



Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)

The historic oasis of Gafsa in Tunisia



The historic oasis of Gafsa covers 700 ha and dates back to ancient times of history. In this oasis, crop diversification and cultivation and the integration of livestock and breeding animals are commonly practiced as means for livelihood subsistence. Crop diversification is conducted in three stages: the first stage is dedicated for vegetable crops, the second for fruit trees and the last one for date palms.

The historic oasis of Gafsa was the result of adapted traditional management practices of the oasis people. This agro-ecosystem is characterized by a water management system based on its control and distribution and in the use of adapted tools and technologies.

However, over the past years, the existence of the Gafsa oasis has been threatened by socio-economic changes such as the market demand for new agricultural varieties and an irrational use of water resources. Local biodiversity has been affected by the market forces which have pushed farmers to cultivate new introduced varieties. Furthermore, customary organizations that have equitable access to irrigation water have followed irrational water management practices.



The GIAHS Intervention Strategy

Working with local and national partners operating in the oasis, FAO's national counterpart, ASM Gafsa, conducted dynamic conservation and sensitization activities such as:

- A participatory inventory of the historic oasis of Gafsa,
- Awareness raising on the importance of the dynamic conservation of oasis heritage through several meetings and workshops with local institutions and government agencies,
- Broadcasting in radio and television programs dedicated to local agri-cultural heritage,
- Dissemination of informational material such as posters and brochures, and
- Coordination of training sessions for farmers on the dynamic conservation of traditional agricultural systems.



Activities have reached community based organizations, farmers and agricultural technicians who have benefited from more than 10 training sessions on methods to economize water irrigation in plots. Furthermore, during a date palm and apricots fair organized to demonstrate the biodiversity richness of the oases, 10 young graduates were trained on agro-tourism to improve and diversify their incomes.

The Results

After 4 years of work at a local, national and international level, the GIAHS project has contributed to the valorization of this centuries old ingenious resource management system in the historic oasis of Gafsa. Local and national partners and stakeholders are now aware of the value bestowed by this system and the importance of its conservation for the well-being of the indigenous people and the food security of future generations.



As a result of the GIAHS project, the national charter for the Conservation and Development of the Tunisian Oasis was prepared and signed by the key stakeholders on the 14 April 2012 in Gafsa, Tunisia. It has been achieved thanks to the efforts deployed by the national and local partners to conserve the historic oasis of Gafsa as a national agricultural heritage system. The national charter for the historic oasis of Gafsa marked a major step towards the conservation and recognition of this important agricultural heritage system.