



Annual review

MOROCCAN BIODIVERSITY & LIVELIHOODS ASSOCIATION

Equator prize winners

Message from MBLA’s management team

Reflecting on 2024, which marks a decade since MBLA was founded, we feel immense pride and inspiration from all that it has brought to our team — from our dedicated staff based in Marrakech to the community researchers working across sites in the High Atlas Mountains.

This year has brought significant visibility to our decade-long efforts. From receiving the prestigious Equator Prize to contributing to major international platforms addressing climate and environmental justice, including the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Cali, Colombia, and the 16th session of the UNCCD Conference of Parties in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, our work has been acknowledged on a global scale.

Our belief in the importance of our mission has been rekindled as we witness thriving communities across the Atlas. Cooperatives we’ve supported for years are now flourishing independently, expanding their reach, securing international clients, and showcasing their eco-friendly, locally made products at exhibitions in Morocco and across Europe. Others continue to grow in new directions, seeking our guidance to access funding and pilot innovative projects.

Experiencing this transformation and hearing firsthand how these communities speak about our work has made it easier to expand our mission. A clear example of this is the recent establishment of a new plant nursery and seed bank in Tiouguite, made possible through the remarkable collaboration of the local community. The warm welcome and support we’ve received, often driven by stories shared by neighboring communities about our impact, is not only heartwarming but also deeply motivating. It reinforces our commitment to continue walking this path together.

As we celebrate our achievements, we do so with a clear awareness of the challenges that still lie ahead. Yet, we remain deeply committed to seeking out innovative solutions, building strong partnerships, and amplifying the call for urgent, collective action.

None of what we’ve accomplished would have been possible without the unwavering support and care of our partners, donors, volunteers, and our incredible team. Thank you for your unwavering support, commitment, and trust.



Dr. Rachid Ait Babahmad
Cofounder and Executive
Director



Dr. Soufiane M’sou
Cofounder, Deputy Executive
Director - Head of Projects and
Strategic partnerships
ICCA focal point



Dr. Abdellah Aghraz
Cofounder and Deputy
Executive Director - Head of
Human Resources



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Our mission

Founded in 2014 by Moroccan environmentalists, the Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association works to support Amazigh communities by carrying out conservation initiatives in the High Atlas Mountains. We work with communities to restore ecological balance, document and enhance traditional conservation practices, and support agriculture-based rural economies.

In collaboration with rural communities, we assess the status of local flora and fauna to protect endemic species, build and restore water infrastructure, and implement and manage community plant nurseries and seed banks. We also introduce sustainable land use practices to farmers, shepherds, cooperatives, and youth to support local livelihoods and promote green entrepreneurship.

Our vision

We aspire to see the High Atlas Mountains' resources managed sustainably and equitably, with healthy ecosystems and prospering local economies resulting from a commitment to sustainable and climate-resilient practices.

Our work sites

- 📍 Oukaimeden
- 📍 Ourika Valley
- 📍 Ait M'hamed
- 📍 Imegdâl
- 📍 Zaouiat Ahansal
- 📍 Tilouguite
- 📍 Zerkten

280000

distributed plants

200000

trees and plants reintroduced to the wild

30

community projects

5

community plant nurseries

4

community seed banks

2

recurrent major events

3

botanical gardens

1500

trained community members

Biodiversity conservation

Focused on the High Atlas, where rich floristic diversity faces growing threats, we generate and strengthen knowledge on the conservation of threatened, endemic, and culturally significant plant species. Through research, capacity building, conferences, and seed fairs, we reinforce agroecological practices that sustain biodiversity and local communities. Rooted in community leadership, our seed banks and nurseries are locally managed, preserving biodiversity while directly benefiting those who safeguard these landscapes.

Restoration of forest ecosystems in the cultural landscapes of Oued Ahansal-Melloul and Tamga

Our biodiversity conservation initiatives are fundamentally reliant on local communities' input, making it essential to foster strong relationships with the people and understand their expectations and aspirations when expanding our work into new areas. This collaborative approach ensures that our efforts align with the needs and vision of the communities we engage with.

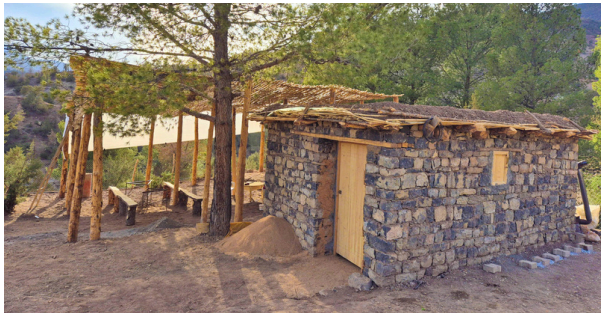
At the start of this year, we launched a new project supported by Audemars Watkins, aiming to restore forest ecosystems in the culturally rich landscapes of Oued Ahansal-Melloul and Tamga, located in the province of Azilal. This initiative heavily involved local communities, with a series of sit-ins arranged to meet villagers and a formal conference held to engage local stakeholders, local authority figures, representatives of associations, and environmental advocates, all contributing to meaningful discussions about the project's vision and goals.

