as pomegranate, olive and other types of fruits in the second layer, then planting vegetables, wheat and barley in the third layer. This planting style endowed the oasis with a productive potential that met the food needs of its populations in difficult climate conditions.

## OLIVES: SPECIALISATION AND IMPORTED CULTIVARS

French colonial authorities engaged in land-grabbing in Sfax in Eastern Tunisia to create a lucrative area of olive plantations nearly 70 $km^2$ in size[20].

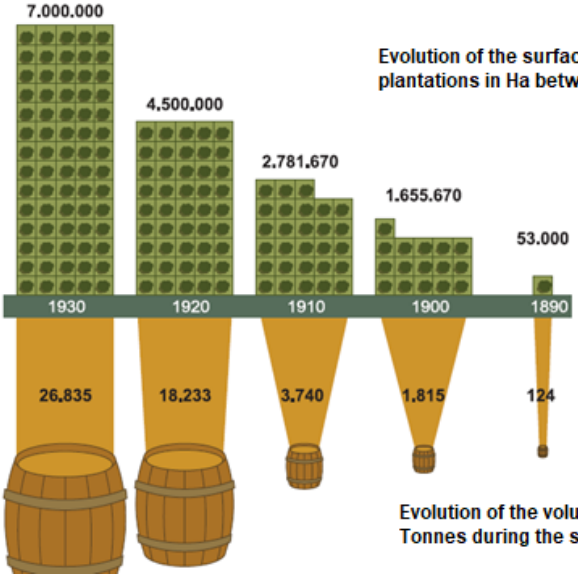
The source: 189 archives of the Mix Chamber of Trade and Agriculture of the South, Sfax

After independence, the Tunisian State continued this practise with a focus on the export market. The rapid growth of olive tree plantations in Tunisia was also due to the tendency of small and medium-sized farmers to plant olive trees, while ceasing growing other crops, particularly wheat and barley.

19 IBID.

20 Kachida N., Management of agriculture and modernisation of the colonised agriculture in Tunisia, 2017.

Olive trees now cover an estimated 1.7 million ha, significantly more than wheat and barley, which cover only 1.127 million ha combined[21]. The notable quality of Tunisian olive oil, and the good production potential of this sector, have led to Tunisia being acknowledged as a global leader in olive oil production and further encouraged this specialisation and mono-cropping. Adding to these challenges is the profit-driven decision of many Tunisian farmers and private investors to use imported olive tree cultivars from Italy and Spain, instead of using local varieties, something State policy has done little to address.




Evolution of the surfaces of olive trees plantations in Ha between 1890 and 1930

Evolution of the volume of olive oil imports in Tonnes during the same period

## B- MOROCCO: PRIORITISING EXPORTS AT THE EXPENSE OF SMALL FARMERS

While Morocco was a Protectorate of France in the first half of the Twentieth Century, France determined Morocco's agricultural priorities - largely to complement French needs, such as cereal production or, during the Second World War, textile and oil raw materials. During the 1950s, exports to European markets shifted towards citrus and vegetables, which continued after independence.

Following the debt crisis of the 1970s, financial assistance for Morocco was conditional on the implementation of structural reform programmes to reduce public investment and subsidies. This

21 National Institute of big plantations, 2016 statistics.

resulted in the privatisation of many public agricultural companies, liberalising of basic food prices and reducing regulation, which worsened the already fragile situation of small and medium-sized farmers. The impoverishment of small farmers has intensified as economic liberalisation has grown and Free Trade deals have been enforced along World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules.

*A small farmer in the Tamtuch region, harvesting the yearly crop of potatoes. Image taken in Tamtuch, a mountainous region in Tinghir, southern Morocco. Photo taken by Ali Aznague.*

In 2008, the Moroccan government implemented the "Green Morocco Plan" intended to improve the investment conditions for multinational companies and big local producers, in order to overcome the major difficulties they face in the context of globalisation, global crisis and the intensification of competition within the international market. This plan is based on supporting new and existing large-scale agricultural production intended for export, and export groups which small farmers could be associated with (subject to their conditions). Subsistence farming of cereals, sugars and similar products is deemed to be unprofitable and these would be imported.

The State export approach has destroyed many local agricultural cultivars in Morocco due to its focus on exportable produce, with commercial agriculture relying on hybrid seeds utilised mainly in the production of grains, corn and vegetables.

This agricultural exporting model, backed by the Ministry of Agriculture, reflects production and consumption patterns of capitalist markets, using hybrid and non-native seeds, large greenhouses, and

ultimately decimating local, traditional cultivars and farming practises. Trademarks for origin and quality have been established on agricultural products such as the argan tree, dates and saffron by the government, forcing small farmers to grow cheaper non-native alternatives. These alien cultivars of seeds and trees are based on soil exhausting and water-depleting methods, an intensive use of chemical fertilisers and toxic pesticides, and high consumption of fossil fuels which, taken together, contribute to climate change and result in flooding and droughts.

