



A region in danger !

Justice between environmental and economic aspects

Food sovereignty **and environmental violations:**

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Introduction:

Several developmental models have been applied in the Arab region since independence, all of which mainly relied on the exploitation of local natural and human resources to fund investments in sectors that constitute a major component of the global economy such as services, tourism, and extraction. These models, which follow the law of comparative advantage, marginalized rural areas in favor of developing coastal cities and reduced wages to deal with unemployment and consolidate state institutions while creating a subsidy system for basic foodstuffs to make up for low incomes. This policy led to the decline of subsistence farming as well as substantial demographic changes that resulted from the migration of farmers to the cities to join the informal workforce.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the initiation of structural reform programs that followed the debt crisis in the Global South. These programs involved imposing strict neoliberal policies that included lifting subsidies on several foodstuffs such as bread, butter, and sugar while keeping low wages, which led to a remarkable deterioration in the living standards of millions of families.

Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco were among the countries whose food sovereignty was affected by reform programs¹. The new policies impacted several food-related sectors, which was demonstrated in encouraging extractive and export agriculture to bring in foreign currency. They also affected small farmers who lost their lands and were displaced from the countryside to cities². Meanwhile, investors in the agriculture sector were given several privileges including direct funds and/or lands for cheap prices. The impact of the new policies was also reflected in the environment with the misappropriation of natural resources, the depletion of underground water³, excessive use of chemicals, disrupting the natural balance of the soil through monoculture, and doing away with heirloom seeds⁴, all foreboding an acute environmental crisis in the future. These policies are still applied in the three countries subject of this paper and were particularly intensified in Tunisia and Morocco where big investors are given precedence, hence jeopardizing food sovereignty and exposing the population to global fluctuations in food prices as was the case in 2007/2008. Groups that are most affected by neoliberal policies, including small farmers and agricultural workers, initiated social movements that rejected exploitation within capitalist estates where they are treated like serfs, the depletion of natural resources, and the confiscation of land in favor of investment projects. Those movements revolved around the necessity of achieving food sovereignty and contested the concept of food security adopted by the three countries.

¹ Gilbert Achcar. "On the 'Arab Inequality Puzzle': The Case of Egypt." *Development and Change*, Volume 51, Issue 3, May 2020: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dech.12585>

² Said Oulfakir. "Morocco: Big farmers get fertile land and small farmers get nothing [Arabic]." *As-Safir Al-Arabi*, April 2019: <https://bit.ly/3vQ5wt5>

³ "Water resources: Depriving small farmers in favor of capitalist export agriculture [Arabic]." *Siyada*, October 2020: <https://bit.ly/2PcDxTR>

⁴ Ayman Ameer. "Local seeds: A history of plundering [Arabic]." *Siyada*, March 2021: <https://bit.ly/38ZkDqf>

Food sovereignty and food security:

Food sovereignty and food security are in many cases used interchangeably, with the latter being more common in the discourses of governments, agricultural institutions, and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund among others. The concept of food security emerged in the 1960s and is, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, achieved "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life"⁵. The concept developed over time and became attached to a number of conditions including that "food should not be used as an instrument for political and economic pressure"⁶. For international institutions, the concept of food security replaced that of "self-sufficiency," which emerged in the 1950s and was then linked to independence movements that prioritized a country's ability to locally meet food consumption needs, hence not having to resort to importing foodstuffs⁷.

However, the concept of food security as adopted by international institutions acquired a cross-border meaning as it shifted to meeting the consumption needs of a given country without prioritizing local self-sufficiency, hence encouraging the replacement of several local products with imported ones. This, in turn, marginalized local farmers and absolved governments from their responsibility to boost local production⁸.

Relying on imports in achieving food security has had several negative effects on the countries that went through this experience. These include the following:

- Undermining local subsistence farming, hence impoverishing small and medium farmers
- Monopolizing natural resources such as land, water, and seeds and using them for commercial agriculture
- Replacing the local self-sufficient agricultural model, which protects natural resources and maintains diversity, with a commercial model that prioritizes profit through the cultivation of export crops
- Small farmers' inability to compete in the market owing to lack of state support, which leads thousands of them to go bankrupt and either leave the agriculture sector altogether or cope with market rules
- Impacting the local stock of seeds in favor of imported and genetically modified ones
- Harming the soil and ecological systems, hence increasing their vulnerability in the context of climate change
- Consolidating economic subordination, particularly in terms of food⁹.