During these exchanges, we emphasized the importance of forest certification and the value of products derived from sustainable forest management. We also shared our action plan, which includes establishing plant nurseries and supporting certification processes for local cooperatives, underscoring our commitment to fostering sustainable practices and empowering the communities we work with.



Building a new seed bank in Tilouguite plant nursery

The construction works of a new seed bank based at the Tilouguite plant nursery were kicked off this year, with plans to store hundreds of local seed varieties and serve as a space for exchange for local farmers and researchers. The seed bank aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable agriculture practices in the region, while also fostering community engagement and knowledge sharing.



Annual plant distribution

Despite the main plant nursery in Imegdal being repurposed as a settlement camp for families displaced by the disaster, our unwavering commitment to the community has driven the successful establishment of a new plant nursery in the commune. This effort not only ensured continuity but also led to the highest cultivation across all our active nurseries. As a result, we distributed an impressive 6,836 plants—despite the earthquake causing the loss of over 2,000 plants.



Even with such an achievement, Imegdal recorded the lowest number of beneficiaries. This paradox indicates the deeper challenges faced by the community, a prolonged five-year drought, compounded by the disruptions of the recent earthquake, has severely affected the region's agricultural capacity. While farming has historically been the backbone of livelihoods in Imegdal, the worsening drought has forced many farmers to abandon their activities, limiting their ability and interest in participating in programs like our plant distribution initiative and the farmers' field school.

This situation underscores the urgent need for collective action to address these challenges and build resilience in communities like Imegdal, where environmental and social vulnerabilities intersect.

6836 plants were distributed in Imegdal despite the loss of 2,000 due to the earthquake.

This year, across five sites, approximately 83,966 plants were cultivated. Of these, 25,200 plants—representing 38 species—were distributed across four sites: Oukaïmeden, Ait M'hamed, Imegdal, and Zaouiat Ahansal.

The distribution benefited a total of 456 recipients, including individual households, local associations, cooperatives, and schools, reinforcing our commitment to supporting communities despite the ongoing challenges.





Seed fair

The Seed Fair, held in July 2024 in Ait M'hamed, provided a unique platform for farmers and seed producers to exchange knowledge and resources. Bringing together seed growers from across the High Atlas, the event was especially significant for those affected by the recent earthquake. Ait M'hamed was chosen as the venue due to the lack of exhibition spaces in other areas and the challenging post-earthquake conditions.

Organized as part of the Bio-Cultural Festival, the Seed Fair ensured maximum participation, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among farmers, researchers, and organizations. The event featured 50 exhibitors showcasing local traditional seeds and attracted over 500 visitors, strengthening efforts to preserve agricultural biodiversity and promote resilient, sustainable farming practices.



50 participants
200 visitors

A highlight of this year's seed fair was the introduction of a new prize, awarded to the farmer who showcased the most local seed varieties and actively contributed to knowledge sharing. This initiative aims to encourage continued local seed exchange, foster meaningful discussions about agricultural practices, and strengthen a lasting network of seed producers beyond the event.



Ahmad El Malih from Douar Bernat (Winner of the seed fair), his sons and MBLA team

Fourth edition of the Bio-cultural festival of Ait M'hamed & Azilal

Under the theme "Cultural Heritage: An Essential Lever for Local Development," MBLA, in partnership with the partners, organized the fourth edition of the Biocultural Festival in Ait M'hamed and Azilal. The event served as a platform for biodiversity actors to exchange knowledge and collaborate on sustainable practices.



One of the key sessions was a training on biochar, led by Professor Baçaoui, highlighting its production, benefits, and role in improving soil fertility, and climate resilience. Additionally, the festival featured a Farmer Field School with 50 participants, focusing on traditional seed conservation, organic fertilization, and efficient irrigation techniques, including the Indigenous "Three Sisters" intercropping method (corn, beans, and squash).



A major highlight was the Seed Market & Agroecology Fair, bringing together 50 exhibitors from multiple regions and 200 visitors, including representatives from ICARDA, INRA, Terre Humanisme Maroc, Cadi Ayyad University, and Hassan I University. The fair facilitated traditional seed exchanges, networking among farmers, practical agroecology workshops, and the promotion of climate-resilient crops, while also fostering a local agroecological market to strengthen sustainable farming initiatives.



