

# Growing Diversity – North Africa

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**TITLE OF EXPERIENCE:** Attempt at restoring the cultivation of fig trees within the economy of the mountain districts

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**COUNTRY AND REGION:** Kabylie, Algeria

**ECOLOGICAL ZONE:**

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## ABSTRACT

1300 villages are spread out in the mountains in Kabylie at between 600 and 1300 m. Committees manage socio-economic problems. Women are the main players in the management and conservation of biodiversity. The organisation was created in 1999 by farmers of the Ath Maouche area. One of its objectives is to improve the value of figs especially through the processing of surplus. It is also important to encourage the cultivation of traditional varieties. There are three types of fig trees: male, female and bakours (non fertilised fig tree). The male tree does not give edible fruits, it is used for pollination. There are six varieties of male trees and 25 varieties of female trees.

**The objectives of the ADPF are:** To create centres of processing and conservation of fresh and dry figs in order to give farmers the opportunity to market their crops in a different way. The fig fair was the first event organised by the organisation in order to inform people of the importance of the fig tree in the area and the problems involved. The objectives of the fair were:

- to give the farmers the chance to meet up and share their experiences;
- to establish traditions in order to encourage a communal approach
- to promote the traditional cultivation of the fig tree and to market easily saleable products.
- to promote the valuable agricultural potential of the area which has been threatened in the last few years;
- to inform people about the conservation and the maintenance of fig tree;
- to promote crafts connected with fig trees, especially basket making

**Problems:** The cultivation of the fig tree is an age-old activity and traditions run so deep that farmers still apply old methods that are not always in keeping with modern thinking. Most farmers have had to use the land around them, which is sometimes of poor quality and suffers from soil erosion on the sloping land. These conditions only allow them to cultivate trees such as the olive and the fig trees, two hardy species which are well adapted to the climate and the poor soil conditions. Amongst the causes for the current deterioration of the development of the fig, it should be noted that:

- plant stocks are getting old; the choice of land is limited; national programmes do not support these crops.
- the extreme scarcity of marketing and support services
- few people with the necessary practical knowledge to collect and maintain the crops.
- lack of manpower (young people are increasingly leaving their villages to seek a "better life" in town)
- the changing diet
- competition (people prefer other cheaper types of food from other regions: for example they don't want to buy dry figs which cost twice as much as dates).
- commercial considerations convince and force farmers to reduce the number of varieties they grow. Farmers must use varieties with well known characteristics in order to satisfy present day customers.

**The future:** further studies into the fig tree should improve our knowledge of a species which is only grown at present in small farmers' plots. Solutions must be found to the causes of the present decline of the fig tree in order to secure its effective conservation and account for the potential that this plant brings to the development of fruit tree cultivation in mountain areas.

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