The State has set an integrated system of financial subsidies for the agricultural sector to encourage export agriculture in irrigated areas that only make up 17% of the total agricultural area, whilst rain-related areas that are central to the production of primary foodstuffs, such as cereals and corns (around 60%), have been marginalised. This system of subsidies can be considered as a means to plunder public money by large commercial organisations.

*The road leading to Tamtuch village, women carrying their corn harvesting. Photo taken by Ali Aznague.*

The majority of agricultural areas dedicated to cereals are located in uncultivated lands that do not benefit from dams or groundwater. In most cases, these are located outside of the irrigation perimeters that are mostly subject to government intervention. The total area of cereal production is declining, as is the area for barley, in exchange for increasing areas of soft wheat. The field research team in Morocco has concluded that small farmers have a tendency towards irrigation perimeters in order to replace cereals cultivation with that of hay (alfalfa and corn), used mainly as fodder for cows that are raised for milk production[22].

22 Report : Pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire au Maroc : étude de terrain sur les politiques agricoles et le pillage des ressources, ATTAC Maroc, October 2019.

In citrus production we found similar evidence of large corporations acquiring large arms. This has been noted through field research in the regions of Guerdane in Oulad Teyma and Taroudant. The same applies to the farmers who produce vegetables and bananas in greenhouses. Small farmers in each agricultural sector are under pressure from the large commercial agricultural producers.

## EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS

Exporting is based on the exploitation and oppression of workers, especially women workers who constitute most of the workforce in the vegetable production sector. Indeed, foreign and Moroccan agricultural export companies use two methods to administer their workers :

1. A proportion of companies employ workers directly, in compliance with the minimum requirements of the labour code which includes adhering to a minimum wage, declaring workers in the national social security fund, insurance for occupational injuries, one day off per week and annual holiday allowance.

2. Other companies use intermediaries to hire workers at arms-length and without the protections enshrined in law. These are often workers from poor and remote areas employed on a daily basis with no guarantee of further work. The intermediary companies have proliferated in the region and have become known for forcing down the pay of senior workers and breaking off trade union strikes.

Here we note some of the indications of injustice and exploitation inflicted on workers[23]:

- The peasant minimum wage is not enough for workers to fulfil their needs : the rising costs of living, including food, have resulted in rural villages now having comparable costs to urban areas. While there are agricultural corporations and banks that grant interest-free loans to workers, this type of support is very limited. As a result, farmers are turning to microcredits.

- Industrial farms no longer allow their employees to benefit from the production for their own consumption, a practice which used to supplement wages.

- Workers in industrial agriculture work around 8 hours a day under greenhouse covers in excessive heat and high humidity, which causes many diseases. More dangerous is the use of chemical pesticides while they work inside the greenhouses, together with the

23 IBID.

absence of protection methods for the workers who spray them. Farm officials do not disclose to workers critical information about the toxic substances used, for example the chemical type, active substance or the minimum time for not entering the greenhouses after spraying. Likewise, officials do not post information on health and safety regulations related to the use of pesticides in their appropriate places.

- In order to maintain the condition of seedlings and plants, workers are forced to wash their hands with harmful chemicals.

- Doctors do regularly visit sites but there are concerns these visits are more focused on public image than the health of workers with safety and hygiene conditions not addressed.

- Work accidents are frequent in farms and packing stations where the majority are not insured. Employers cover the cost of treatment in some simple cases, but they avoid liability in the event of temporary or permanent disability, leaving workers struggling to cope. Fatal accidents are often explained as fate.

All male and female respondents acknowledged the widespread existence of sexual harassment. Women are subject to harassment in the workplace, especially by farm and packing station officials who extort female workers and threaten to deprive them of work if they refuse.

Most of the big agricultural companies do not have nurseries for childcare, and women do not benefit from legal breaks to breastfeed their children. In addition, farm officials do not take into account the conditions of pregnant workers, such as the need to avoid heavy labour, nor the danger of oxic pesticides that can lead to miscarriage. In the rare cases where consideration is given, it is thanks to the intervention of the trade union. Women often hide their pregnancy because employers refuse to employ them when they are pregnant.

It should be noted that the labour inspectorate does not have any legal authority to prevent violations. Its role is limited to mediation and providing advice to employers. This advice is often perceived as helping to circumvent the law and justify violations, while demonstrating constant disregard of the complaints of workers.

## THE WORLD BANK'S NEOLIBERAL PERSPECTIVE ON AGRICULTURE

The WB requires the withdrawal of any policies that fall within "import substitution" and "export-based development". The bank finances operations that foster infrastructures related to raw materials production, which meet the needs of the Northern countries markets (metals and fuels) and agriculture intended for export (cotton, peanuts, cocoa and coffee).

Besides, banks managers and some organisations such as the Bill Gates Foundation encourage the investment of millions of dollars into the industrial farming and help multinationals such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Pioneer Cargill etc. to register and sell patents pertaining to plants and seeds. However, those are joint assets that have belonged to humanity and local communities for thousands of years; they have just added patents for genetically modified bodies, fertilisers and pesticides.