Participants also visited the community nursery of Ait M'hamed, supported by MBLA since 2014, where researchers and local actors explored its role in conserving endemic plant species and supporting sustainable agriculture. Finally, the presentation of local projects, such as the Agdal d'Igourdane initiative, emphasized the importance of preserving socio-ecological heritage through improved governance and pastoral infrastructure. The festival successfully reinforced the links between traditional knowledge, scientific research, and community-driven conservation efforts, promoting resilient and sustainable agricultural practices for the future.

Marrakech

ISE
CONGRESS
2024

Biodiversity & Cultural Landscapes

Scientific, Indigenous and Local Perspectives

15.05 — 19.05 2024

Morocco

Co-organizing the International Society of Ethnobiology Congress 2024: Biodiversity and Cultural Landscapes

We are proud to have co-organized the 18th International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE) Congress, held from 15th to 19th May 2024 at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech, Morocco. This global gathering brought together nearly 400 academics, activists, practitioners, and visionaries from over 70 countries to engage with the theme, “Biodiversity and Cultural Landscapes: Scientific, Indigenous, and Local Perspectives.”

This remarkable event was the result of a successful collaboration with the International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE), Cadi Ayyad University (CAU, Morocco), the Global Diversity Foundation (GDF), the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at Universität Bern (Switzerland), and the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD, France).

The ISE, founded in 1988, is a global network focused on preserving the links between human societies and the natural world. It provides a unique platform for participants to share research and initiatives from diverse disciplines related to human-nature relationships. Set against the backdrop of the High Atlas Mountains, the 18th edition of the congress invited participants to delve into the deep connection between biodiversity and cultural landscapes.



Over the course of five days, participants engaged in 56 sessions, including panels, roundtables, workshops, and poster presentations. The congress embraced an unconference format, encouraging interactive dialogue and collaborative learning. The event covered a range of significant themes that highlighted the intersection of culture, science, and the environment.

◆ The congress focused on five key themes:

Landscape Stewardship:

Focused on land management, conservation, and Indigenous-led preservation efforts.

Agriculture, Nutrition, Health, and Well-being:

Explored food sovereignty, biocultural landscapes, and alternative health systems.

Decolonial, Inter-, and Transdisciplinary Approaches in Ethnobiology: Engaged with community-driven action, decolonial research, and transformative learning methods.

Global Change: Analyzed the impacts of migration, urbanization, and climate change on both landscapes and local communities.

Spirituality, Art, and Cultural Identities:

Celebrated the deep connections between Indigenous cultures and their landscapes.



Keynote Speakers

The ISE Congress 2024 featured five distinguished keynote speakers:

- **Prof. Mohamed Mahdi**, an expert in rural sociology.
- **Prof. Anna Tsing**, a renowned anthropologist and author.
- **Prof. Andrea Pieroni**, an ethnobotanist specializing in Mediterranean cultures.
- **Senior Scientist Houria Djoudi**, a specialist in socio-ecological systems.
- **Dr. Carolyn Finney**, a cultural geographer and author.



A series of engaging side events were organized by MBLA and the Harvest Festival, throughout the congress, including a Youriba performance at Dar Bellarj, a snake-tracking excursion in the mountains, a collective dinner celebrating contemporary takes on traditional Moroccan cuisine, and more.

Our team was thrilled to present two side events that added a special touch to the congress. The first, the eighth edition of the High Atlas Food Market, highlighted the region's rural cooperatives and gave attendees a chance to experience the rich flavors and traditions of the area. The second was a field trip to Oukaïmeden, where participants had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the region's remarkable biodiversity.

Eighty attendees joined the field trip to explore some of our most successful initiatives, including the botanical garden at Ourika's boarding school, the thriving plant nursery in Oukaïmeden, and our eco-museum, which is currently under construction. These visits provided valuable insights into our work and the meaningful impact we are making.



■ Third year of the Organic legume breeding project



Our Organic Legume Breeding Program, titled "Organic legume breeding for establishing seed diversity and use for small-scale farming – a cooperation project between the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco," has reached its third and penultimate year. This initiative, conducted in partnership with the National Institute of Agronomic Research, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), and Living Seeds Sementes Vivas SA from Portugal, spans the Iberian Peninsula and various regions of Morocco. Its primary goal is to enhance seed diversity and resilience for small-scale farming. Over three years, we have conducted seed trials in the High Atlas region, specifically in the Imegdal commune. Thirteen out of 28 pea and fava bean varieties provided by ICARDA were selected for the 2023 trials based on their resistance to pests and drought, as well as their protein content.

