

SEMINAR: *Food Security in the MENA Region: Participation of Civil Society and Associationism*



Food Security in the MENA Region: Participation of Civil Society and Associationism

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It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this seminar organized by the READI in association with the FPSC on the subject of "Food security in the MENA Region: Participation of Civil Society and Associationism". Due to the importance of the topic, I have divided my speech into three parts:

1. the first part will deal with food security: situation and outlook in Morocco
2. the second part will refer to the Thematic Group on Food Security and Sustainable Rural Development in Morocco
3. and in the third part will I will focus on AMPFR's modest contribution to food security and rural development by talking about some pilot experiences within the framework of its action programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

First part: Food security: situation and outlook in Morocco

Nowadays, we are aware that the world's food situation is influenced by various conditioning factors, principally the increase in prices due to factors such as climate change, the development of biofuels and national policies aimed at protecting markets, as well as the current economic and financial crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Kingdom of Morocco has always raised the alarm about the seriousness of the current situation regarding the food crisis in the Horn of Africa. For the international community this situation constitutes a major challenge with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals aimed at reinforcing food security in the world and drawing attention to the problems of desertification, climate change, water management, etc., which are steadily worsening the situation of several million people.

During the 37th Conference of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization held recently in Rome, Morocco, along with several other countries, emphasised the need to find adequate and effective solutions to the problems affecting food security, especially the fluctuation of food prices, and to do whatever is necessary to reduce its effects on the most vulnerable sectors of society.

In order to deal with the effects and impacts of these problems, since the 1970s Morocco has managed to establish a system of subsidies, legislation and control of food staples with a view to ensuring the supply of these products, guaranteeing the stability of the prices of raw materials and, therefore, protecting consumers. It has also decided to continue with its policy of carrying out major development projects, which involves promoting investment, promising sectors and a range of social actions, particularly the National Initiative for Human Development.

Furthermore, Morocco has developed an integrated vision based on the development of the region and a set of important strategies and development plans, including a plan for agricultural development (the "Green Morocco Plan"), a strategy to guarantee energy self-sufficiency, a national water strategy, the national charter for industry, a programme for new digital technologies, a fishing strategy, a tourism strategy, a strategy for the handicrafts industry, etc.

The main aim of these strategies and development programmes is to increase the income and purchasing power of Moroccan citizens and to guarantee them access to employment and, therefore, greater food security.

Ladies and gentlemen

Second part: the Thematic Group on Food Security and Sustainable Rural Development in Morocco

I think it is important to talk to you, albeit briefly, about this Group which has played a leading role in the recent progress of domestic agriculture and the development of rural society. It was set up in 1998 and comprises the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and the majority of UN bodies, some Government Ministries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Fishing, etc.), the High Commissioner for the Plan, the Assembly of Councillors, some specific NGOs, the Federation of Chambers of Agriculture, etc.

Its activities focus on consultation for the analysis and examination of food security issues.

At national level, this Thematic Group has the experience, resources, cooperation, etc. needed to make consolidated contributions and have a real impact. In this context, it has become a mechanism of reflection and decision-making for our country's programme.

The Group helps to collect data and fundamental indicators for the Moroccan report on food security. It has also worked with the Government and the civil society parties concerned during the preparatory phases of the programmes (such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2002-2006 -UNDAF-).

The Thematic Group is ideally suited to this role: it is increasingly regarded as country's main consultative body, and has also benefited from a comparative advantage in that it has direct access to the document relating to the country's social and economic development.

In order to focus its attention more clearly on the development situation in Morocco, the Thematic Group on Food Security and Rural Development has created two subgroups: one on *"food security and rural development"*, coordinated by WFP representative in Morocco, and the other on *"management of natural resources and the environment"*, coordinated by UNPD deputy representative.

The Group's work has recognised the leading role of agriculture and the rural sector in the development of Morocco. Moreover, the partnerships created during the preparation process could resume their collaboration in future joint efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen

Third part: The AMPFR's experience in the promotion of food security

Allow me to give you a very brief introduction to the Moroccan Association for the Promotion of Rural Women. The AMPFR is a non-governmental, apolitical and non-profit organization which was created to offer rural women support in various spheres thanks to the numerous activities and capacities of its fieldwork teams.

Aware of the role it can play in sustainable development, and convinced that it is impossible to guarantee food security without an intervention strategy and that the problem of food security concerns both urban and rural populations, the AMPFR contributes to the execution of various programmes based on an integrated approach to development.

Likewise, a constant concern for promoting rural women by improving their living conditions necessarily leads the AMPFR to intervene with actions in time and space. These actions are characterized by specific monitoring and continual assessment in order to achieve better and more credible results. In this context, the AMPFR's experience in carrying out actions based on an integrated approach to development and the promotion of food security can be summarized as follows:

- **Institutionalization of the group:**

Since its creation, the Association has opted for a decentralized structure in order to achieve the goals assigned to it: among others, improving the rural population's food security, and maintaining direct contact with the rural women who are partly responsible for this improvement.