As a result, the main agricultural stock exchanges (such as Chicago, Kansas City and Minneapolis) are the ones that impose their prices over the other markets in the whole planet. Hence, the local production has been completely dissociated from the reality of the populations' needs, which has affected the nutrition of millions of human beings.

While the liberal economic theory confirms that prices fluctuations in the "liberal market" will be weakened when melting with other markets (liberal theories based on the law of large numbers), the tangible experience shows that the fluctuation of prices in the different markets is sustaining and growing. FAO recorded a continuous growing fluctuation over the prices of essential goods during the last two decades. This prices fluctuation – that seems to be nowadays an everlasting feature in the market - has not existed in the past.

It is obvious that the elimination of customs' barriers in developing countries and fostering trade between Europe and the United States are two responsible factors for the growth of global prices fluctuation over agricultural goods. This makes the global food subject to few companies that control prices and volatility, generating exponential profits.

The emergence of food crises is likely to take place, where some categories of wage earners and poor farmers would become unable to buy their essential food needs, and their purchasing power would tend to decline. Such was the case during the whole neoliberal capital era, marked by the absence of indexes to master the speculative trade of global financial markets pertaining to agricultural raw materials after the financial crisis burst in 2007-2008.

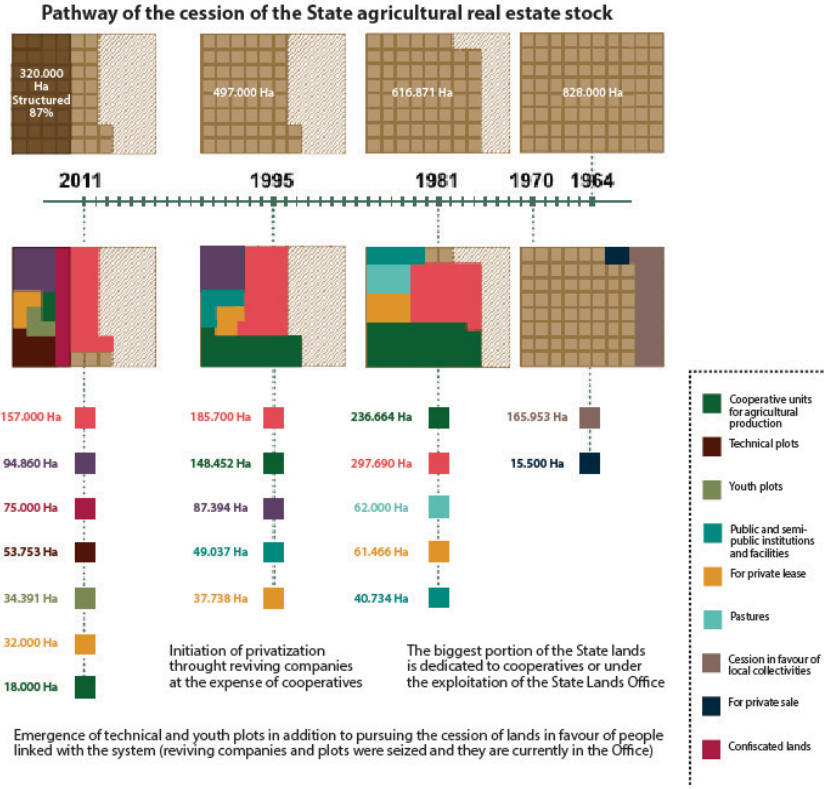
# 4. THE RIGHT TO LAND ACCESS AND POLICIES OF LAND GRABBING

There are many approaches to land grabbing in Tunisia and Morocco, yet it is clear that the neoliberal approach of dispossessing small farmers and transferring land rights to so-called 'agricultural investors' and local and foreign industrial agriculture companies, is common to both countries.

## A- TUNISIA

After independence in 1956 the Tunisian State started reclaiming agricultural land previously possessed by French settlers either through nationalisation or by compensating and buying lands from settlers. State-owned agricultural land was part of a co-operative movement in the 1960s focused on diversifying production and improving productivity.

The State's subsequent adoption of a liberal economic and political program signified the failure of the co-operative approach and systematic neglect paved the way for the liquidation and cession of State-owned land.




*Elloumi M.; State-owned lands in Tunisia. History of appropriation by public authorities; rural studies (192: 43-60; 201)*

## EL IITIZEZ 2: FOREIGN INVESTMENT ON STATE LAND TO PRODUCE JOJOBA

El Iitizez 2 is a 725 ha farm located on good quality State land with high ground water potential. The farm was leased at the end of the 1990s to a foreign investor during a period dominated by land privatisation. Limited data exists on this investor; therefore, this report focuses on the narratives of El Iitizez villagers as well as our field visit to this area.

Jojoba is used in medications and cosmetics, to wax fruit for export and to make plastic products and also has a potential as a biofuel. The jojoba grown at El Iitizez 2 is exclusively for export. Tunisia is not self-sufficient in terms of food production, yet El Iitizez 2 is a prime example of land being given up to foreign investors, who produce products that do not benefit the country in any way.