This year, we continued our trials in Imegdal to identify seed varieties capable of withstanding increasingly harsh climate conditions in Morocco. We have implemented a targeted strategy for selecting organic legumes and seed varieties within our project in Imegdal. Initially, 28 varieties were evaluated for drought resistance, pest tolerance, and protein content, leading to the selection of 13 potential varieties. In the second year, these 13 varieties were subject to further trials, resulting in the identification of 5 resilient varieties—2 fava beans and 3 peas. Since November 2024, these varieties have been undergoing thorough testing, continuing through 2025 to confirm their resilience. This process is guided by a Participatory Varietal Selection (PVS) approach, ensuring active collaboration with local farmers to align outcomes with their needs and environmental challenges.



Rural Entrepreneurship

A cornerstone of our vision is fostering resilient rural communities—where economic well-being goes hand in hand with sustainable practices, ensuring long-term settlement and a strong commitment to land stewardship. Following the earthquake, our efforts required a reset and an extra push, as many cooperatives and aspiring rural entrepreneurs faced devastating losses, from workspaces and agricultural land to machinery and the psychological toll of losing homes and loved ones. In 2024, we expanded our reach and strengthened our support to ensure that both current and future rural entrepreneurs in Al Haouz have the resources they need to rebuild and thrive.



Rural Entrepreneurship Promotion Caravan Across the High Atlas

May 7th marked the launch of the Rural Entrepreneurship Caravan, aimed at reaching the most remote communities deeply impacted by the earthquake. Our goal was to get to know these communities and assess their views on entering the world of entrepreneurship.

Participants per village	
Tahnaout	38 men & women
Talat n yacoub	25 men & women
Tamakoust	90 women & 30 men
Ijoukak	30 men & women
Achbarou	10 women
Anbdour	25 men & women
Tizi	10 women

The program had four key objectives: raising awareness of entrepreneurship, enhancing entrepreneurship tools, evaluating the feasibility of project ideas, and identifying challenges. To accomplish this, our team undertook a series of visits to more than seven villages, engaging with 258 community members, both men and women.

These gatherings provided a forum for community members to discuss how the earthquake had challenged and stymied their entrepreneurial ideas. They also had their questions answered about the basics of launching a business and explored the risks, required skills, and potential success of many rural projects.

Andou Competition for Al Haouz Earthquake-Affected Entrepreneurs

As part of our long-term relief strategy to uplift and rebuild communities affected by the earthquake, we have launched the Anbdou Competition—a capacity-building program designed for cooperatives, small business owners, and aspiring entrepreneurs. This initiative supports those whose projects were disrupted, completely demolished, or discouraged from launching due to the catastrophic impact on their living conditions.

The program provides training to selected entrepreneurs from the Al Haouz region in key areas, including marketing, diverse investment and funding opportunities, business management, legal frameworks governing entrepreneurial entities in Morocco, licensing requirements, regulatory compliance, and tax obligations. Applications opened in July, and by October, participants were actively engaged in intensive training, attending at least two workshops per month. This training will continue in the coming months, preparing participants to pitch their projects to the Anbdou Competition committee. They will compete for the top three awards, recognizing the most innovative, motivated, and impactful projects, which will receive financial support to kick-start or advance their ventures.

Eight months into the program, our participants have demonstrated remarkable progress. This is evident in their growing curiosity, as they actively ask more questions and request specific training topics. Additionally, their newfound confidence has been captured in practice pitching videos we've recorded with them.





■ Exploring harvesting certifications for Argan with Traffic's FAIRWILD Certification

We were proud to have partnered as facilitators and local mediators this year with the UK-based NGO, TRAFFIC. TRAFFIC's mission focuses on ensuring that trade in wild species is legal and sustainable, benefiting both the planet and its people.

In Morocco, TRAFFIC's efforts center around improving the conditions of argan harvesting and commercialization. Addressing these elements is crucial for protecting the argan tree, while also ensuring fair treatment and compensation for the predominantly female harvesters, many of whom come from extremely poor backgrounds.

We joined TRAFFIC on several trips to Essaouira and Agadir, where we facilitated initial introductions to cooperatives specializing in argan products and potential future partners, including The Interprofessional Federation of the Argan Sector (Fifargane), Centres d'Appui à l'Entrepreneuriat et Développement Économique Local (CAEDEL), Agence Nationale Pour Le développement Des Zones Oasiennes Et L'arganier (ANDZOA), and FMTEC. By engaging harvesters and stakeholders in assessing benefits and improving market access, our aim is to empower communities with stable incomes while promoting sustainability.



The year was wrapped up with a pilot event organized in collaboration with IECD Morocco. This networking event brought together our 15 participants alongside another 15 cooperatives involved in IECD initiatives, all from heavily earthquake-affected areas. They introduced their projects, challenges, and ambitions to an audience of potential funders, including representatives of national and international organizations such as CARITAS, GIZ, Education For Employment (EFE), and Near East Foundation (NEF), as well as governmental bodies like 'Office du Développement de la Coopération (ODCO), Société Marocaine d'Ingénierie Touristique (SMIT), and CAEDEL (Centres d'Appui à l'Entrepreneuriat et au Développement Économique Local).



