

**CANNABIS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN GHOMARA'S MOUNTAINS  
(WESTERN COASTAL PART OF RIF - NORTH OF MOROCCO):  
THE GENDER MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The Ghomarian woman plays a fundamental role in her society: the ruling agricultural activity as well as the socio-cultural life depends strictly on her, but this woman still suffers some discrimination. To clear up this situation, a study concerning 249 people was realized through the adoption of a quantitative and qualitative sociological approach. According to the obtained results, the woman is relatively deprived of certain fundamental rights, especially those concerning the management of Cannabis (hemp) cultivation and holding her own project (job) or working in project outside her family. Nevertheless, she plays a fundamental socio-cultural role from her first age, protects customs linked to the traditions and the local culture, and constitutes an axis around of which revolve all the activities and the aspects of the development in the studied region. Therefore, it is necessary to give a major importance for the role of the woman before any aiming action to improve the conditions of the sustainable development in the zone.

**Keywords:** Gender, Cannabis cultivation, sustainable development, qualitative analysis, Ghomara, Rif, Morocco.

**INTRODUCTION**

In the countryside, women's sphere activities are linked and overlapped, in a way that it becomes difficult to make a difference between indoor and outdoor responsibilities. Indeed, in rural areas, women being at once housewives, with all what this "function" implies, contribute efficiently in the agricultural works. Furthermore, they play a vital role and /or take full responsibility in some part. It is the case, for instance, of the breeding, keeping the truck farmer, picking fruits, and even crop harvesting; food transformation, storage and safety of their families, generators of extra-income, thanks to their handcraft activity, in particular the weaving of clothes, covers, or carpets. In this regards, the handcraft activities contribute to the family livelihood, either directly by the price of their product sold in markets, or indirectly by the economy of the cost price of these products on the market (BLPNTTA, 1997). On the other hand, women often do not have the same access to and control over capital and resources as men or equal rights of inheritance, ownership, freedom, and power over decision-making including their own reproductive health. Traditions, customs, and

social norms often hold the key to understanding the roots of gender inequalities (Jutting, Morrisson, Dayton-Johnson, & Dreschsler, 2008).

On an international scale, the United Nations, through its reports since the 1980s (United Nations, 1985) and since its future perspectives (United Nations, 2008), exhorted the states member, in association with the organizations of United Nations and civil society, to take measures to improve the women situation, including the autochthonous women, in their national, regional, and world development strategies. These measures foresee the creation of a favorable environment to the improvement of the women living situation in their rural area, the continuity of the political and socio-economical autonomy, the support for their full participation in the decision processes, the guarantee of the rights of old women living in rural areas, the mobilization of resources to facilitate the access to the credits, and the integration of the rural women in all national and international development strategies of the poverty alleviation. Without the presence and input of women, agriculture would not exist (Agriculture, 2002). Nobody can neglect the role of the woman in the local policies of development; she is an active element in changing society, particularly in Morocco. According to the thematic report of the Human development in Morocco: the Moroccan Demography (2006), one of the reasons behind the increasing growth rate of economy in these last years corresponds to the contribution of the woman to the demographic decrease at the national level. This is due to several reasons such as; a more and more late marriage age (31.2 years old for men and 26.3 years old for women), the girls frequent more and more school therefore got the opportunity to design their own future career, and straightforwardly inserted in the labor market system, the wide use of contraceptives, unemployed and the changing in life style of young generation.

Several works have been appeared, studding the relation of Rifian people with cannabis cultivation and the sustainable development in this region and has been undertaken since 1991. Many aspects were studied: taxonomy, biology, ethnobotany and ethnopharmacolgy (Merzouki et al., 1994a,b; Merzouki and Molero Mesa, 1995; Merzouki et al., 1996a,b,c; Merzouki and Molero Mesa, 1997, 1999; Merzouki et al., 2000a; Merzouki, 2001)

This paper highlights the contribution and the input of the rural women of Ghomara tribes during all the agricultural activities, including the cannabis cultivation, by answering the following questions: how much integrated a rural woman becomes into the everyday life of Ghomara? What are the perspectives towards her well-being? How does the autochthonous population of the region perceive the rights and the duties of the Ghomarian woman?

