



Tropentag, September 16-18, 2015, Berlin, Germany

“Management of land use systems for enhanced food security:
conflicts, controversies and resolutions”

Market Integration and Food Security in the Moroccan Mountains

DAVID KREUER¹, MOHAMMED MAHDI²

¹*Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research - UFZ, Department of Ecological Modelling / Junior Research Group POLISES, Germany*

²*National School of Agriculture, Rural Sociology, Morocco*

Abstract

In the High Atlas mountains of Morocco, the largely self-sufficient agro-pastoral economy of the past is all but gone. Most families have abandoned cereal farming and transhumant livestock breeding over the past three decades in favour of market-oriented fruit production, activities in mountain tourism, and various types of wage labour in the region and beyond. As a result, locals today sell the fruits of their agricultural production or their labour force in order to provide their families with food.

Based on a large-scale household survey and ongoing empirical research we have carried out in the High Atlas municipality of Asni, this paper addresses these profound shifts in the local production system and discusses their consequences on food security. Specifically, we ask under what circumstances these developments have the potential to increase food security for the local population.

Undoubtedly, cash incomes and better access to ever-expanding basic infrastructure have improved living conditions, health indicators, and educational opportunities for many families in the area. However, their access to markets remains asymmetrical and has thus introduced new risks and vulnerabilities. Four examples illustrate this: first, the market price for apples dropped substantially in 2014/15 and although the harvest was good, warehouses in Asni were still full with last year's crop which had not sold as expected. Second, the number of tourists who bring cash to the mountains is directly linked to the perceived security situation in other parts of North Africa. Third, the purchase price of imported staple foods needed by the families is subject to financial flows and political decisions which are increasingly made in remote locations. And fourth, social institutions of mutual aid and solidarity within the villages have been weakened along with the decline of traditional forms of land use.

Therefore, we argue that the main threat to food security in this region today is the unreliability of cash income caused by the farmers' dependence on global markets, rather than climate risks or ecological constraints. As a reversal of market integration is not an option, state agencies and international organisations should assume more responsibility in buffering these new income risks.

Keywords: Food security, markets, Morocco, mountains, pastoralism, social geography