

# Women's experiences in Tunisia's agro-pastoral production systems: Reframing women as agripreneurs

Sandra Biskupski-Mujanovic<sup>1</sup> and Dina Najjar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Gender Scientist in the Social, Economics and Policy Research Group at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Rabat, Morocco.

*This research was carried out by ICARDA and enabled by funds from the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock. The authors are grateful for the participants' time and commitment.*



## Problem Statement

The recent degradation of rangelands and their loss is greatly affecting women who graze livestock and who depend on these lands as animal feed prices are increasing worldwide. In Tunisia, feed prices are increasing due to the country's climatic conditions being challenging for growing fodder, so is an especially urgent concern. There is a push for a pastoral code in Tunisia as the current system has been criticized for contributing to the disappearance of the traditional common rangelands governance system by being replaced with an "open access" system where access to rangelands cannot be managed or controlled resulting in uncontrolled cultivation and overgrazing. Much work remains on how a new pastoral code can be gender just and how gender can be mainstreamed throughout to ensure that women are not left behind. In this paper we examine research findings from interviews with 32 women who engage in agro-pastoral work in Tunisia.

## Methods

This research was conducted as part of a larger project undertaken between 2018-2020. The purpose of the study was to explore gender roles, relations, constraints and opportunities in livestock production in interdependent agricultural systems of Tunisia, including forest, rangelands and agriculture. There is little research on gender issues in agriculture in Tunisia, and even less so on the topic of rangelands. In this paper, we draw on the responses of all 32 women involved in the study to learn about their experiences with animal ownership, decision-making power in relation to livestock, adoption of credit and innovation and grazing and feeding challenges. The study took place in three communities in Tunisia, Tataouine and Medenine, dry rangeland regions in the south and Zaghuan, an area closer to the city that is more crop-oriented.

## Main Findings

Our findings show that women perform more work and decision making in agro-pastoral production than was expected or assumed. We posit, as a result, that rather than seeing women as invisible in agriculture or as victims of male dominated systems, that we reframe these women as agricultural entrepreneurs or agripreneurs so that they are better able to access the supports needed to successfully do their work and improve their businesses. As women's entrepreneurship in the MENA region is among the lowest worldwide with an average of eight percent of women engaging in entrepreneurial activities, a push for increasing supports for women agripreneurs in Tunisia is critical. Interestingly, women who are entrepreneurs were shown to have higher self-confidence than even their male counterparts, motivating them further and allowing them to improve their independence and achievements.

## Recommendations

- **Increase access to finance** through the set-up of a guarantee fund and the creation of gender-specific incentives in the investment code;
- **Enhance extension, training and coaching services** to contribute to the economic and financial viability of gender-inclusive investment projects;
- **Improve communication and strengthen access to information**, including through the creation of physical and online one-stop shops;
- **Enhance coordination between different actors**, both within and among the different stakeholder groups (government, donors, research institutes, farmers' organizations and financial institutions); and

**Strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of agricultural value chains**, including through traceability and labelling schemes (such as geographic indicators), increased visibility of products, responsible contract farming arrangements and the creation of territorial baskets of goods.