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The study area, also known as "Tribes of Ghomara" is part of the Rif Mountains, the date of the introduction of cannabis cultivation in the Mountains is not known with precision. The historian Al-Bakri (11<sup>th</sup> century) did not indicate its presence in the Maghreb. Neither Al-Maqrizi, nor Ibn Al-Baytar (13<sup>th</sup> century) mention its

existence in Morocco, but they extensively described it in Egypt. It is certain that its consumption was quite diffuse among the Moroccan population in the 1800s for, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Sultan Moulay Al-Hassan issued very strict laws to combat the trade in the drug. During the period of the protectorate (1912 - 1956), its sale was officially legalized under the monopoly of the tobacco grower, "Régie des tabacs" that prepared the kif, in its companies in Tangier and Kenitra, and commercialized it. This situation lasted until 1953, the date sale of kif was prohibited by an initial decree, followed by second one on 24 April 1954 that prohibited its production and the consumption (Merzouki, 2001). In the present time the area of cultivation of cannabis in the Rif Mountain approximates 120 500 ha (UNODC, 2004), although in the 1970s this area was concentrated in 100 km<sup>2</sup> in the Ketama – Chefchaouen - Targuist triangle (Mikuriya, 1967)

According to this version of the cannabis survey report (UNODC, 2005), cannabis cultivation has caused significant changes in family structures in relation to their farmlands. Production relationships between family members rely more on transactions that are based on the dominant forms in the market economy. New forms of division of labor within the family group were introduced: the head of the family brings the land and financial capital needed to purchase fertilizer and pesticides as well as payment of farm workers as needed and members of the family contribute their work to the maintenance of culture.

#### **WHAT ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRY?**

The concept of sustainable development and environmental protection has become an unavoidable topic of political, economic, and social debate. The basic definition was given by the Brundtland report in 1987 (Our common future) "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The three pillars of sustainable development are environmental protection, economic growth, and social progress and equity. Although his definition was vague, it cleverly captured two fundamental issues, the problem of the environmental degradation that so commonly accompanies economic growth and yet the need for such growth to alleviate poverty. Almost every national government in the United Nations now has a minister and a department tasked with policy on the environment, and many regional and local governments have also developed this capacity. Since 1992, the volume and quality of environmental legislation (international, national, and local) has expanded hugely, and international agreements (such as the Kyoto protocol) have not only raised the profile of environmental change, but also begun to drive global policy change.

Public awareness of environmental and social issues in development is, in many cases now, well developed. Citizens, in almost all countries, not only know the issues, but tend to feel that the quality of the environment is important both to their own wellbeing and to the common good.

The ‘greening’ of business has grown to be a central issue in corporate social responsibility for many global companies, although, for many, it is still a boutique concern within wider relationship management, rather than something that drives structural change in the nature or scale of core business.

There is a profound paradox here. On the one hand, the twenty-first century is widely heralded as the era of sustainability, with a rainbow alliance of government, civil society, and business devising novel strategies for increasing human welfare within planetary limits. On the other hand, the evidence is that the global human enterprise is, rapidly, becoming less sustainable...

Much has been achieved - but is it enough? Are global trends heading towards sustainability or away from it? (IUCN, 2006). Nowadays, Morocco continues to be subject to all sorts of environmental degradations; pollution of air and water, deforestation, soils erosion, desertification, and biodiversity losses, among others. This is well highlighted in the Rif (northern Morocco) which is currently suffering from a number of issues such as overpopulation, immigration, low infrastructure, very low agricultural yields and fisheries, declining tourism revenues, smuggling, and cannabis cultivation. Therefore, Rifian women and, specifically, Ghomarian women require major attention both to their socio-economic integration and their sustainable development needs.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

The studied zone is situated in the coastal hillside of the province of Chefchaouen in the western North of Morocco (Figure 1). From the ethnographical point of view, the Ghomara country is formed by ten tribes: Beni Ziat, Beni Sejel, Beni Bouzra, Beni Selmane, Beni Mansour, Beni Guerir, Beni Smih, Me tioua, Beni R'zine, and Beni khaled. According to administrative subdivision, this zone includes two circles (Bab Bered and Bouhmed) and four caïdats (Jabha, Assifane, Bou Ahmed, and Talambote)



Figure. 1. Demarcation of the study region

**Quantitative aspect:**

The concerned population constitutes what we call "the country of Ghomara". It is estimated that about 145,000 inhabitants live in this area (49.5% are women). A total of 249 people (for all sexes), selected from the four caïdats, are interviewed. This sample size was representative enough to give estimations of measured factors. Besides, this survey focuses rather on the explanation of the studied phenomena without claiming to give very precise measures onto their scale.

**Qualitative aspect:**

The study is inspired by sociological and anthropological methods. The adoption of qualitative approach constitutes a major importance, because not only the qualitative data allows refining the statistical information, but they give the possibility of explaining the mechanisms which governs the studied phenomena. Qualitative methods can be used to design and implement quantitative methods (Kanbur, 2003). The qualitative interviews undertaken in this study were taken to represent personal experience narratives based on perspectives from interpretive sociology (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Silverman, 1999), in particular, the perspectives of 'active interviewing' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997)

The technique of the survey used corresponds to the opened and detailed interview with the local population. The sample of this survey was conducted with 5 farmers, 1 official administrative, 5 school girls, and 6 alumni's fathers. A semi-structured guide of the questions was established to lead to successful conclusions in the progress of the survey.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:**

**Quantitative Analysis**

From a perspective of the quantitative analysis, we try to collect the local population opinions about the theme of "gender equality", rights, and duties of the woman. In the everyday life of the Ghomara's agriculture and the other social and political aspects, the result of this quantitative survey discriminates two parts: the agriculture and cannabis and the fundamental rights of Ghomarian women seen by local population.

a- The agriculture and cannabis:

To represent the head of a farm

Two thirds of the consulted people (61% against 39%) did not find it logical that a woman is qualified to lead the farm and takes advantage or manages the economic properties.

