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Indigenous Knowledge and Practices Related to Food Preparation and Preservation in a Bedouin Community, Egypt

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Abstract

Bedouin indigenous knowledge and practices systems are territorial treasures, generated by local people, that need both documentation, to assure their territorial rights, and innovative arrangement to maintain their socio-economic, cultural and environmental integration. These systems must be assimilated with contemporary research agenda and results to enable Bedouins, especially women, to face socio-economic challenges and mitigate and adapt to the negative effects of climate change as well. Women, who represent about 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, are increasingly recognised as important actors in these systems. Within the household, they are responsible for food preparation and food preservation.

The main objectives of this study were to: 1) Investigate and document the indigenous practices related to food preparation and preservation in the studied area, 2) Identify coping mechanisms used to overcome challenges 3) Identify challenges facing Bedouin women related to food preparation and preservation.

The study was conducted in Bedouin communities of Matrouh Governorate, located at the Northern Western coast of Egypt. A semi-structured check-list was designed and utilised during focus-group discussions and individual personal interviews with Bedouin women to collect the qualitative data related to the study objectives.

The study documented the plant and animal sources of foods and different practices of preparation and preservation which suit the dry weather and scarcity of water. Food preparation and preservation practices reflect the socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions prevailing in the tough desert nature that Bedouin women live. These practices and conditions could provide researchers and development specialists with necessary guidelines to verify, develop the IKPs and support them with latest scientific developments to upgrade their capacities for better coping with the harshness of nature.

Keywords: Bedouin community, Egypt, food preparation and preservation, indigenous knowledge and practices