Our goal is to explore certification strategies that safeguard harvester rights and livelihoods, while curbing the exploitative practices of middlemen.





Four editions of the High Atlas Food Market

The High Atlas Food Market is an initiative designed to connect rural producers with urban consumers, fostering a direct exchange between the two and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. This year, four successful markets were organized, each highlighting the diversity and quality of over 300 products from 40 different cooperatives. The 6th edition, held in January 2024, was a major success, with 27 cooperatives showcasing their goods in celebration of Id Yennayer, the Amazigh New Year. The event drew more than 500 visitors daily, eager to discover unique regional products.



The 7th edition, which took place in March 2024, was timed to coincide with International Women's Day and the holy month of Ramadan, featuring 17 cooperatives and attracting a diverse crowd. In May 2024, the 8th edition was held alongside the International Society of Ethnobotany (ISE) Conference, offering a platform for 15 cooperatives. The 9th edition, celebrated in October 2024, marked the harvest season, continuing the tradition with 15 cooperatives presenting a wide range of cosmetics and agro-food items. These markets not only support local economies but also promote cultural heritage and sustainability.



Environmental Education Programs

Our efforts in environmental education aim to reach across generations and spaces—from children in rural schools and farmers in the mountains to underprivileged mothers in cities. We achieve this by building botanical gardens, creating platforms for mountain-based students to share project ideas and research on local biodiversity, and facilitating workshops on agroecological practices and the region’s green potential.

■ Zerkten school botanical garden workshops on plant health

In Zerkten’s school botanical garden, established in 2022 as an extension of our environmental efforts, we hosted engaging workshops benefiting 64 students. Hailing from 55 surrounding villages and residing at the remote boarding school in the heart of the mountains, these students have few opportunities to engage in dynamic educational activities beyond their regular curriculum.

Through a blend of hands-on fun and practical learning, our workshops introduced the students to creating natural pesticides using simple, affordable ingredients. Moroccan traditional soap, bicarbonate of soda, alfalfa, black pepper, garlic, and nettle were showcased for their impressive ability to protect plants from pests and diseases while maintaining soil health.

■ Ait M’hamed youth workshops on the region’s green potential

To promote environmental education and raise awareness about rural entrepreneurship in the Atlas Mountains, we organized a series of workshops at Ait M’hamed High School. These workshops aimed to introduce students to our ongoing project focused on the restoration of forest ecosystems in the High Atlas, shedding light on its significant ecological and economic potential. Through interactive sessions, we highlighted the importance of reforestation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable land management practices.



Additionally, we discussed how these efforts can create rural entrepreneurship opportunities, such as job creation in conservation, sustainable farming, and eco-tourism. Our goal was to inspire the youth to become actively involved in preserving their natural heritage while contributing to a sustainable future for their communities.



■ Farmer Field School

The Farmer Field School (FFS) program is designed to introduce farmers to innovative agroecological practices, empowering them with knowledge and techniques that enhance sustainable agriculture and climate resilience.

Rooted in a participatory approach, the program ensures that training sessions are tailored to the environmental and socio-economic realities of each locality, drawing on insights from focus group discussions with local communities. The first module, titled "Soil and its Fertility," was launched in June 2024 and brought together farmers from various villages to explore key topics such as traditional seed conservation, organic fertilization, and efficient irrigation techniques. Among these, the Indigenous "Three Sisters" intercropping method (corn, beans, and squash) was highlighted for its ability to improve soil health, and crop productivity.

The program places a strong emphasis on inclusivity, ensuring that women and diverse community members actively participate in shaping sustainable agricultural practices. Through hands-on learning and peer-to-peer exchanges, FFS fosters a collaborative environment where farmers can develop solutions to local challenges, strengthen food sovereignty, and build more resilient farming systems.



■ Agroecology workshops for the mothers of Dar Bellarej

As partners of the 2024 Autumn Harvest Festival, our Agroecology Lead, Dr. Omar Saadani Hassani, steered an engaging workshop on agroecological practices for mothers from Dar Bellarj Foundation—a Marrakech-based cultural center empowering marginalized Moroccan women through cultural and artistic integration. Participants explored essential concepts like soil composition, plant nutrition, health management, and hands-on biopesticide preparation and application.



■ **Developing an educational program on nurseries and community seed banks to educate students on our work**

This year, with the support of Audemars Watkins,, we launched the “Restoration of Forest Ecosystems in the Cultural Landscapes of Oued Ahansal-Melloul and Tamga” program. As part of its activities, we introduced the project to high school students in Ait M'hamed, focusing on raising environmental awareness and promoting sustainable practices among the students.