⁵ Trade Reforms and Food Security: Conceptualizing the Linkages. FAO, UN. 2003.

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization (November 1996). "Rome Declaration on Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action". Retrieved 26 October 2013

⁷ North African Network for Food Sovereignty. "Between food security and food sovereignty: Where do people stand? [Arabic]" July 19, 2019: <https://bit.ly/3kvVbgM>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Water resources: Depriving small farmers in favor of capitalist export agriculture [Arabic]." Op. cit.

The concept of food sovereignty was coined in 1996 by the Via Campesina movement in the World Food Summit organized by the FAO. It is defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems"¹⁰. Food sovereignty gives precedence to the producers, distributors, and consumers of food over the mechanisms of the free market and multinational corporations. Food sovereignty also includes defending the interests of future generations through resisting current food policies and deconstructing commercial food systems. In addition, it directs local producers towards taking the lead in food trade, agricultural policies, fishing, and breeding¹¹. The concept of food sovereignty was expanded in 2007 in the World Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali¹².

First: Food sovereignty and unjust economic growth in Egypt:

As part of its plan to achieve food sovereignty, the Egyptian government worked on integrating the agriculture sector into global trade through encouraging the cultivation of capital-intensive export crops. The implementation of reform programs in Egypt led to the deterioration of agricultural activities in old lands in the Nile Delta and the marginalization of farmers who cultivate less than five feddans. Landowners and investors were given privileges that made small farmers unable to access lands, resources, and agricultural inputs and made rural markets incapable of competing in the market. This led to the deterioration of the living standards of farmers, who had no other source of income, as well as a decline in growth and productivity in rural areas, hence affecting Egypt's food security¹³.

The 2030 plan and food sovereignty challenges:

International institutions worked on integrating Sustainable Development Goals into national development plans, which was particularly demonstrated in the case of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and its role in planning the administration of natural resources in the Arab region. This plan included supporting and developing institutional mechanisms that focus on food, water, and energy security and enhance levels of coordination between sectors as well as ensure the consistency of policies¹⁴. In this context, the Egyptian government admits that food security, nutrition, and sustainable agricultural developments are substantial components of the 2030 plan. This plan included increasing reliance on the local production of major food commodities, developing sustainable consumption patterns that increase intake of food with high nutritional value and increase each citizen's share of it, limiting food waste, linking farmers to the market, implementing the electronic bread subsidy system, creating an independent entity for food safety, and developing social security networks¹⁵.

¹⁰ International Institute of Social Studies, Food Sovereignty: A critical Dialogue: <https://www.iss.nl/en/research/research-networks/initiatives-critical-agrarian-studies/food-sovereignty-critical-dialogue-20132014-conference-papers-series>

¹¹ Esther Vivas "Viva Campesina: The farmers' path [Arabic]." March 7, 2017: <https://bit.ly/3bQcEN5>

¹² Declaration of Nyéléni: <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>

¹³ Center for International and Regional Studies "Food security and food sovereignty in the Middle East [Arabic]." <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558545/CIRSArabiaSummaryReport6FoodSecurity2013.pdf?sequence=5>

¹⁴ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. "Integrating Sustainable Development Goals into national development plans [Arabic]." June 2019: https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/dmj_hdf_ltnmy_lmstdm_fy_khtt_ltnmy_lwtmy_1.pdf

¹⁵ The Committee on World Food Security (CFS). "Implementation of the 2030 plan [Arabic]." October 2016: <http://www.fao.org/3/mr327a/mr327a.pdf>

On the other hand, article 79 of the Egyptian constitution states that "each citizen has the right to healthy, sufficient amounts of food and clean water. The state shall provide food resources to all citizens. It also ensures food sovereignty in a sustainable manner and guarantees the protection of agricultural biological diversity and types of local plants to preserve the rights of generations"¹⁶. The phrasing of this article makes it more progressive than its counterparts in previous constitutions and which did not focus on sustainability and the nutritional value of food. In line with the Strategic Plan (2018–2023), which includes supporting food security, developing rural communities and small farmers, the Egyptian government initiated with the World Food Program the agricultural and rural development project. Through this project, the government focuses on the compatibility projects funded by international institutions with Sustainable Development Goals, including the second goal, "Zero hunger." This was done through different initiatives such as the Decent Life Initiative that targets the neediest villages and aims at investing in human resources in rural communities through diversifying sources of income, sustainable use of water resources, supporting farmers in coping with climate changes, empowering women and girls, and encouraging creativity and innovation through knowledge sharing platforms across the south¹⁷.

