

# WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY IN ALGERIA



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## Introduction

This article argues that *local* and *indigenous knowledge* and *intergenerational learning* are important and necessary components for Adult Learning and Education (ALE) to support and strengthen women's income-generating activities and to promote food security. In addition, the article highlights the need to take inspiration from the agricultural models of our ancestors in order to be part of the broader organic campaign for healthier food, while protecting the environment. The article focuses on the Rural Women's Association in Algeria (AFUD), which argues for the establishment of educational farms where ALE principles are embedded to preserve the environment, adopt water-saving practices and raise awareness about current issues, in addition to more practical skills that are needed such as reading and writing, production processes and financial expertise.

## AFUD

AFUD represents a collective comprised primarily of women and some men from diverse backgrounds, educational levels and linguistic diversity. Members come from development NGOs, women's associations, socio-cultural groups and village committees. Additionally, there are women from official bodies

advocating for women's rights and positions, as well as individuals from universities and development cooperation agencies.

The Association's goal is to empower rural women through the creation of income-generating activities, especially in crafts and agriculture. This is to enhance their capabilities and become active contributors to the economic development of the Bejaia province in particular, and the country in general. AFUD strives to encourage the exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge through training programmes, aiming to elevate the education and professional levels of women and to meet the needs of rural women across all domains, with a special emphasis on promoting female entrepreneurship.

Its vision is to develop local agricultural and artisanal products, appreciating and recognising the majority of the producers – women. AFUD's approach is three-tiered:

1. Guidance and support: Rural women possess invaluable ancestral knowledge and skills that are often unrecognised. The association aims to raise awareness, guide and advise women so that they can undertake income-generating activities.
2. Cooperative creation: The association strives to support projects that facilitate women's entry into the workforce by

promoting the creation and growth of cooperatives.

3. Knowledge exchange: Activities are developed to encourage the exchange of best practices related to education, employment, the establishment of associative projects and networking among stakeholders.

## Background

In Algeria, women are known to be at the forefront of bringing communities together to promote our cultural heritage and local products. They do this through mutual cooperation and resource sharing. More and more, women and the local economy suffer from the rise of cheaper mass-produced products and luxury items, which are available throughout the Maghreb<sup>1</sup>, where there has been a vast expansion of shops, markets and online shopping – all dedicated to the commercialisation of products. People are bombarded with a flood of different choices, outlets and even home delivery. These mass produced products come with an overuse of chemicals, plastic and throw-away by-products, making it difficult to keep our environment in balance. These kinds of products, including the way they are made, some marketed as 'organic' or 'natural' (and they might not be) causes confusion for the local populace. The food items and how they are produced stand in stark contrast to the agricultural model of our ancestors, who practised agriculture that respected biological diversity while producing healthy organic food by utilising sustainable agricultural practices.

It is imperative to support students, farmers, entrepreneurs and initiatives such as women's cooperatives in ways that encourage them to embark on agricultural activities, whether agroecological and/or educational – this in an effort to keep our authentic, locally-produced products 'current' and guard against them becoming a thing of the past. The creation of local markets for products from healthy and sustainable agriculture is an imperative. ALE's role in projects that pursue solidarity and that strengthen socio-economic conditions in rural communities is essential.

## Organic farming and ALE

Globally, there has been an increase in organic farming, which is not new to our region, and this represents a valuable opportunity for us to be a part of this movement. Our region abounds in traditional knowledge and expertise which must be preserved and developed. ALE has an important role to play in this by integrating concepts such as local and indigenous knowledge and intergenerational learning. It can play a role in encouraging a commitment to a more sustainable and diversified agriculture, raising awareness of the preservation of the environment and the challenges of organic farming. It can prepare young entrepreneurs to seize opportunities offered by this sector (and thus promote economic growth) and it can help to enlighten consumers on the distinction between organic, local and natural products, among others.

The establishment of educational farms plays a crucial role in this endeavour, and should definitely involve rural women. These farms can offer training in various fields, such as the production of cheese, soap, jams made from aromatic and medicinal plants, as well as in the management of small farms. The objective is to sensitise women to the importance of preserving the environment in the face of the challenges posed by climate change, for example adopting water-saving practices like drip irrigation systems and using renewable energies.

## Cooperatives

Currently, rural women play a central role in development while preserving biodiversity and in the quest for self-sufficiency, particularly through family-based initiatives. There are also a large number of women holders of agricultural and artisanal cards<sup>2</sup>, as well as programmes such as the Environmental Governance and Biodiversity project (GENBI), which encourages the participation of women in the production and marketing of organic products in parts of the country.

The creation of women's cooperatives further strengthens the role of rural women by harnessing biological resources and traditional expertise. To

ensure the success of these initiatives, close work with rural women is essential as they face various social and economic barriers, including limited access to information, a lack of reading and writing proficiency, a lack of training and difficulties in accessing employment opportunities, activities and financing. Despite these challenges, the first exclusively female cooperatives in Algeria have succeeded in demonstrating their effectiveness, particularly within the El Kala National Park<sup>3</sup>, where women produce and market vegetable oils from lentils, beekeeping products, perfumes and herbal medicines, as well as prickly pear products. These cooperatives make it possible to ensure fair remuneration for producers thanks to fair trade, guaranteeing a minimum price and decent working conditions. In addition, they promote resilience to the impacts of climate change, such as droughts and floods.

## Future plans

Recommendations to strengthen ALE programmes, with particular emphasis on the concepts of *local* and *indigenous knowledge* and *intergenerational learning* could take the form of the following actions:

- Raise awareness within communities: Organise workshops and information sessions at the local level to sensitise community members on the distinction between organic, local and natural products, highlighting the benefits of each category.
- Promote intergenerational learning: Encourage the exchange of knowledge between generations, allowing elders to pass on their traditional knowledge of agriculture and food production to younger generations, thus promoting the preservation of indigenous knowledge.
- Integrate local knowledge into training: Adapt agricultural training programmes to include region-specific local knowledge, emphasising sustainable agricultural practices and local production methods.
- Support access to education: Facilitate access to ALE by making these programmes financially and

geographically accessible, so that more people can benefit from these opportunities.

- Promote organic farming: Set up specific organic farming training programmes to encourage the transition to more sustainable and environmentally friendly production methods.

By adopting these recommendations, we can contribute to a better understanding of food production and to the promotion of organic and sustainable agriculture, while preserving local and indigenous knowledge, thus promoting more balanced economic growth and environmental protection.

## Conclusion

AFUD works actively to promote education and training for rural women, while developing cooperatives to strengthen their livelihoods and contribute to fair remuneration for producers. By combining these initiatives with a transition to more sustainable agriculture, Algeria can achieve its development goals while preserving its precious environment.

### Endnotes

- 1 The region comprises western and central North Africa including Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The Maghreb also includes the disputed territory of Western Sahara (Wikipedia).
- 2 An agricultural and craft card is an official document issued by the relevant authorities, confirming a person's professional status as an artisan or farmer. This card is crucial as it enables the authorities to keep track of and support artisanal and agricultural activities, while also granting artisans and farmers specific benefits and rights associated with their profession.
- 3 It is home to an extremely unique ecosystem, and since its establishment in 1983, nature conservationists have been working tirelessly to ensure the survival of the fauna and flora of the park. UNESCO recognised the El Kala National Park as a biosphere reserve in 1990 <https://www.algeria.com/attractions/national-parks/el-kala-national-park/>