It addresses pressing environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution while emphasizing the importance of responsible natural resource management. The initiative, which targets schools in the rural commune of Ait M'hamed in the High Atlas region, aims to educate students on how local actions can contribute to broader environmental goals. Key objectives include:

Raising awareness about the role of community seed banks and nurseries in biodiversity conservation.	Promoting sustainable agricultural practices through the creation of educational gardens.	Encouraging active student participation in environmental projects, instilling a sense of environmental responsibility.
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The program features hands-on workshops on biodiversity, seed bank management, and the use of biochar and wood vinegar in sustainable agriculture. Students participate in practical activities, such as managing seedlings in community nurseries and contributing to the development of a botanical garden at their school. They also take part in the Bio-Cultural Festival, where they present their projects and engage with local farmers. By providing students with the tools and knowledge to implement green practices, the program not only educates them about environmental issues but also fosters entrepreneurship and sustainability, helping build a future generation that actively participates in preserving and enhancing the local ecosystem.

Team Member Feature

Rachid Ait Elhadj

Rachid grew up surrounded by the rich landscapes of the High Atlas Mountains in Ait L'kak village, Oukaïmeden, where our plant nursery is based. He joined our team in 2019, when the nursery was established, and has since poured his heart and energy into the successful cultivation of tens of thousands of plants and trees each year, destined for distribution to local community members. Passionate about sharing his knowledge of soil and plants with visitors, Rachid takes pride in supporting his community while staying close to home to provide for his family.





Earthquake Relief Action

On September 8, 2023, a magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck Al Haouz province, resulting in approximately 3,000 deaths, 5,700 injuries, and the destruction of numerous homes and buildings. The disaster displaced around 300,000 people, with the hardest-hit areas being Al Haouz and the surrounding Taroudant province. Given MBLA's established ties with local communities, we were well-positioned to provide immediate assistance. Our efforts focused on emergency medical care, food, clean water, shelter, transportation, and hygiene supplies.

Winter Preparedness and Heating Support

As temperatures dropped to -8°C during the autumn and winter months, temporary tents were no longer sufficient. In response, we distributed 120 heating units across three villages, benefiting over 120 families. Alongside the heaters, we provided safety instructions to prevent accidents, helping families endure the harsh conditions and ensuring their safety during the cold months.



Impact on Education and Portable Classrooms

The earthquake's timing, coinciding with the start of the school year, severely disrupted education in the affected areas. Many students were relocated to Marrakech, while all ten schools in Imegdâl commune were destroyed, leaving around 100 students without access to education. To prevent students from dropping out and ensure their education continued, MBLA provided two mobile classrooms in Agured and Imslane, benefiting over 80 primary school students.

The local teachers were supported to continue lessons. This initiative helped maintain students' academic progress and provided a sense of routine and hope during a time of great distress. Furthermore, the mobile classrooms served as a safe and structured environment for learning, offering much-needed stability to the community's children.



Sanitation Facilities

Sanitation facilities are as essential as other basic needs, especially in the consequence of a disaster. In the affected communities, many families were forced to meet their sanitation needs in the open, near their temporary shelters. This created unpleasant odors, unsanitary conditions, and significant health risks. The lack of privacy and proper facilities, particularly for women, further heightened the vulnerability to infections and diseases. The situation also contributed to emotional stress and insecurity, as families struggled with a lack of dignity and safety.

Recognizing the urgent need for improved sanitation, MBLA made it a priority to provide clean, safe, and private spaces for the affected communities. To address this, we installed 12 portable toilets in the Imegdâl, Talat n' Yacoub, and Ijoukak communes, benefiting approximately 300 families. These portable toilets not only reduced health risks by preventing exposure to unsanitary conditions but also restored a sense of privacy and dignity, especially for women and children. The installation of these sanitation facilities was a crucial step in ensuring the well-being of these communities as they began the long process of recovery.



■ Support for Farmers and Livestock

MBLA alongside its partners organized two rounds of seed distributions, reaching over 5,700 farmers across 100 villages. A total of 95 tons of seeds were distributed, including essential crops such as barley, corn, fava beans, carrots, turnips, and coriander. These distributions enabled farmers to restart their agricultural activities and ensure food security in the affected regions. The first round, conducted in March 2024, benefited 2,718 farmers, while the second round, in October 2024, reached an additional 3,114 farmers. This initiative was carried out with a participatory approach, involving local farmers and associations in the selection and distribution processes to ensure that the seeds met the community's specific needs.