While it is still possible for the Egyptian government to cooperate with funding institutions in plans that take sustainable development goals into consideration, several challenges still exist. These include gaps in information and methodologies required to accurately measure levels of food security and nutrition. This is particularly applicable to goal number two, "Zero hunger," and all goals associated with it, which include addressing issues like hunger, malnutrition, small farmers' incomes and productivity, the sustainability of agricultural practices, and the protection of crops and genetic resources. These issues cover most of the components of food security: availability, accessibility, and utilization/adequacy. That is why the 2030 plan should take into consideration that achieving several of the sustainable development goals relies on eliminating food insecurity and malnutrition and that any progress in the hunger goal is closely linked to achieving other sustainable development goals. This means that policies related to this goal need to be revised in order to link different goals¹⁸ and identify points of weakness that obstruct implementation.

Despite the fact that the 2030 vision includes ambitious goals such as eliminating anemia for children less than five years old, it does not specify the strategies to be utilized in achieving this goal¹⁹. The main focus of the food plan is the fortification of flour, yet this does not address the root causes of anemia such as poverty and inability to access nutritious food²⁰. In order to face this problem, the government must offer nutritious food at affordable prices. The list of subsidized goods should be extended to include vegetables, fruits, and legumes, which are rich in micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals, instead of only focusing on high-carb goods such as rice, flour, and sugar²¹. Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy should include a food security plan in which all investment institutions are to contribute through making the necessary

¹⁶ Modified constitution of Egypt, 2019: <https://manshurat.org/node/14675>

¹⁷ "Four ministers discuss the agricultural development plan [Arabic]." *Al Bawaba*, February 23, 2021: <https://www.albawabhnews.com/4275743>.

¹⁸ See Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Food Program. "Food security and nutrition in light of the 2030 sustainable development plan [Arabic]," 2016: <http://www.fao.org/3/i6188a/i6188a.pdf>

¹⁹ Egypt's 2030 vision: http://www.crci.sci.eg/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Egypt_2030.pdf

²⁰ World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. "Nutrition in Egypt," 2020: <http://www.emro.who.int/egy/programmes/nutrition-and-food-safety.html>

²¹ "Prices of 16 subsidized commodities in March [Arabic]." *Akher Al Anbaa*, March 1, 2019: <https://bit.ly/3v5buG8>

resources available. In addition, this plan should include strategies to address inequality based on health conditions and discrimination in access to food based on geographical location²².

It is also necessary to study the environmental impacts of projects to be implemented under the 2030 plan. These include power generation projects that might increase pollution and intensify the repercussions of climate change. This also applies to urban expansion projects that the Egyptian government promotes as indispensable for development while not taking into consideration possible damages to biological and ecological balance as well as infringing on people's right to public space as demonstrated in the case of privatized beaches. Ecological balance can be preserved through supporting small farmers, protecting the land, and empowering producers of food and will at the same time achieve food sovereignty. It is noteworthy that urban development projects encroach on agricultural land, hence affecting food production and undermining food security as well as increasing dependence on imported food for high prices that average citizens are unable to afford.

Second: The relationship between social and environmental justice in Tunisia:

Agricultural policies in Tunisia: A general framework:

Access to land is one of the main components of food sovereignty, for agricultural land is not just a space for cultivation and production but also part of farmers' identity, the main source of income for rural communities, and an integral part of the environment. The value of agricultural land is, therefore, cultural, social, and political. Like most countries in the South, agricultural policies in Tunisia support export-oriented production and trade in comparative advantage goods while marginalizing subsistence farming and replacing it with imports. This approach goes back to colonial policies that introduced modern production models, which were later applied in the entire agriculture sector and were supported by the state through funds and privileges. These policies played a major role in the appropriation of land from small farmers, undermining subsistence farming, and giving precedence to export agriculture. This section examines the state of agricultural land in Tunisia with special emphasis on environmental conditions, farmers' access to land, production models that deplete the soil, and pressure by other economic sectors in an attempt to identify the main features of land exploitation and its relation to food sovereignty and social and environmental justice.