- **Promotion of the role of rural women:**

- Making the different actors involved aware of the special nature and importance of women's contributions to agricultural development in general and to the fight against hunger and poverty in particular;
- Prioritizing the strategic role of rural women in production activities, the enhancement and protection of the cultural and natural heritage, etc.

Needless to say, the activities undertaken in favour of rural women, such as income-generating activities and projects, awareness-raising and information actions concerning their rights, especially their right to food, etc., create an energy and vitality within our group and reinforce the importance of rural women in the process of regional development, whereby they become more autonomous and more capable of defending themselves and dealing with any situation.

- **Efficient intervention approach:**

AMPFR favours a participative approach based on rural women's participation in identifying, preparing and carrying out activities, projects or programmes that concern them, in order to prioritize:

- Equal access to and control of natural and productive resources;
- The creation and strengthening of information and communication networks that bring women into contact with one another and with public planning institutions;
- The empowerment and integration of rural women as agents of development so that they can be better represented and participate more actively in decision-making processes and in business and income-generating activities;
- The improvement of young rural women's living conditions, especially training and access to production support services;
- The women's movement through 'Les Femmes Ressources Disponibles' (Women Available Resources) at local level.

The main approaches can be summarized as follows:

- **Awareness-raising and information actions:**

AMPFR carries out vitally important actions aimed at a large number of rural men and women. They cover general issues relating to obstacles that have to be overcome or to results that need to be extended to the field of agricultural production (vegetable and animal), rural development, promotion of food security, etc.

These actions include:

- Intensive awareness-raising and information campaigns, especially coinciding with World Food Day. These campaigns deal with issues such as increasing the area of land under cultivation, responsible land management, water management, improving rural infrastructures and access to markets, etc.;
- Information days on the current problems of rural women, especially their contribution to food security and the creation of associations to achieve this security.
- Roundtables organized for the purpose of facilitating exchanges of ideas, experiences and know-how in collaboration with the AMPFR's partners, focusing on the various conditioning factors that put the improvement of rural women's food security and the search for solutions at risk.

- Information seminars or workshops geared towards specific issues: improvement of access to food, health, hygiene, food supply and marketing, etc.

These actions are carried out in collaboration with the bodies and Ministerial Departments involved, such as those of Health, Agriculture and National Education, local communities and authorities, etc. They are backed by a range of audiovisual materials (films, slides, banners, leaflets, pamphlets, etc.)

The AMPFR is in charge of reproducing and disseminating the documents produced in connection with these actions relating to food security, with the aim of spreading the information to the various national and international parties concerned.

Study and research activities are mainly carried out by the national team comprising technical consultants, researchers, etc., reputed for their respective expertise and skills. Focused on the transfer of simple and relatively cheap technologies, these activities allow the AMPFR to meet certain specific needs of rural women, such as the creation of small market gardens and orchards, water and soil management, intensification of vegetable and animal production, utilization of cookery recipes, etc.

- **Income-generating activities and projects**

Through income-generating activities and projects aimed at the most disadvantaged rural women, carried out in association with national and international organizations, the AMPFR seeks to improve their living conditions and, consequently, those of their families thanks to the additional income provided, and to include training, education and literacy actions in the project's activities in order to increase the autonomy of these women. By way of example, we can mention:

- a)** Creation of improved goat breed rearing and farm cheese production units, collectively managed by rural women in regions suited to these activities. These units aim to reduce agricultural work in favour of domestic tasks, increase the women's income, introduce a productive breed and promote the joint management of the project activities.
- b)** Creation of beehives for a better production of beekeeping products in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture's local structures, which has led to the creation of cooperatives for the marketing of these products.
- c)** Creation of improved sheep breed rearing projects for the intensification of sheep rearing with the D'man breed in southern Morocco, in association with the Ministry of Agriculture's local structures. The aim of these projects is to foster the participation of rural women in the development of their region through technical innovations that will allow them to increase their income and thereby guarantee healthy food at affordable prices.

Ladies and gentlemen

- **Conclusions**

It is essential for the NGOs to prepare the ground in order to contribute to the self-sufficiency of the populations they help. There is a well-known phrase that illustrates this point: "Teach people to feed themselves before feeding them". If this point is an important one, we cannot forget that we must also explain to people how to protect their environment, so that their long-term self-sufficiency possibilities are not compromised. It is also essential to instruct the rural population about:

- The transfer of simple, relatively cheap and more efficient technologies, in order to increase their productivity,
- The procedures for access to means of production and credit, so that they can preserve and sell their products,
- Protecting their production against climatic contingencies, controlling water by means of small-scale works carried out by local labour.

For these purposes, the AMPFR and the NGOs concerned should create networks and partnerships in order to participate in joint efforts and contribute to the execution of the action plan that the Moroccan government must carry out to ensure the promotion of rural women and their environment, all of which will help to guarantee food security.

The Moroccan government should also encourage NGOs to participate in the decision-making process and facilitate their contribution at all levels. International organizations and financial institutions should also provide the necessary technical and financial resources for an effective participation of the NGOs involved in the promotion and development of rural women, who hold the key to the socio-economic development of their environment and guarantee food security in the home.