In addition to supporting crop cultivation, MBLA recognized the importance of livestock for many families in the affected areas. To help protect these vital resources, we constructed 26 temporary shelters to house 162 animals from 44 families in three villages: Alos, Ifourirn, and Anebhour. These shelters provided much-needed protection from the harsh weather conditions, ensuring the animals' safety and well-being. Moreover, we extended veterinary care to more than 1,563 animals, including cattle, goats, and sheep, to address any health concerns and support their recovery.

To further aid in livestock recovery, we distributed 387 bales of dried alfalfa and 55 bags of mixed feed for dairy cows. These resources ensured that animals had adequate nutrition during the critical recovery period. We also held informal meetings on emergency livestock management, disease prevention, and sustainable use of resources to empower local communities with the knowledge needed to care for their animals and rebuild their agricultural practices.



■ Community Resilience and Winter Shelters

The winter season in the High Atlas Mountains is known for its harsh conditions, with regular snowfall and rain. Snow often remains until late spring, making survival even more difficult for those displaced by the earthquake. Many families were left in temporary tents that were ill-equipped to withstand the severe cold, leading to discomfort, health risks, and increased vulnerability, particularly for children and the elderly.

To address this urgent need, MBLA initially planned to build two winter-resistant communal shelters in Ighil commune, each with a 60 m² surface area, to provide warmth and security for over 40 people during the harsh weather. These shelters were designed to offer protection from the cold and improve living conditions for the affected families. However, in a remarkable demonstration of community resilience and collective decision-making, the local population chose to repurpose these shelters as classrooms for their children. This decision ensured that both warmth and education continued throughout the winter months, benefiting the entire community.

■ Restoring Agricultural Terraces and Rehabilitation of Irrigation Systems

Significant progress has been made in rehabilitating irrigation infrastructure and agricultural terraces in earthquake-affected areas. A total of 35 agricultural terraces have been successfully restored, with ongoing efforts to rehabilitate additional ones to support local farmers in regaining their livelihoods.

To ensure sustainable water access, MBLA reconstructed 2.6 km of irrigation canals and 130 meters of fully rebuilt canals, benefiting the douars of Aourigh, Tiniskt, and Ighrem, along with an additional 150 meters in Ighil. These efforts have improved water distribution for irrigation, preventing crop loss and maintaining agricultural productivity.

Furthermore, community engagement played a crucial role in these initiatives. A participatory approach was employed through focus groups in Ighrem, involving 115 households from Aourigh, Ighrem, and Tiniskt to assess the damage and prioritize recovery efforts. As part of traditional "Arras n Targa" practices, community members actively participated in the maintenance of saguias before full-scale reconstruction, fostering collective responsibility and sustainability.



To further support irrigation and water storage, two basins were constructed: one in Taourirt with a 330 m³ capacity, benefiting 203 families across four douars (Taourirt, Ouarti, Anamer, and Wassentourt), and another in Ighrem, holding 66 m³, serving 135 families in Aourigh. In total, these improvements now enable the irrigation of approximately 90 hectares of farmland, ensuring long-term agricultural stability and food security for the affected communities.

Global Commitment to Advocacy and Supporting Local Eco-Friendly Projects

With a decade of work in the Atlas Mountains, we have gained both the knowledge and the trust of local communities, who now seek our guidance in securing external funding for eco-friendly projects. This experience has also positioned us on the global stage, expanding our network and alliances while earning recognition through prestigious awards.

■ MBLA as Equator prize recipients

We're proud that MBLA's decade-long work addressing climate change's impact on local agriculture and biodiversity in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains has been honored this year with the prestigious Equator Prize.

What's the Equator Prize?

The Equator Prize, organized by the Equator Initiative within the United Nations Development Programme, is awarded biennially to recognize outstanding community efforts to reduce poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.



Out of 600 nominations from 102 countries, eleven Indigenous Peoples and local communities NGOs from eight countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean were chosen as recipients of the Equator Prize. An honor we celebrated with the inspiring winning leaders during the awarding ceremony held both remotely and in Colombia during COP16. Such a recognition underscores our commitment to merging cultural preservation with scientific innovation in Morocco's High Atlas Mountains and reinforces.



■ Participation at the annual gathering of ICCA Consortium

Represented by Dr. M. Sou Soufiane, Regional Representative for North Africa, and Najwa Es-Siari, Regional Coordinator for North Africa, MBLA joined the annual in-person gathering of the ICCA Consortium this year, which took place from October 16 to 18 in Bogotá, Colombia.

The ICCA Consortium is an international non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the proper recognition and support of Indigenous Peoples' and community-conserved territories and areas (ICCAs—territories of life) at local, national, and international levels.