*Planting the jojoba trees in "El Iitizez 2" farm, Menzel Bouzayane (Photo taken by Ghassen Ben Khelifa)*

During our visit to the El Iitizez 2 farm, we noticed the existence of drip irrigation pipelines extending throughout the jojoba plantations, in addition to a deep well. This supports the argument that foreign investments are draining groundwater resources and is particularly damaging in an area such as this, which is classified as having limited water resources.

According to the locals' testimonies, this foreign investment has only exploited a portion of the land that was leased from the State, while leaving the remainder undeveloped (220 ha undeveloped out of 750 ha). This is a clear violation of the specifications of State lands lease and use, stating that the whole land should be used according to a comprehensive

programme subject to the approval of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The government regularly links private local and foreign agricultural investment to creation of new jobs. However, the El Iitizez 2 example disproves this premise as only two people are employed permanently; the farm guard and the technical manager of the project - seemingly too few for the size of the farm. It should be noted that specifications generally stipulate a minimum level of workforce and that in case of infringement, the right of the investor to use the land is withdrawn.

The example of El Iitizez 2 farm shows the extent of the agricultural, environmental and social cost generated by the systematic cession of the State-owned agricultural lands under the pretext of profitable investments.

## B- MOROCCO

Morocco became increasingly integrated with the global economy during the colonial era and this continued under the post-independence WTO Free Trade rules, destroyed the relationship of small farmers with the land and fragmenting traditional social structures and the co-ownership of agricultural lands. The State supported the privatisation of the two public companies that were managing around a third of reclaimed colonised lands and have continued awarding the remaining land to private investors under the Green Moroccan Plan. Between 2004 and 2018 a total area of 105,699 ha was distributed[24].

Morocco's liberal openness, the programme of structural reform and the Green Morocco Plan all paved the way for big local and foreign private business to dominate the agricultural production sector, while also benefiting from a series of exemptions and subsidies. This led to the deepening impoverishment of small farmers who become forced to rent or sell their lands.

Collective land is land held by collective property rights granted to a group of individuals, such as a tribe or village, by which the land is owned by the group as a collective rather than individually held portions or shares, while the proceeds may be distributed among the members of the collective. The total area of collective lands is around 15 million ha, with around 10 million inhabitants. The total population of Morocco is around 34 million.[25]

Collective lands originated in antiquity where security circumstances and living conditions compelled tribes to exploit their resources jointly and collectively, and continued to

24 Reports figures about the public real estate mobilized for investment in the financial law projects for the years 2016, 2017, 2018 et 2019. Website of the Ministry of Finance.

25 « Le Matin » French newspaper, « In Morocco, there are 15 million Ha, including 182 000 Ha that are exploited outside of any legal framework", January 13th 2019 at 5:24 p.m.

administer those lands according to each tribe's customs and traditions until colonial rule. Collective lands were regulated by a 1919 dahir[26] or royal decree, enabling the colonial authority to control the groups' representatives and facilitate the exploitation of those lands by the settlers. The colonial authority introduced some adjustments to the dahir in order to strengthen exploitation and the dahir remains in force, subject to amendments following Moroccan independence.

Each group, tribe or community with rights to collective lands have representatives who are responsible for the daily management of the land, and their approval is necessary to distribute, sell or lease the land. There are 6,532 representatives for 5,043 dynastic groups[27]. Approximately 85% of collective lands are pastoral, used by the entitled population. The rest of the most important areas of around 2 million ha are dedicated to the agricultural and forestry activities. The collective lands are exploited according to their natural operation, based either on rainfalls or on irrigation systems.

Having obtained the approval of the collective's representative, the Ministry of Interior is able to transfer the use of collective land to corporations or the State's institutions in order to implement any number of economic projects. In the post-colonial era, the Moroccan government has sought to expand the export potential of modern agriculture including major public investments in irrigation infrastructure. A further dahir of 1969 mandated the partitioning, registration and privatisation of all collective lands within the irrigated perimeter, facilitating the transfer of land to large corporations and modernising agriculture through the massive use of fertilisers, pesticides and selected seeds for products intended mainly for export. It granted subsidies to purchase agricultural equipment, facilitated funding through the National Fund of the Agricultural Loan, and enacted a low agricultural tax. Each of these measures has reduced subsistence farming and weakened the local food market, damaging the self-sufficiency of Morocco.

This approach aims to create and encourage export agriculture to get hard currency in return. The State justifies this approach with the argument that economic development relies on modernised agriculture.

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**26** A decree-law promulgated by the Moroccan monarch as the highest authority of the nation.13th 2019 at 5:24 p.m.

**27** « Les terres appartenant aux collectivités ethniques au Maroc », Revue Marocaine de Droit, 2012.

## REAL ESTATE CONCENTRATION IN THE LOUKKOS REGION

In the Loukkos region, where land values have increased significantly, there is conflict and tension over the ownership of, and rights to, collective land between small farmers and large corporations. Most small farms in the Loukkos region are on collective land, each occupying less than three hectares. The selling price of land has increased significantly, reaching up to 62,000 USD per ha, while leasing rates are up to 1,555 USD per ha per year.