Land between environmental conditions and agricultural policies:

Agricultural land comprises two thirds of Tunisia and is estimated at 10 million hectares, including 1.6 million hectares of forestland in the north, 4.8 million hectares of grassland in the center and the south, and 5.2 million hectares of cropland²³. The climate is generally dry with rain ranging from 600 mm/year in the north and 100mm/year in the south. This led farmers to come up with different rainfed and semi-rainfed agriculture techniques, now used in 71% of agricultural land.

The traditional agricultural system in Tunisia managed to cope with environmental conditions and to preserve biodiversity. It also led to the creation of different communities across the countryside such as mountain villages in the north and northeast, Bedouin and semi-Bedouin tribes in the center and the south, and fishing villages in coastal areas. Seasonal grazing

²² See Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment no. 12: The right to adequate food: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838c11.html>. See also Egypt Social Progress Indicators: Food, Water, and Agricultural land: <https://www.progressegyppt.org/en/topic.html#land>

²³ Profil de Pays – Tunisie, FAO, 2015, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca0212fr/CA0212FR.pdf>

movements, which involved both human beings and livestock, played a major role in maintaining the natural balance of ecological systems. Traditional agricultural systems were based on a comprehensive view of surrounding climate conditions and on shared access to land especially in dry areas. This remained the case until the French occupation got hold of all resources, took urban communities apart, and changed property laws to make land acquisition easier. After independence, the Tunisian state did not stop such practices but, in fact, consolidated them through appropriation, privatization, and clientelism.

Failure in achieving agricultural productivity:

The last statistics of agricultural outputs in Tunisia were issued in 2005, when crop production reached 516,000 tons for 5.3 million hectares. It is noteworthy that 54% of this output is produced by 11% of the total land area and that 3% of landowners are in control of more than one third of the total land area. This underlines the problem of fragmented land ownership and the gap between small and big farmers.

There are three types of agricultural land tenure in Tunisia:

- Private lands: these are estimated at 6 million hectares, including 1.5 million hectares of collective lands that were assigned to individuals since the time of French occupation till the present moment. Private lands are at the core of the fragmentation of land ownership since the average area of an agricultural land dropped from 16 hectares in the 1960s to 6 hectares in 2015, hence increasing cultivation cost and reducing productivity rates. This is especially the case since a large percentage of land users are reluctant to organize through cooperatives.
- Collective lands: these belong communally to tribal groups and cover 1.5 million hectares. Most collective lands are neglected or overused grasslands permeated by strategic sites that contain oil, natural gas, or phosphate among others. These lands are basically located in the south and center of the country and are mostly frozen assets, which places them outside the official production cycles. Collective lands are always at the core of conflicts whether between tribes, between locals and investors, or between locals and the state.
- State-owned lands: In order to presumably achieve agricultural independence, the state bought the land the French were using during occupation and listed them as state-owned endowments instead of returning them to their original owners. In 1964, total state-owned lands reached 828,000 hectares²⁴, only 493,000 of which are left after many of the lands were given to regime loyalists and investors in the agricultural sector. These lands are among the most fertile in the country and are developed in terms of infrastructure. They, however, suffer from serious mismanagement problems including corruption, negligence, debts... etc., which undermines their productivity level. That is why these lands are always home to social movements that call for returning land to farmers.

²⁴ "How to restructure state-owned land in the Tunisian countryside in favor of farmers [Arabic]." *Al Hiwar Al Motamaden*, November 2, 2015.

Structural inequality in land use:

Women constitute 80% of labor force in the agriculture sector²⁵, but they only get 4% of agricultural outputs (around 33,000 out of 516,000²⁶). These numbers underline the inequality from which female farmers suffer and which are to a great extent is attributed to inheritance laws and customs. On one hand, men get double women's inheritance based on Islamic law and on the other hand, the land goes to the nearest male relatives according to local customs. This means that female farmers are always in a subordinate position and are always involved in a feudalist relationship whether with male members of their families for whom they work in the land without pay or with landowners for whom they work for minimum pay that ranges from 3 to 4 US dollars per day. Women who do not work in their families' land are usually exploited on seasonal basis in harsh working conditions and without any forms of social protection. It is noteworthy that most state-owned lands are assigned to males, whether directly or through companies that lease the land. Remaining lands are managed by the Department of State-owned Lands (Office des Terres Domaniales).

