

## INVESTMENTS IN YOUNG WOMEN DELIVER FOR SMALLHOLDER FARMERS



Agro-valoriz

Training early-career women researchers can be empowering—helping them to become leaders and agents of change in their countries, communities and institutions. Given the increasing role women play in agricultural sectors, it also ensures that countries develop the right combination of skills and knowledge they will need to address future challenges.



Imen Garraoui and Najoua Khlaifi, two recent graduates with master's degrees in agronomy, were trained by ICARDA scientists over the course of two years, and their experience demonstrates what can be achieved when efforts are made to enhance the capacities of young women researchers.

Through their contributions to multiple projects, they received training on different data collection approaches related to climate change adaptation, and learned to identify gender roles and needs. They subsequently helped incorporate gender into extension programs run by ICARDA.

### Promoting business skills

Initially part of a 13-member young consultancy team initiated in 2016, they undertook a two-month base line survey with 700 farmer households in central Tunisia, collecting data on socio-economic and agricultural production trends. They then continued to work on qualitative data collection for the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock and an IFAD-funded conservation agriculture project in Southern and Central Tunisia; and more recently led a 16-member consulting group responsible for collecting additional data on farmer households in central Tunisia, part of the ICARDA-managed 'Mind the Gap' initiative, which tests the delivery and impact of different technology packages.

Through contacts acquired on these projects, Imen and Najoua were also trained by GIZ to become Farmer Business School (FBS) trainers. FBS is a training course for small scale farmers which takes one week and contains modules like entrepreneurial planning, cost/benefit calculations, credit access, and the management of agricultural cooperatives. As certified FBS trainers they trained over 300 farmers last year.

Given that training alone is not sufficient for farmers to apply acquired knowledge, they also carried out individual and group coaching sessions with FBS-trained farmers. They were received favorably by farmers, and were instrumental in helping to enhance their adoption of improved barley varieties and feed blocks, and strengthen their entrepreneurial skills.



## Supporting Tunisia's small-scale farmers

This experience exposed them to the real needs and perspectives of Tunisian small-scale farmers, and helped them gain the confidence to initiate their own consultancies—which were partly also a response to the lack of interesting job opportunities in the public sector. With additional encouragement from ICARDA and GIZ, Najoua set up Agro-valoriz and Imen established Garraoui Imen Smart Agriculture (GISA) consulting.



Imen, commenting on the experience she gained through her participation on ICARDA projects, said: “I was able to deepen my theoretical knowledge, enabling me to strengthen my skills and apply my training in suitable and well-targeted projects. This allowed me to get to know farmers, understand their environments, and widen my network of professional contacts.”

An awareness of the environment farmers have to contend with also helped to inform Najoua's career trajectory: “This experience helped me discover the many agricultural challenges that farmers face, especially small-scale farmers. The different consultations done with ICARDA also made me realize what I want to do with my professional career: support farmers.”

Through the consultancies they have established, Imen and Najoua offer something new in Tunisia—motivated and dynamic consultants who are not only specialized in the field of small scale agricultural development, but also gender and socio-economic analysis. They plan to diversify the services they offer and continue working with GIZ and ICARDA.

### Further reading: Strengthening the capacity of early career researchers

For more information, please contact Udo Rudiger, Agricultural Innovation Specialist, Rangeland and Forage research [U.Rudiger@cgiar.org](mailto:U.Rudiger@cgiar.org) and Dina Najjar Gender Scientist, Social, Economy & Policy Research (ICARDA) [D.Najjar@cgiar.org](mailto:D.Najjar@cgiar.org)



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