Most of the collective lands in the region are leased by wealthy individuals and export companies, with many examples of families, individuals or companies owning more than 500 ha. Land leases generally have a five-year term, following which the rights to use the land revert to the collective group. In many cases the lessee continues to occupy the land and refuses to return it to the collective owner despite legal action, which is slow to deal with disputes. In the flatlands of the Loukkos region, all traditional seeds disappeared in favour of commercial hybrid seeds distributed by private companies and public services. All respondents declared during the field investigation that those commercial selected seeds require extra care to protect them from diseases and insects and they must be supported by fertilisers and abundant water quantities. This assumes a massive use of toxic pesticides of various types (to treat parasitic diseases and epidemics, to kill insects on and under the soil and to fight against weeds), and huge quantities of fertilisers of various types, including chemicals, solids and liquids that are used in all phases of the plants growth. Respondents also disclosed that farming incomes are insufficient, with farmers and families having to supplement their income or migrate.

# 5. WATER RESOURCES: SMALL FARMERS FACE WATER SHORTAGES DUE TO EXPORT CAPITALIST AGRICULTURE

## A- TUNISIA

All institutional reports unanimously point out that the water situation in Tunisia is highly concerning.[28] The country reached water stress (where water resources are insufficient for needs) in 1994 with available resources of 532 m3 yearly per capita. It is expected that this figure will decrease to 360 m3 by 2030 and to 150 m3 by 2050[29].

Much of Tunisia's water comes from non-renewable groundwater tables and renewable resources are decreasing due to climate change. There has been a clear degradation of the water quality because of high salinity rates and pollution due to industrial activities and the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in the agricultural sector.

## CITRUS SECTOR

Citrus production is known for its use of significant water resources despite its concentration in Cap-Bon where rainfall rates are relatively substantial. Nevertheless, the region is now suffering the depletion of its groundwater sources and the public authorities have diverted water resources to support citrus plantations at the expense of other farming needs.

According to the Water Foodprint website[30], producing 1 kg of oranges requires 560 litres of water. Orange production in Tunisia reached 560,000 tonnes in 2017, therefore, it consumed at least 313.6 million cubic metres of water.

Source: www.waterfootprint.org

In the same year, the State secretariat in charge of water resources announced that "dams stock is estimated at 944 million cubic metres compared to a rate of 1400 million cubic metres during the last three years. The current stock of the Sidi Salem dam, the biggest dam in Tunisia, is around 195 million cubic metres and its filling ratio does not exceed 36%"[31]. A third of Sidi

28 Water problematic; National Institute of Strategic Studies, Tunis, 2017.

29 Ibid.

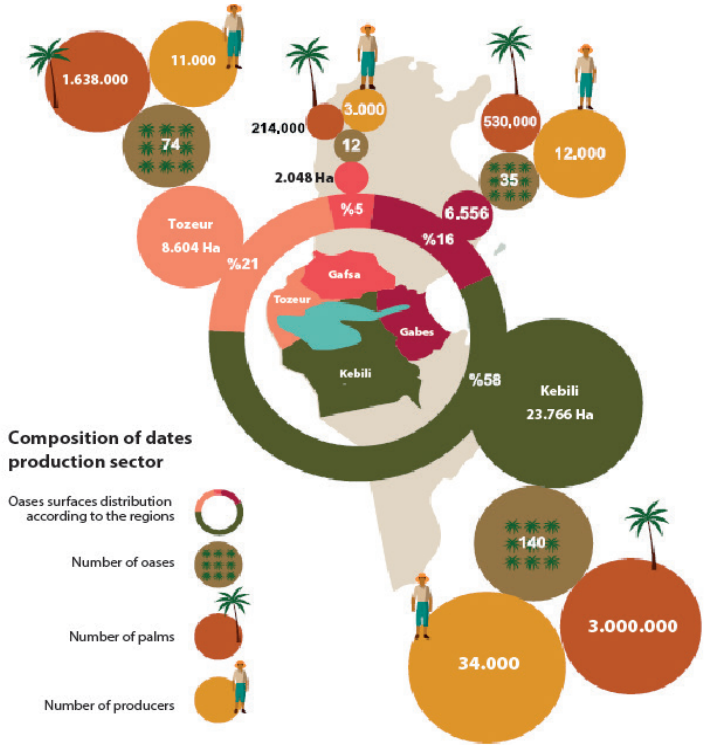
30 https://www.waterfootprintassessmenttool.org/assessment/ and https://waterfootprint.org/en/

31 Declaration of Secretary of State in charge of water resources, Abdallah Rabhi, 6th June 2017.

Salem dam's water is used solely for citrus irrigation, yet the volume of food imports required to offset this is multiplied along with the increasing costs to the Tunisian economy. In 2017, Tunisia exported 26,000 tonnes of citrus at the cost of 14,560 million m3 of'virtual' water, which was used to grow the crop. The real objective is the adoption of an import-based policy, negating the need to achieve local market sufficiency.