To work in the Cannabis exploitations

More than half of the interviewed people (57% against 43%) said that the woman's task is a realization of the necessary works to make this type of culture profitable. Nevertheless, we noticed the absence of the equality notion when it comes to harvesting profits.

To look after the Cannabis crops, after field works

As regards to the intervention of the women in the cannabis cultivation, it emerges that more than two thirds (73%) asserted that the woman contributes actively in taking care of Cannabis crops, while the rest doesn't see it the same way.

In what phase of the cannabis cultivation does she intervene?

Almost 85% of the interviewed people asserted that the women participate generally and sometimes totally in the seed of grains, the weeding of plants, the harvest, the transport, the drying, and, sometimes, in the beating for the resin outcome.

How is her contribution at the work of fields estimated?

The opinions related with the contribution of the woman in the various works did not seem contrasted. 51.5% of the interviewed people thought that the women work hard in their fields. 48.5% of the people interviewed thought the opposite are

Does woman participates in the final phase of the Kif and/or the hashish production?

In general, the majority of the investigated people (82%) declared the participation of the Ghomarian women in the final phase of the production of the Kif and/or hashish.

Does woman participates in the commercialization?

Concerning the marketing of the final products of cannabis, it always remains, according to 70 % of the investigated people, a male practice. Although 30% of the interviewed subjects asserted that there is a participation of women in this practice.

Does she manage the income of the cannabis production?

More than a third of the interviewed people (35 %) assert that the women at the Ghomara region intervened in the management of incomes stemming from the cultivation of cannabis; while 65 % neglect this role.

How do the men evaluate this management?

For those who confirm the participation of the woman in the incomes management, 81 % of them think that the woman manages the financial resources efficiently.

To consume the Cannabis (Kif or Hashish)

The consumption of the cannabis by the woman is not admitted as a feminine behavior in the region, according to the local farmer "the woman does not consume Kif or Hashich!". More than 8 out of 10 interviewees (83%) do not accept that the woman consumes the products of the cannabis.

b- Fundamental rights of Ghomarian women:

To receive a health care

The right to receive the sanitary care for the women doesn't provoke any hesitation to the population. (100 %)

To complete her secondary or high education

A little more than 1 out of every 4 interviewed people (28 % against 72 %) asserted that the women do not have the right to their studies that occur beyond the primary education. On the other hand, 3 out of every 4 interviewed people defend the right of the women to end their studies.

To express freely her opinion in public

A little more than 1 out of every 3 consulted subjects (38% against 62%) refused the woman's right to express her opinion freely in public. For these interviewed people, this practice has to remain limited in the familiar environment.

To reach a job

Generally for the residents of the studied zone, more than half of the subjects (the 53 % against 47 %) do not consider it acceptable for the women to access the labor market.

To choose her husband freely

According to the frequencies distribution obtained from the answers of the interviewed people, 57.4% agree that the women should be free in choosing her husband. For the remaining 43%, the woman doesn't have this right.

To show herself in public and gets dressed the way she wants

The right of the woman to express herself freely in public is considered acceptable by 25% of the interviewed people. This practice must be limited only in the familiar environment according to 75% of the interviewed population.

To express her political opinion by vote

About 2 out of every 3 interviewed people (67%) asserted that the woman has the right to vote and to express her political belief. While the rest (32.5%) does not see that she has to have this right.

According to the results aroused, we can assert that:

The majority of the interviewed people, who are residents in the studied region, consider that the woman is relatively deprived of her fundamental rights (receive a necessary health attention, complete her academic

education until a wished level, show herself in public, and express her political opinion). The same studied population confirms that the woman is not of equal to the man for certain rights, such as, the management of farms (more specially those cultivated by the cannabis), the ability to express her public opinion freely, and to consume the cannabis and its extraction-products. At least 60 % of the surveyed population asserted that the woman should not get these rights.

As regards to the right of the woman to work in a farm destined for the cannabis cultivation, to reach a job outside the family house with the same possibilities of success as the man and/or to choose freely her husband, approximately 50 % of the investigated population expressed the same rights as those recognized for the man, while the rest (50 %) of the population does not admit it.