Irrigated parameters between scarcity and commercial agriculture:

The percentage of irrigable land does not exceed 9.2% of total plowable land, that is around 450,000 hectares, yet they constitute 35% of national agricultural and secures 20-40% of food exports. The scarcity of irrigable land is linked to the scarcity of water resources. Private investors take advantage of the situation to get hold of these lands with state support. Irrigable lands are dominated by monoculture modes of production where one crop is cultivated for export and where hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizers are used. This means that those lands adopt extremely regressive modes of production since they rely on exporting agricultural outputs, monopoly, nepotism, and cheap labor in addition to absolute subordination to global markets. These modes of production also deplete water resources, contaminate the soil, and produce unhealthy food.

The use of irrigation water sheds light on state policies as far as irrigable lands are concerned. The state dedicates approximately 100,000 hectares to cultivating vegetables, one quarter of which is dedicated for tomatoes. Around 150,00 hectares are dedicated to planting trees (64,000 for olive trees, 32,000 for palm trees, 25,000 for citrus trees). Only 35% of irrigable land is used for major crops with a remarkable decline in grains in favor of fodder. This shift is attributed to the state's focus on dairy industries, which are dominated by influential businessmen and banks. Despite the large area occupied by olive forests, around 1.6 million hectares, olive trees keep encroaching upon irrigable lands and now occupy 14% of them. This is because the state encourages the entry of European species that rely on surface irrigation into the country.

Environmental impacts and climate change:

Agricultural lands are exposed to constant pressure by other economic sectors such as housing, tourism, services, and extractive industries. One of the main reasons of the decline in agricultural assets is urban encroachment on agricultural lands, pasturelands, and forest as well as a remarkable rise in informal housing. Polluting industries also had a negative effect on agricultural activities, which is especially the case in Gafsa, Gabes, Tataouine, and Douz. This is the result of supporting lucrative rentier sectors at the expense of subsistence farming.

²⁵ Hamza Marzouk, Tunisie – travail agricole : La main-d'œuvre féminine reste dominante, L'\économiste Maghrébin: <https://bit.ly/3sX0d9k>

²⁶ Enquête sur les Structures des Exploitations Agricoles 2004-2005: <http://www.onagri.nat.tn/uploads/divers/enquetes-structures/index.htm>

In addition, agricultural lands are affected by an increase in domestic waste which is disposed of at informal landfills in the outskirts of cities such as Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax. Added to this is the weak sewerage which leads to disposing of contaminated water in valleys or the sea without treating it and the excessive use of chemicals in farming, industry, and cleaning. All these practices are detrimental to the environment and agriculture and violate the rights of both farmers and consumers.

On the other hand, agricultural lands are affected by climate change, which led to increasing the salinity of the soil and of artesian water, sea level rise, erosion, desertification, and other phenomena linked to rainfall decline and rising temperatures. Despite the gravity of such developments, the state does not take them seriously and its efforts at dealing with climate change are confined to attempts at reducing greenhouse gas emissions on the local level instead of devising strategies to cope with new climate developments.

While the conditions of agricultural lands in Tunisia have a negative impact on different farming sectors and on the majority of farmers, they constitute an opportunity for investors who only focus on the accumulation of wealth. These investors take advantage of the vulnerability of small producers, the legal stalemate on collective lands, lack of monitoring measures for the use of natural resources, and their relationship with state institutions to get hold of the best agricultural lands that they use for commercial projects. Subsistence farming, practiced by small and medium farmers, is facing several structural challenges. Since Tunisia got its independence, the state kept wages very low while not controlling the prices of raw materials, which increased production costs. This led to the impoverishment of farmers and to the creation of speculation and corrupt lobbying networks that monopolized the use of land, resources, agricultural outputs, and the distribution and supply of basic foods such as grains, dairy products, and meat. Nepotism also controls the distribution of other products such as vegetables and feed. All those factors render farmers the most vulnerable in the agriculture sector. The director of the Tunisian Union for Farming and Fishing stated that 12,000 farmers gave up farming in 2018 and either left their lands uncultivated or offered them for sale.

Several protest movements in Tunisia called for a comprehensive agricultural reform and a new farming plan that takes into consideration both farmers and the environment. The demands of these movements included assigning land to food producers, putting an end to exploitation by investors, monitoring the use of environmental resources, and supporting production modes that can be adapted to climate changes. However, the balance of power is still not in favor of such movements since international financial institutions and local corporations that cooperate with them are still in control and still overlook the difference between food security and food sovereignty.

Third: The Chtouka Ait Baha labor movement in Morocco:

Morocco is the North African country with the highest investment in the agriculture sector. Moroccan and foreign investors profited from agricultural lands in the country at the expense of environmental resources and farmers' rights.