## DATES

Date plantations are found in areas of Tunisia characterised by arid and hot climate, such as the South West (Tozeur, Gafsa and Kebili) and Gabes in the South East, where these plants thrive. The strategic reservoir of groundwater that is available in those areas contributes to the prosperity of date plantations. As a result, dates became one of the main pillars of the agricultural production in Tunisia and a source to bring hard currency given the importance of its export earnings.




*Dashboard of dates in Tunisia, National Observatory of Agriculture "ONAGRI"; February 2019*

In Nefzawa, water resources come from two deep groundwater tables: the Terminal Complex aquifer and the Intercalary Continental aquifer. These two aquifers extend over a total area of one million square meters, with Algeria having 700,000 km$^2$, Libya 250,000 km$^2$ and Tunisia just 80,000 km$^2$[32]. Water quantities included in these two aquifers constitute a globally significant strategic reservoir. They are estimated to hold 30,000 billion m3 generated over millions of years, which make them non-renewable aquifers[33]. The water quantities exploited by Tunisia reached 540 million m3 in 2000 - a quarter of the overall extracted quantity. This access to water explains the rapid expansion of palm tree plantations and their spread over all parts of the Nefzawa region[34].

Since the 1980s there has been the problem of the uncontrolled expansion by farmers into what was previously collective land. These expansions cover 72% of the overall area of oases in the Nefzawa region, adding substantially to the production of Deglet Nour dates[35]. So much water is needed, and official systems so slow, that the proprietors drill their own wells to provide water for irrigation while awaiting legal recognition. As a result, the Nefzawa region saw a rapid growth in drilling of private wells within the area of uncontrolled expansions, increasing from 3,733 wells in 2008, to nearly 7,900 wells in 2018[36].

This proliferation of uncontrolled wells has further contributed to the worsening depletion of water resources in the Nefzawa region. The groundwater aquifer resources in the Kebili governorate total 7,236 million m3 per year while their current exploitation level is 407.3 million m3 per year, causing real stress on resources. Over half of this consumption (211.86 million m3) is a result of the uncontrolled expansions and their wells[37].

The overuse of groundwater in the Nefzawa region has contributed to the decline of aquifer levels, which has resulted in less water available for irrigation by users' associations. This decrease is part of a long-term trend, leading water users' associations to consider deepening their own wells to improve their flow and provide the required quantities of irrigation water at the necessary frequency to meet demand. In addition, the exploitation of depleted aquifers has contributed

32 "Analysis of the dates' sector", Agency for the Promotion of Industry and Innovation. Centre of Studies and Industrial Prospection, March 2017.

33 IBID

34 Belloumi M. and Matoussi M. S.; Salinity impacts on the technical efficiency of irrigated agriculture: application of the Nefzawa oases case in Tunisia; Cairn. Infor; 2007.

35 Royal dates, the literal meaning is: "date-palm of light"; "heavenly date".

36 Kebili… due to water scarcity and salinity, 40 types of dates disappeared and production is in danger, Echourouk newspaper, 28 February 2019.

37 IBID

to the growing problem of water salinity, which presents a real threat to the future of dates' plantations and the Nefzawa region in general.

## B- MOROCCO

Over the last 30 years, Morocco has witnessed an unprecedented move towards neoliberal policies in water management and agriculture prioritisation, which has supported the interests of exporters.

In this context, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) intervene to impose the privatisation of public services (such as the drinking water supply), public-private partnerships, and specific strategies in sectors such as tourism, fisheries and energy[38]. Since the 1960s, the State encouraged the exporting agri-businesses at the expense of subsistence farming for local small farmers. To do so, the State adopted the policy of dams dedicated to big capitalist farms, supporting the idea of the superiority of the market.

### THE NEW WATER LAW

In 1995 a water law was passed which rescinded the previous laws of 1914, 1919 and 1925. A review in 2016 sought to modernise the regulations, paving the way for increased capitalist investment and exploitation of natural resources. The State initiated a strategy and National Water Plan for water management to 2030 and announced new regulations including a water law. Public institutions such as Water Basins Agencies were also created tasked with securing water as an indispensable asset now and in the future.

The water law established an institutional framework at three levels:

- At the national level: The Higher Council for Water and Climate was created with the king as honorary president. The Council reviews and advises on the water policy of the State, such as the National Water Plan. The council convenes infrequently and is considered little more than a bureaucratic body.
- At the regional level: Province and district commissions organise a quarterly meeting chaired by the head of the province.
- At the local level: Water Basins Agencies are public institutions whose administrative council meets twice a year, chaired by the Minister responsible for national water and environmental planning.

38 Omar Aziki, Water as a public stock possessed by people, and the State does not have the right to grant it to the private capitals, https://attacmaroc.org

Multiple agencies have an interest in water: The Ministry of Energy, Minerals, Water and Environment is officially in change, along with the National Office of Drinking Water and the Regional Offices of Agricultural Investment. In addition, the ministries of Interior, Agriculture and Fisheries, Health, Economy and Finance all have a stake. Despite this high-level interest the Government has failed to provide safe drinking water for thousands of Moroccans and has been unable to reduce water salinity and the pollution of drinking water. Undeterred by annual protests the exploitation of water reserves to serve the massive modern agriculture intended for export continues, disregarding local food needs. The appropriation of water is a social discrimination issue, where disadvantaged labour classes struggle to access their rights to water and food.