In fact, it must be noted that the degree of change of the woman status in this region (wife, girl, and sister), after the expansion of cannabis cultivation, their contribution to the production of cannabis is recognized as fundamental. Since the woman is recognized as a person among whom the wage spending (expenses) and the redistribution of the cannabis incomes are relatively under her control, we can assert that she is spirited to acquire a certain financial independence and a social recognition in her Douar and her family. This little independence had positive effects on the extension of her cultural space, more and more important mobility towards the souk (Rural market) or the city, and improvement of her domestic role.

### **Qualitative analysis**

The analysis of qualitative data began with the textual transcription of sound tracks recorded during the conversations. They were seized on the qualitative data analysis software, Atlas ti 5.0 (computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software). The collected data are analyzed by subject and their meanings are recapitulated by assigning a code to every subject. The codes (or data) were compared and links were established (explanations, problems, and comments) by editing the "network" tool on the software. To ensure the objectivity of the work, the codes are analyzed by three researchers belonging to the Biology department in the faculty of sciences in Tétouan.

#### **a- Gender perspective in the urban and rural environment:**

The most important factors which mark the development of the everyday life in the studied zone are defined from the "Gender perspective", shown in the following figure (Figure 2).



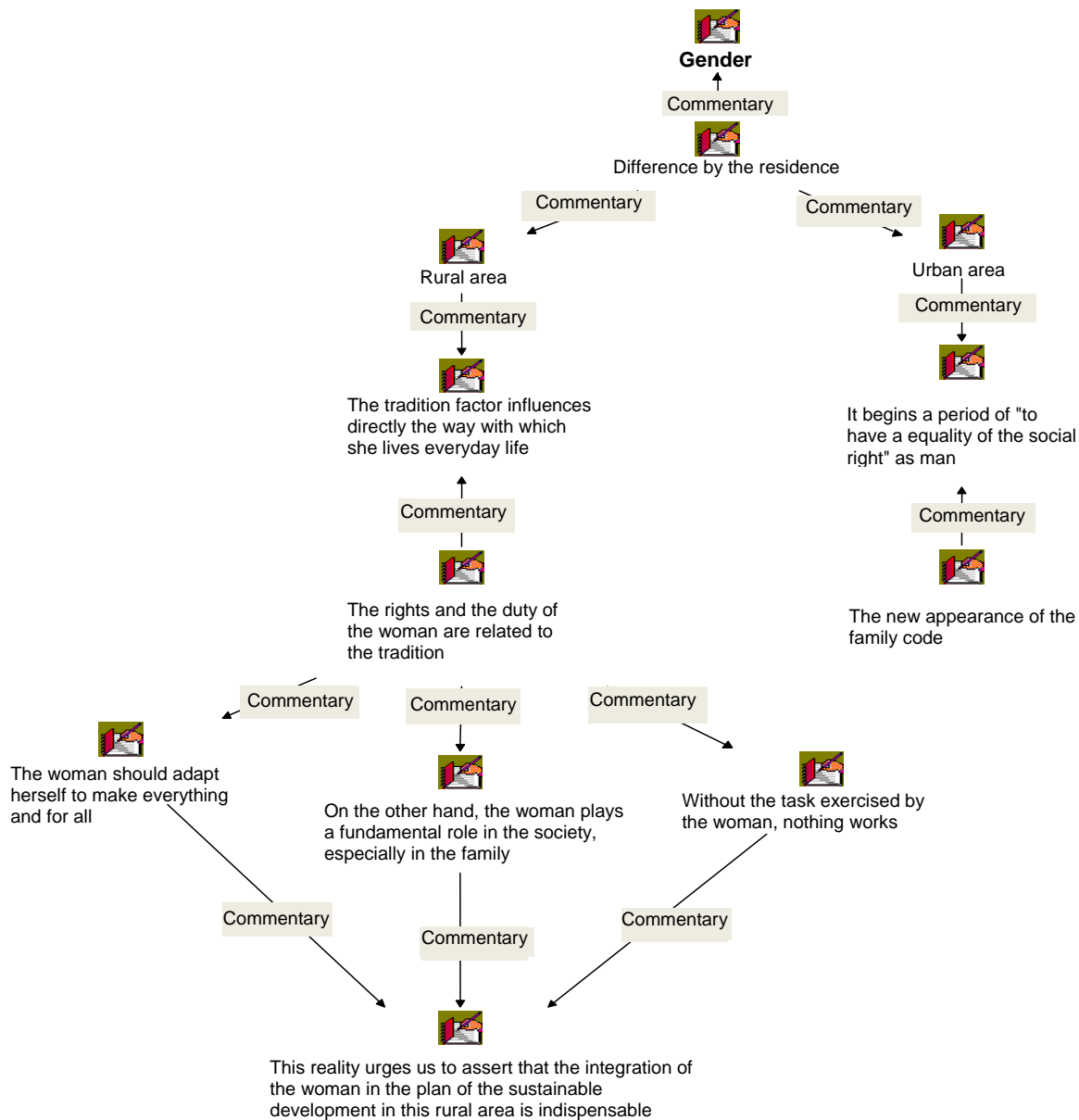


Figure 2. Gender perspectives

Before studying the evolution mode of daily life from a gender perspective, as well as in its general aspect in Morocco and at the rural area, it is necessary to know the differences which exist at present times between the roles and the presence of the woman in the rural and urban areas.