Loss of food sovereignty:

After gaining its independence in 1956, the ownership of lands held by French occupiers, which were seized from small farmers, was transferred to rich property owners. As a result, those property owners, labelled the "neo-colonizers," got hold of 747,000 hectares out of a total of one

million and 20,000 hectares controlled by the French occupation²⁷. A small portion of the lands were assigned to the public sector and are managed by Société de Développement Agricole (SODEA) and Société de Gestion des Terres Agricoles (SOGETA), whose privatization started in the late 1990s.

The structural reform program implemented by Morocco in 1983, based on instructions by international financial institutions, contributed to the rise of neoliberalism in the country. The national economy was restructured to cope with global market demands and the agriculture sector was the most affected. This was done through encouraging export farming and granting investors substantial tax exemptions, hence achieving the core goals of the Green Morocco Plan (Plan Maroc Vert)²⁸.

The agriculture sector in Morocco attracted huge investments, which enabled agricultural companies to merge into major corporate groups that control the sector. In fact, only seven groups control 95% of fruit and vegetable exports²⁹. This led to the emergence of large agricultural estates in which a substantial labor force worked.

Farm laborers in Chtouka Ait Baha and the struggle for food sovereignty:

The Chtouka Ait Baha province is home to more than 70,000 farm laborers, male and female, who come from different parts in Morocco. They live in villages next to where they work, where they are crammed in small spaces with no adequate infrastructure, no nurseries for children of workers, and no means of entertainment. Poverty and the absence of dignified living standards provide a fertile soil for crime and prostitution. This province secures around 70% of the national production of fruits and vegetables³⁰.

The living conditions in Chtouka Ait Baha offer an example of the type of "development" supported by the state through creating a suitable environment for multi-nationals and adapting labor, investment, and tax legislations to market demands. The adoption of such legislation created a wide gap between agricultural and industrial workers. That is why one of the major demands put forward by agricultural unions is raising the wages of farm laborers to be equivalent to those of their counterparts in the industrial sector.

Since 2004, large numbers of men and women who work in farm labor joined unions and engaged in social movements that protested the exploitation to which they are subjected in agricultural estates. This exploitation is not only demonstrated in low wages but also long working hours, an unsafe working environment especially with the unmonitored use of pesticides, and the emergence of brokering companies, all typical aspects of commercial, export-oriented farms³¹. Unionized social movements mainly came in the form of protests in which thousands of workers, men and women, took part. Those movements were faced by numerous challenges that included the expulsion and imprisonment of a number of protestors, yet they started gradually to gain momentum and farmers were able to have some of their demands met. Protest movements in the Chtouka Ait Baha province did not achieve many of their goals since corporations started expelling workers or delaying their wages, filed lawsuits against unionists, and raided union offices.

²⁷ Hamza. "Who controls Morocco's fruit and vegetable exports? [Arabic]" *Akhbarona*, December 22, 2011: <https://www.akhbarona.com/economy/12550.html>

²⁸ Najib Akesbi. "Free trade agreements are colonial agreements against the people [Arabic]." ATTAC Maroc and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2015.

²⁹ Hamza. Op. cit.

³⁰ "Pesticides are detrimental to the environment and human health [Arabic]." *Lakome.com*, July 26, 2017.

³¹ Omar Aziki. *In defense of food sovereignty in Morocco: A field study of agricultural policies and the depletion of resources* [Arabic], July 2019.

The case of Chtouka Ait Baha provides an example of the development model that prioritizes profit at the expense of laborers as agriculture is turned into a commercial project whose main aim is exporting to global markets. This is done without taking into consideration the safety of farm laborers, which is mainly demonstrated in the excessive use of pesticides especially inside plastic greenhouses in which temperature and humidity are remarkably high. Activism in Chtouka Ait Baha coincided with other movements across Morocco that resisted the capitalist model that has become a major component of the agriculture sector in the country.