# 6. RESISTANCE AND ALTERNATIVES ON THE HORIZON OF ACHIEVING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

## A- TUNISIA

### REVIVING THE CO-OPERATIVE EXPERIENCE

The co-operative experience was the backbone of the economic model adopted in Tunisia during the 1960s. It was based on two ideas: decolonising the national economy, and adopting a planned economy approach. The co-operative planned approach was predominantly applied to the agricultural sector.

After the failure of the experience of liberal economy during the first years after independence, Tunisia moved towards adopting an economic and a social co-operative project with similarities to the planned economies of China and the Soviet Union. This new economic model was noted for centrally driven directives proclaiming the national liberation from the darkness of colonialism.

Nevertheless, the co-operative experience failed for various reasons at the end of the 1960s. On the one hand, there was fierce resistance by big farmers associated with some factions of President Borguibia's regime, opposing the policies of Ahmed Ben Salah, the Minister responsible for the planned economy policies. On the other hand, there was France, which was not comfortable with the new sovereign policies of its former colony. These factors contributed, alongside bureaucratic processes, to the termination of the planned economy project in Tunisia.

Despite the official abandoning of the co-operative policy by the State, which gave up on most co-operative farms and encouraged private investment in the agricultural sector, some agricultural co-operatives still survive though they face many challenges.

### MABROUKA CO-OPERATIVE:

The Mabrouka agricultural co-operative was established in 1963 on 1,124 ha of State land along with 20 ha of private property contributed by local co-operative farmers[39]. The neighbouring Mabrouka Village benefited from 154 units of social housing owned by locals, as well as the construction of a primary school and a pharmacy to provide the community with all necessities[40].

39 Dialog with Mr. Amara Ghabri, one of the inhabitants of the Mabrouka village and a former worker in the real estate court in Sidi Bouzid, Meknassi, August 2018

40 IBID

*Premises of the co-operative unit of agricultural production in Mabrouka – Meknassi – Governorate of Sidi Bouzid*

After the State's abandonment of the cooperative model in the 1970s, much of the land at Mabrouka was left uncultivated. However, in 2011 a number of unemployed people from the village formed a group to revitalise the land. These second- and third-generation descendants of the original co-operative members have a legitimate claim to the co-operative thanks to the founding agreement and wish to do justice to the work of their parents and grandparents. They also recognise the untapped potential of the Mabrouka land to be cultivated for the benefit of local people. They are working within the legal boundaries of the original co-operative but seeking to change some of the articles of the framework to provide more flexibility and to be relevant to a modern context. The group is managing this State-owned land in line with the principles of food sovereignty and their approach focuses on:

- Right of access to natural resources by small and medium-sized farmers and unemployed people.
- Adoption of the co-operative organisation model. Beyond its legal aspects, it is defined by the central principle of joint and non-hierarchical work where social benefit prevails over economic interests, and where the economic production process is serving the farmer.
- Not being limited to one crop. Despite the significant financial income generated from the 4,800 olive trees found on Mabrouka land, the model should pave the way for alternative production, which will help meet local food needs.

- Growing of drought-resistant local wheat and barley cultivars to reduce water usage.
- Organic farming methods – eliminating the use of pesticides and chemicals to maintain the fertility of the soil and provide healthy food products for consumers.
- Limiting the supply chain by building a direct relationship between the co-operative and the consumer; ending the need for intermediary monopolies and ultimately making food more affordable.
- Training Mabrouka locals, who may be future workers in the future co-operative, in agricultural production techniques and the operational procedures of the co-operative[41].

Given the State preference towards privatisation and private investment at the expense of small and medium-sized farmers, current agricultural policy in Tunisia does not naturally support the continued operation of the Mabrouka co-operative and those like it. However, the project demonstrates an alternative way to manage production and natural resources while raising awareness of agricultural policies and their impact, so people can recognise and voice their concerns.

## B- MOROCCO

### TRADE UNION ORGANISATION FOR SMALL FARMERS AND FARM WORKERS

Small farmers in Oulouz dam began mobilising in the 1990s to defend their right to compensation for land grabs and the exploitation of uncultivated land and forests. Ultimately the first agricultural trade union office was established under the umbrella of the Moroccan Workers' Union in 2002 and the union has supported many struggles of small farmers and forestry practitioners defending their rights with respect to land, water and natural resources. The trade union uses seminars and media activity to raise awareness of these issues at national, regional and international levels.

In the Souss-Massa region the trade union has witnessed some significant success on behalf of farm workers with cases increasing since 2007. The union has held export companies and packaging stations in particular to account; securing instances of labour law implementation, the application of a minimum agricultural wage, enforcing trade union freedoms and allowing union activities, improving

41 IBID.

transport, respecting women's rights and providing hygiene and safety information. Despite recent attempts by employers to counter trade union power in many Moroccan and foreign agricultural big companies, the presence of the union is now well-established.