The urban woman lives in an environment marked by the installation of a series of laws and legislations (new family code or Moudawana –DAHIR 2004) which constitutes the beginning of the socio-cultural change in the kingdom of Morocco, by removing the rights classically attributed to the man. As an example of this

reform, we can quote the rectified divorce law which obliges the man legally to justify the essential causes for which, he asks the divorce from his wife, the new legislation also reinforces the mechanisms for reconciliation and mediation both through the family and the judge. If the husband has the right of repudiation, the wife may also avail herself of this right through *tamleek* (assignment). In all cases, before repudiation may be authorized it must be ascertained that the repudiated woman has received all of her vested rights. A new procedure for repudiation has been established that requires judicial permission, and the repudiation can not be registered until all vested rights owed to the wife and children have been paid in full by the husband. Irregular pronouncements of repudiation by the husband shall not be considered valid. Recently, Morocco has shown by these high authorities, his clear intention to retract his reservation on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) However, no official information has been released about the operational steps taken by the Moroccan government for the implementation of this intention and the Moroccan Human rights organizations are struggling so far to gain access to remove this reservations. Consequently, we can clearly see the changes that rural woman can benefit from, while she has been suffering from an environment which was typically patriarchal. But, on the other hand, it is a question of producing a true shock affecting the habits and customs which cements the social structure of the everyday life of the Moroccan family. Therefore, we can assert that the rural woman, traditionally, lives in a closed environment, exercising a role imposed by the traditions which exists in the zone, so that:

- She is considered as a resourceful person for everyone and for everything. Without her presence, nothing works, but her social importance is submersed in a socio-cultural atmosphere, fundamentally patriarchal;
- The woman plays a fundamental role in the development of the socio-cultural life, both for societal part as well as for her family core; and
- The Ghomarian woman is strongly attached to the local tradition of the region.

The results obtained concerning the role of the woman demonstrate to us the way to know the basic criteria to elaborate any plan of human sustainable development. Therefore, the implication of the woman in this plan is basic and can be essential.

b- The role of woman in the rural environment of Ghomara:

According to the opinions obtained from the detailed interview with the local population, the role of the woman in its environment ensures an essential function, as presented in the below relation network (Figure 3):