■ Participation in the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Cali, Columbia and the UNCCD Conference of Parties 16th session in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

MBLA has been continuously involved in the global discussions on biodiversity and climate resilience. This year, we actively participated in the Climate Conference on Biodiversity in Colombia and the Conference on Desertification in Saudi Arabia, reinforcing our dedication to sustainable solutions and community-led environmental action. These engagements provided a platform to showcase the power of local initiatives in building climate resilience and conserving biodiversity on a global scale.



■ MBLA's Incubation Local Eco-Friendly Initiatives

We empower local associations in the High Atlas by helping them access grants and implement sustainable development projects. This year, we successfully assisted the Aska and Tamazight Tilouguite associations in securing external funding for their biochar initiatives, while guiding the Ihnssaln association to obtain grant support for a vital water reservoir in Agoudim - helping farmers weather prolonged droughts. Through our partnership with Corps Africa, we've also helped introduce innovative feed solutions like Azolla and sprouted barley, strengthening local agricultural resilience. Our role focuses on enabling communities to access resources and opportunities through our network of partners and funders.



■ Participation at the African NGOs Alliance for Environmental Sustainability (ANAES)Gathering in Kigali

In June this year, we joined the Alliance for Environmental Sustainability (ANAES) gathering in Kigali, Rwanda—a key event bringing together 32 NGOs from 18 countries. Alongside landscape restoration training sessions, we helped draft the Kigali Declaration, a continental commitment to strengthen environmental protection and empower communities in ecosystem restoration. This marks a major step forward for collaborative sustainability action in Africa.





Dr. Rachid Ait Babahmad
Cofounder and Executive Director



Dr. Soufiane M'sou
Cofounder, Deputy Executive Director, Head of Projects and Strategic partnerships, ICCA local point



Dr. Abdellah Aghraz
Cofounder, Deputy Executive Director and Head of Human Resources



Fadma Ait Iligh
Cofounder and Lead Community Researcher



Dr. Omar Saadani Hassani
Field Agronomist and Lead of Agroecology Program



Ibtissam Bouseta
Digital Communications Lead



Oumaïma Tchato
Entrepreneurship Program Lead



Ferdaousse El Idrissi
Administrative and Finance Manager



Megane Herve
Reporting and Grants Manager

OUR TEAM

MBLA operates in the Atlas Mountains with a diverse, multidisciplinary team guided by our board. Our Marrakech office hosts a team with deep expertise in biodiversity, agroecology, community governance, entrepreneurship, grant acquisition, and communications. While based in Marrakech, our team members frequently travel to project sites, serving as key points of outreach for the communities we support.

OUR COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

To uphold our community-centered approach, we work closely with community researchers—local leaders embedded in our project sites. They play a crucial role in managing plant nurseries, organizing workshops and events, and facilitating logistics and communications. Their presence ensures seamless coordination with local communities for research, consultation, and project implementation, fostering trust, responding to community needs, and honoring their aspirations.



Rachid Ait Elhadj



Touda Atiya



Youssef Rouchdi



Mohamed Ait Boujamaa



Hamid Ait Baskad



Hamou Malih



Ahmed Oukdim



Hamid Oumenoui

BOARD MEMBERS



Najwa Es-siari
MBLA President



Dr. Mohamed Cherkaoui
MBLA Vice President



Dr. Abdellaziz Ait Mansour
Treasurer of MBLA



Dr. Abdelaziz Baçaoui
Advisor



Dr. Karima Benrazzouk
Vice-Secretary



Ahmed Imoula
Vice Treasurer



Chaima Benzaya
Consultant

OUR FINANCIAL SUMMARY

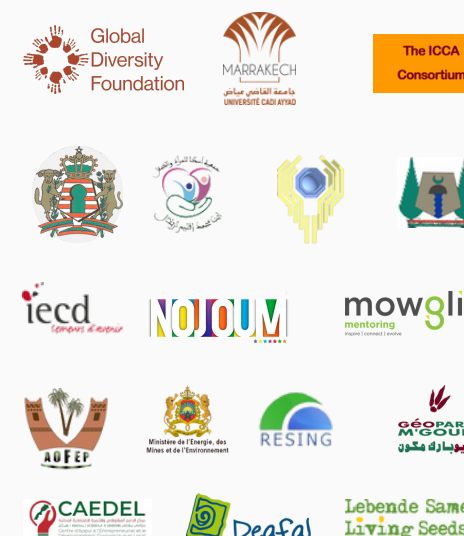
Revenue	10 094 266,81
Expenditure	4 275 645,72

Operational costs 1 429 851,71

On-going projects
1 773 454,29

Research,
Capacity
building &
conservation
actions
1 072 339,72

OUR PARTNERS



OUR SUPPORTERS





CONTACT US

Sidi Abbad, 1 Rue Houcima, Villa N° 280,
1er étage, Marrakech 40000, Maroc.

+212 (0) 80-8558485

contact@mblaassociation.org

mblaassociation.org