## ACTS OF RESISTANCE

- Resisting the sale or leasing of land: Many small and medium-sized farmers refuse to sell or lease land to Moroccan agribusinesses or foreign investors as they have seen the suffering of those who gave up their lands. Many farmers who sold or leased their lands now work as day labourers under severe conditions, often on land which was previously their own. These hardships have alerted other farmers to the importance of retaining their lands and farms despite their worsening economic and social circumstances.

- Resisting non-native cultivars: Many farmers in the Moulay Bousselham region refuse to plant red fruits in their farms, while in the Awamra region, most farmers are still using their ancient cultivars for crops such as potatoes, peanuts, and cereals.

- Resisting water appropriation: Protests at water shortages and the appropriation of water resources by big businesses have occurred in cities across Morocco in recent years. Among the most prominent protests was the 'thirst uprising' in Zakoura in the summer of 2017, which started in the most marginalised neighbourhoods and spread throughout the city. People protested the chronic lack of water and the negative health impact of not addressing salinity levels in water supplies (which is related to blood pressure diseases). The demonstrations ended in October 2017 when arbitrary detentions saw 31 people including 8 minors arrested at a huge public march.

- The village of Imider serves as a model of resistance and steadfastness against the assaults of the mineral company Société métallurgique d'Imider (belonging to the royal group) and their draining of water, sand and mineral stocks. The local population of Imider - organised by the movement Sur la route 96 - undertook many struggles, starting from the demonstrations of 1986, up to a sit-in conducted in the Mount Alban that started in 2011 and that continues up to today, marking nine years of protest in Mount Alban.

The struggles in North Africa are intrinsically connected to those of

people across Asia, Africa and Latin America who are suffering as a result of capitalism and globalisation, and organising their own resistance. Therefore, it is essential for movements to work together to tell their powerful global story.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT OF SMALL FARMERS, FISHERFOLK AND FARM WORKERS

The global movement La Via Campesina was established in May 1993, in mobilisation against nearly a decade of customs and trade tariff negotiations, which resulted in the establishment in 1995 of the WTO to lead the liberalisation of trade and the globalisation of agricultural policies worldwide. Campaigns against the big seven industrial countries (G7) were organized in Paris in July 1989 on the centenary of the French Revolution where the "Bastille Call" relating to the cancellation of third world debt was ratified.

The general framework founding the movement endeavoured to create an alternative globalisation and called for frequent, large-scale campaigns against the agricultural, financial, commercial, industrial and importing model, against the international institutions that oversee it and against multinational corporations. It is now formed of 182 local and national organisations in 81 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, encompassing around 200 million farmers, fisherfolk, men and women that don't own their own land, youth in villages and rural areas, indigenous people, migrants and farm workers.

La Via Campesina defines food sovereignty as the right of every State to maintain its capacity to produce and develop its basic food, while respecting the cultural and production diversity. In their definition food sovereignty also requires the protection of the national resources especially soil, water and seeds. Furthermore, La Via Campesina stands against the trade liberalisation and Structural Adjustment Programmes that are advocated by multilateral organisations such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF.

La Via Campesina supports an agricultural reform that is led by social movements. Their struggle is encapsulated in the following statements:

- Agrarian reform is not only essential for farmers - it can be a social solution for the problems of society as a whole. Farmers alone cannot affect this change, so agrarian reform must be part of a package of comprehensive demands with broad support from people of many movements.
- The changes that the movement suggests with respect to farming, land ownership and rural development must be part of

a new popular project for our people, driven by a new economic, social and political system.

- The strength of farmers and people in general lies in their fundamental capacities as well as in their continuous willingness to struggle for their objectives and rights, whether through direct struggle or through mass mobilisation.

- It is necessary to create new forms of organisations, associations and co-operatives that bring together farmers and villagers to tackle the issue of the productive economic governance and the management of rural development in line with the cultural and organisational traditions of people, based on cooperation and agricultural solidarity.

The struggle for food sovereignty should lie on a movement based on bottom-up and horizontal organisations at a local level. This is far from the tradition of centralised organisations that are based on hierarchical structures ruled by an executive body that monopolises decision-making. It is essential to endeavour to create alliances and coalitions in a dynamic way to ensure self-management and organisational autonomy at the international, regional and national levels. Food sovereignty cannot be limited to providing communities with local, healthy and sufficient products. It is a concept endowed with a militant, revolutionary, comprehensive, independent, multidisciplinary, multidimensional and deeply democratic heart that pushes towards change. Furthermore, food sovereignty does not only concern the farmers' environment, it provides the foundations and impetus to build another community starting from food and farming issues, to introducing a new work approach and a new vision for our joint life in society.

# CHALLENGING AGRIBUSINESS AND BUILDING ALTERNATIVES IN TUNISIA AND MOROCCO

WORKING GROUP ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN TUNISIA AND ATTAC MAROC

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