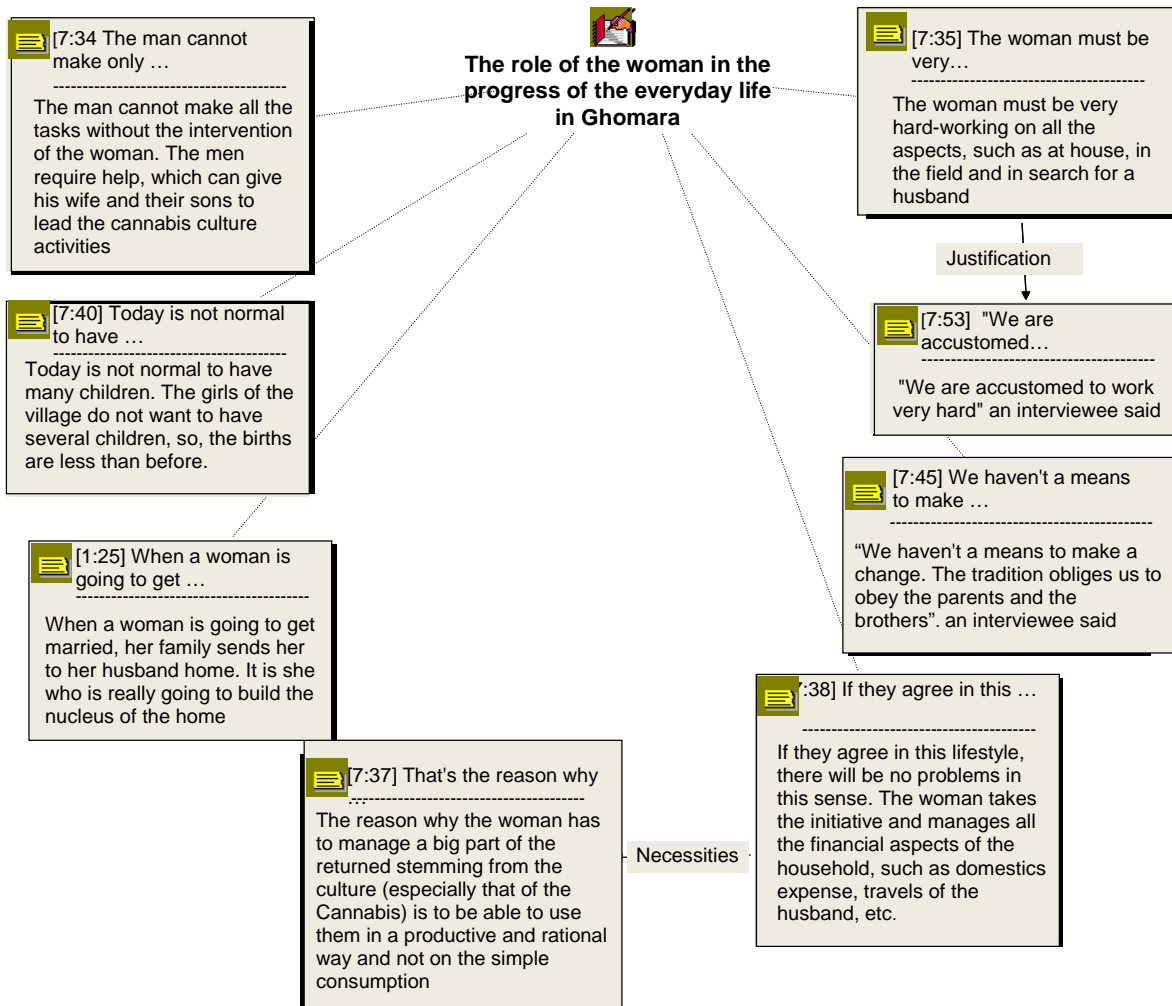


Figure 3. Women in Ghomara's environment

The Ghomarien woman exercises several roles in her local society while keeping herself under the control of the traditions and customs of this society.

- She constitutes a fundamental element of the development of the agricultural tasks because the man, alone, can make nothing. His wife participates actively almost in all the tasks associated with the agriculture, especially in the culture of cannabis.
- The woman of Ghomara gives birth several times (social phenomenon widely held in the rural world) and is in charge of her children until their adulthood. But today, the married girls of the village tend to have few children. Thus, we observe a social change which begins to develop, touching the planning of the family.
- The woman intervenes in the forecast and the management of the expenses, especially of the families which buy or commercialize their farm products.

- She is known by her respect and her total obedience, of traditions, because she is afraid of not being in harmony with the local traditions.
- She looks after her children, with daily home and field tasks "we are already used to working too much" (Local farmer).
- She also demonstrates her qualities as a good home and field worker in order to be able to be chosen by a future husband " to be afraid of being badly seen as she is not yet married, " it is not good ", because it is unacceptable in the view of values which reign a great deal of that particular social environment " (local schoolgirl) .
- To accept the idea of the marriage as "a fatality tradition" (Local farmer), this obliges the woman to obey to the traditional norms.

Now, we can state that the role that makes the Ghomarian woman in this area, is very important, she is centered in the development of the everyday life (family life, social life and professional life), especially in the management of incomes stemming from the cannabis culture and their future re-uses in a productive and rational way and not in the immediate consumption.

This role, in spite of the fact that it's accompanied by the other obligations and duties, must be adjusted according to traditions and according to a purely patriarchal lifestyle. The woman is still submitting "to rules and obligations" and that she has to honor them. It is, thus, too early to talk about the gender equality.

c- Improvement of socio-cultural conditions:

The following relations of network show the aspiration of the women interviewed towards their improvement of living conditions.

In spite of the reality detected and described in the previous point, women were consulted in what they would ask to improve their living conditions within their community. The answers don't evoke the rights or the duties of the women, but they ask for the improvement of the living conditions in their living house.

For instance, in the relations network, (Figure 4), there are two main axes which summarize the women delay to improve their socio-cultural conditions.

- On the one hand, they express the opinion according to which "by seeing their children's happiness, they are too". Thus, their demands are simply reduced to the desire to see their children happy.
- On the other hand, they asked, with a smile, "to work a little less". While admitting the impossibility of this wish, they consider it necessary for the improvement of the daily life condition.

- The sacrifice sense is anchored for those mothers. They want, at least, to see their descendants enjoying better conditions (having a livable home, appropriate work, and being healthy)