Impacts on the environment:

Extractive agricultural corporations control thousands of hectares in the Sous plain at the Chtouka Ait Baha province south of Agadir. Most of these lands focus on export crops including ones that are new to the region and that use huge amounts of underground water in addition to excessively relying on chemicals that harm farmers and consumers alike³². This information was confirmed by a report published on Lakome.com and which stated that all Moroccans are threatened by those toxins³³. Through using up millions of cubic meters of water, those crops lead to a catastrophic decline in underground water in Chtouka Ait Baha and neighboring areas. ATTAC Maroc sounded the alarm bells through confirming that “potable water allocated for human, industrial, and touristic use does not exceed 7% of the total amount of water used in Souss-Massa and even this percentage is threatened by the excessive use of water for commercial agriculture, which devours more than 93% of total water resources”³⁴. Agricultural corporations also produce tons of waste that include drip irrigation pipes and plastic bags among others. This constitutes a grave threat to neighboring lands owned by small farmers. In addition, the accumulation of plastic waste near residential areas threatens the health of humans and livestock alike.

The way to sovereignty on food and resources:

The demands of farm workers are part and parcel of the Via Campesina Movement³⁵ and the North African Food Sovereignty Network. These demands revolve around focusing on local and sustainable farming that respects the environment and preserves the traditions of the people of a given region. Coordination between the agricultural and industrial sectors is necessary in order to guarantee the production of healthy and nutritious food. This kind of transformation is not possible without responding to the demands of movements at Chtouka Ait Baha and their counterparts that work on finding alternative solutions across the country.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Pesticides are detrimental to the environment and human health [Arabic].” Op. cit.

³⁴ “Water crisis in Sous continues, water treatment plant in Chtouka not a solution [Arabic].” *ATTAC Maroc*, February 23, 2021.

³⁵ Declaration of the World Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali. North African Network for Food Sovereignty.

Conclusion:

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the vital role of small producers³⁶, who have been the main suppliers of food and basic commodities since the crisis started while global supply lines managed by multi-nationals did not manage to do that job³⁷. This leads to the necessity of looking for comprehensive economic alternatives that can replace the current capitalist model, which witnesses constant fluctuations whose cost is mainly paid by vulnerable groups. One of the main components of that alternative model is food sovereignty, whose features were identified by the Via Campesina movement and gained momentum among millions of small farmers, fishermen, shepherds, and farm laborers across the world. Based on those features, food sovereignty is a comprehensive project on the social, economic, and cultural levels and is also one that prioritizes the protection of the environment.

In order to make this possible, several recommendations are to be presented to governments, international organizations, and movements that call for food sovereignty. These include the following:

- The necessity of changing the laws related to small farmers, fishermen, and shepherds in order to guarantee providing a safe working environment
- Focusing on current and future development plans on production, harvesting, and distribution plans that protect the environment and adapting local food system to climate changes while avoiding imported inputs and chemicals
- Supporting local farmers, especially small farmers, through securing their right to access production tools such as lands, forests, water, and funding while putting an end to favoring corporations that focus on export crops which harm the environment and farmers' rights, hence obstructing the achievement of food sovereignty
- Stopping the cultivation of crops that use large amounts of water, energy, and pesticides and supporting environmental-friendly farming that achieves food sovereignty on one hand and adapts to climate change on the other hand
- The participation of civil society organizations in the 2021 Food Systems Summit to present the arguments against injustices practiced by big corporations and negatively impacting food sovereignty
- Supporting protest movements by farm laborers in countries where commercial agriculture prevails and supporting their rights such as access to land and resources and organization in unions
- Reviving subsistence farming as a means of protecting the environment and preserving local cultures
- A bottom-top agricultural reform that supports the rights of small farmers, including access to land and water, and returns lands confiscated by the state and multi-nationals

³⁶ "Farmers: The epitome of struggle in the face of Covid-19 [Arabic]": <https://bit.ly/3ucAN8a>

³⁷ Walden Bello. "Is COVID an opportunity for Food Sovereignty?" September 2, 2020: <https://www.kzoo.edu/praxis/walden-bello/>

- Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
- Including the Glasgow Agreement: Climate People's Commitment³⁸ in agricultural policies and putting into force strategies to cope with climate change in the Arab region
- Revising the farming map in the region and adopting approaches that focus on diversity, integration, adapting to climate change, and farming for local consumption
- Going back to using original seeds and local animal species
- Encouraging small farmers, fishermen, and shepherds to organize in unions that defend their economic, social, and environmental rights
- The participation of food producers in the pricing of food commodities to protect their incomes and diminish the role of brokers
- Establishing local, cooperative networks that link the cycle of production, manufacturing, and local consumption and that work independently from state institutions

³⁸ Glasgow Agreement: Climate People's Commitment: <https://caneurope.org/achievements/glasgow-agreement-climate-peoples-committment/>