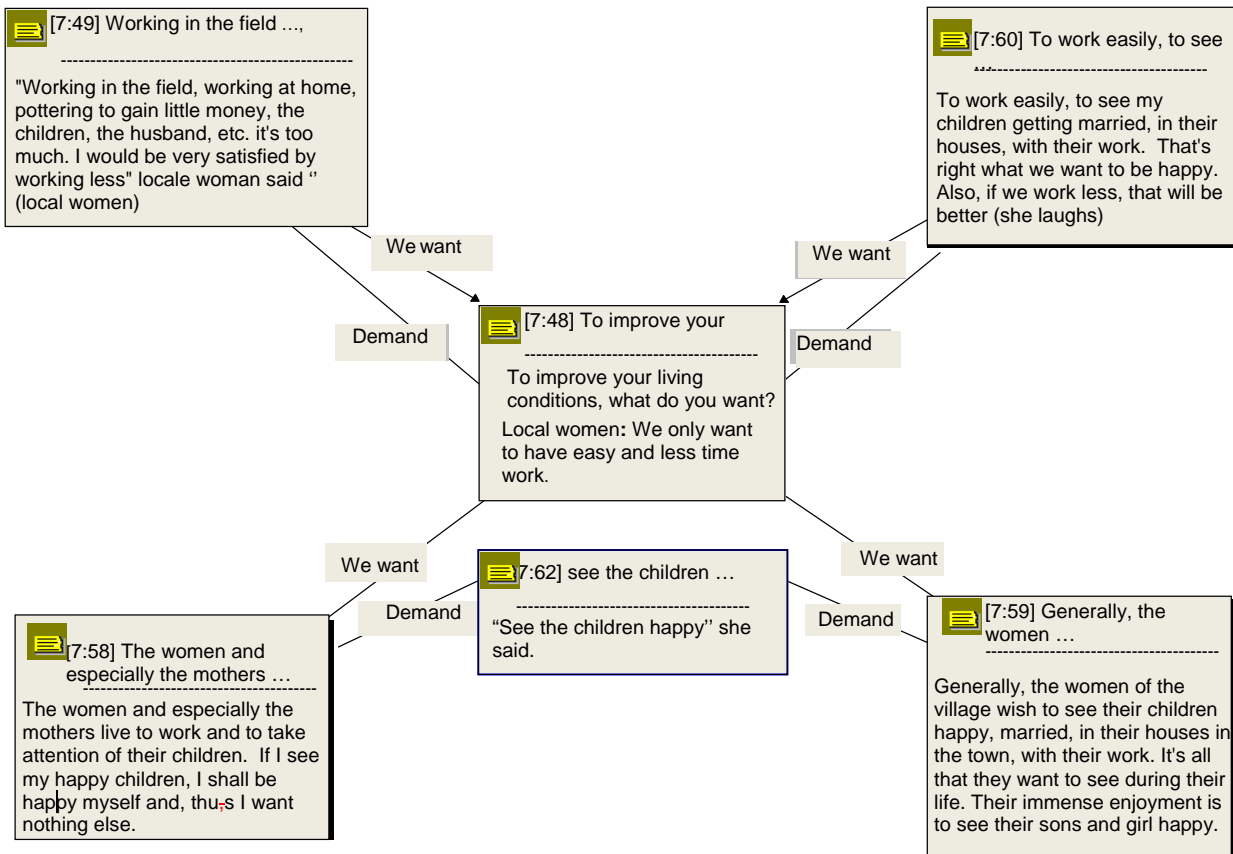


Figure 4. Woman and her improvement of socio-cultural conditions

d- Presence of the woman in the rural environment:

The presence of the woman, according to the tasks which she exercises in the development of the rural everyday life in Morocco and exactly in the Ghomara region, is very important. In the following relations network (Figure 5), we explain this presence while making reference to the activities and functions. All these activities are realized in a purely patriarchal social environment which the Ghomarian woman accepts without any hesitation, according to the own speeches of the women interviewed in the study zone.

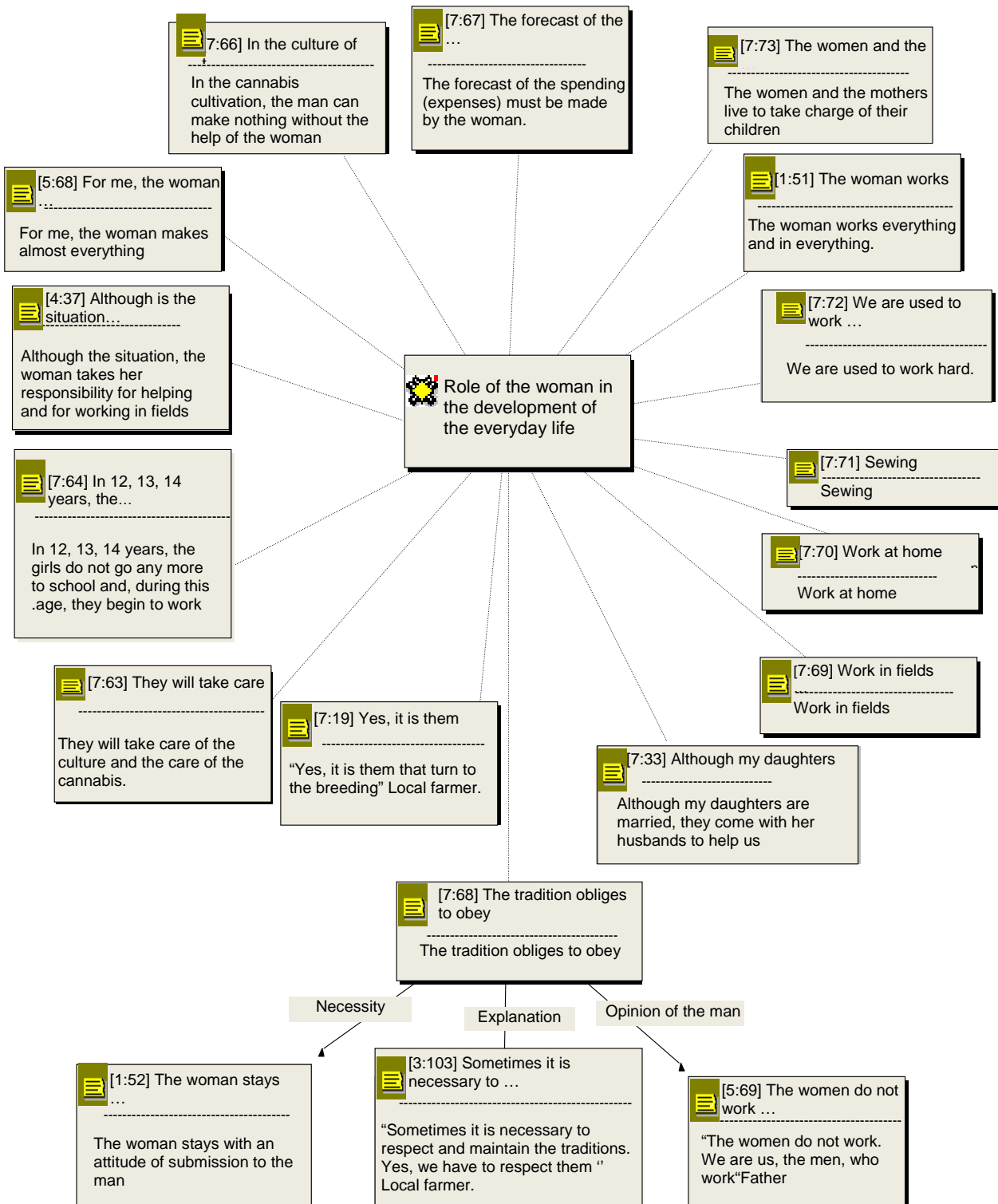


Figure 5. The woman and the rural environment

- Active and fundamental socio-cultural presence. Without the role of the woman, the man could not succeed in his work;
- Presence and assistance in the activities of the field in a precocious age, such as 12, 13 and 14 years;
- The omnipresence at the family sphere, as well in the activities of the field within their own family;
- Important role in the preservation of customs linked to the traditions and the local culture of the zone;
- Integral presence " For me, she is the woman who makes almost everything" (Local farmer);
- The man always denies the efforts exercised by the woman, for instance in their eyes the women don't work.

The woman is, thus, the mainspring of all the socio-cultural and socio-economic activities that are developed in her region. Besides, she ensures the essential function to perpetuate the continuity of the tradition.

Beyond this omnipresence in the development of the communal life she always keeps this obedience to her husband who wants, in his turn, to keep the cultural rules already established. Without her, it would not be possible to maintain the society as it is established in the concerned communes. Furthermore, this presence, which constitutes the socio-economic and socio-cultural pillars of development and the subsistence of these communes, is undervalued by the man. Because, according to the assertions of the people interviewed in the zone, "the women don't work; it is us, the men, who work" (Local farmer). We notice that the woman is necessary for the development, preservation of the traditions, and who brings all the social and family values to local population.

## **CONCLUSION**

It could be concluded from this work that women play an important role in developing local society like their male counterpart. Her presence constitutes an essential element in the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of the studied region. Most importantly, the Ghomarian women constitute an axis which revolves all the activities and the aspects of the development in a purely patriarchal society. She is characterized by the respect for the tradition, supports for the family unity, contributes in the working tasks in the field, and manages all of the family patrimony. We must not forget that the Ghomarian women practice an illegal cultivation, imposed in large part by man, so she is under permanent assault committed by authorities who control the cultivation and trafficking of drugs. Moreover, given the substantial contribution women make to agriculture and to other areas of economy, it is important that attention be given to their concern. It is necessary to look into the need and problem of women in order to tap their full potential and productivity and would be necessary to give a major importance to the place that the woman, otherwise, occupies at the time during the elaboration and of the application of the sustainable development plan or any sort of aiming action to improve the conditions of the development in the zone will fail. Finally, we have to recognize the

important tasks and responsibility, which are exercised and assumed by Ghomarian woman in her environment. These efforts must be compensated in an equalitarian context by respecting the rights and the gender.

In conclusion, sustainable development is a process that should involve and mobilize all members of society to the same extent, according to their individual needs. In order to address strategic gender needs, this will need to involve radical change in attitudes, behavior, ideology, and power structures in government, organizations, society, and individuals, both men and women.

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