

MOROCCAN BIODIVERSITY AND LIVELIHOODS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REVIEW 2020





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INTRODUCTION

The Moroccan Association for Biodiversity and Livelihoods (MBLA) is a non-governmental organization created in 2014 by young researchers and engineers, most of whom are from the High Atlas, and are therefore familiar with the threats to local biodiversity and the needs of local communities. Since its inception, MBLA has ensured the full integration of situ and ex situ conservation measures, while strengthening cultural conservation practices to protect biodiversity and improve local livelihoods. Additional actions include assessment of the wealth of local resources in biodiversity, terraced cultivation, construction and management of local seed banks, herbaria, community nurseries and water infrastructure.

Lastly, MBLA has provided training opportunities to community members and cooperatives in sustainable land use practices and marketing of local plants and products to support local livelihoods. MBLA aims to expand our activities beyond the regional level in order to become a leading conservation organization at the national level. As part of this expansion, we aim to continue our project activities in other sites in the High Atlas Mountains to increase our positive impact on the natural environment, as well as local Amazigh communities. Today, MBLA operates in four project sites: Ait M'Hamed, Imegdâl, Oukaimeden and Ourika. By 2022, we aim to launch the HACL (High Atlas Cultural Landscapes) program in Zaouiat Ahansal in the central High Atlas, which was recently classified as a RAMSAR site owing to its extremely rich biodiversity and the diversified traditional ecological knowledge of its local community. By 2025, we aim to further expand the HACL program to Demnate, Tabant and Ait Bouguemaz in the central High Atlas and to Tighedouine and Amez Miz in the High Atlas near Marrakech.

Rachid Ait Babahmad
President of MBLA



OUR MISSION

The Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association (MBLA) is a non-governmental organization established in 2014 and based in Marrakesh.

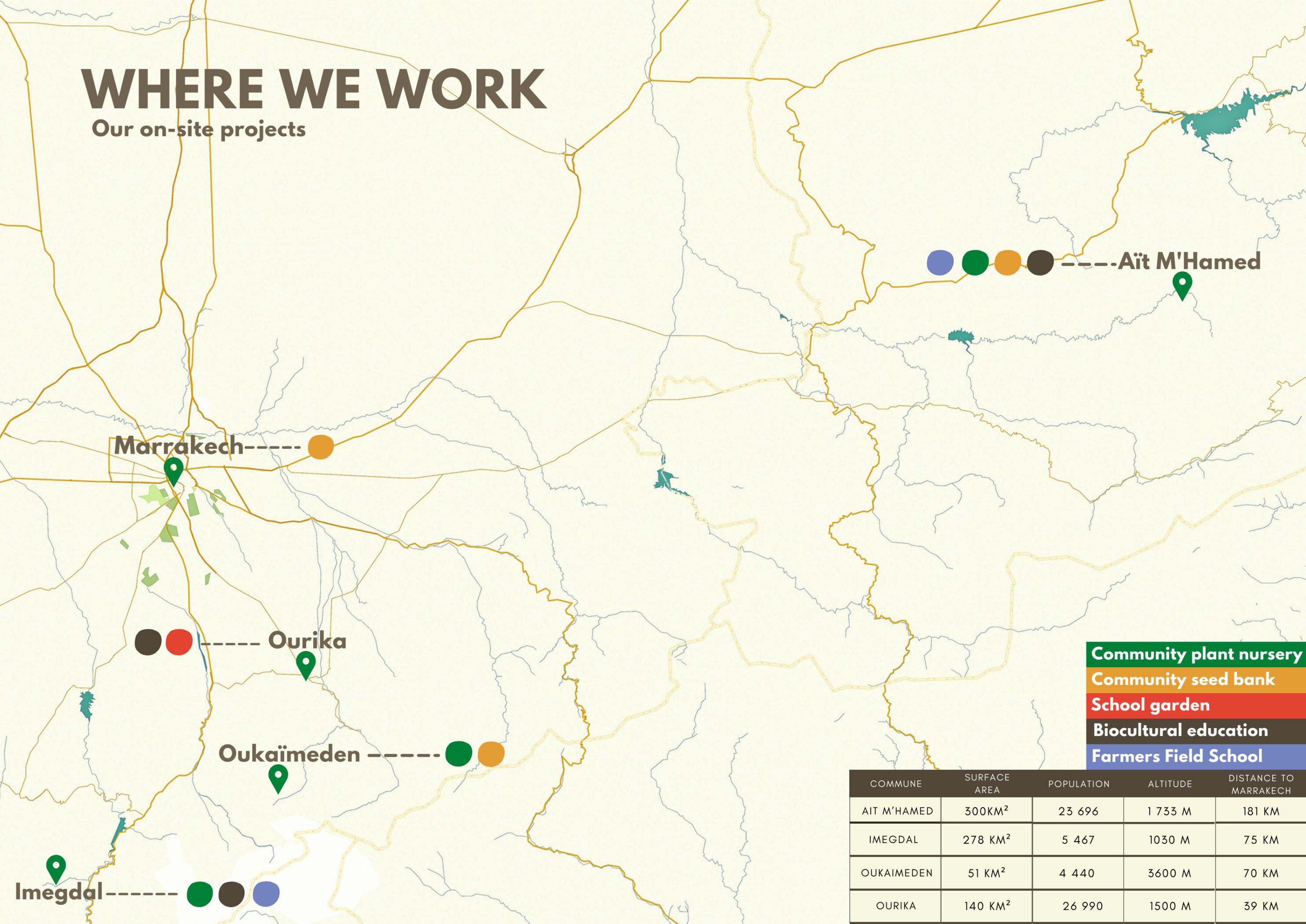
We focus on biodiversity conservation and livelihood improvement in the High Atlas through applied research and practical actions based on a participatory approach with local communities.

OUR VISION

We strive for a thriving biodiversity in the High Atlas Mountains protected by local communities. We aspire to see indigenous communities prosper economically while adopting a sustainable exploitation of their natural resources.

WHERE WE WORK

Our on-site projects



- Community plant nursery
- Community seed bank
- School garden
- Biocultural education
- Farmers Field School

COMMUNE	SURFACE AREA	POPULATION	ALTITUDE	DISTANCE TO MARRAKECH
AIT M'HAMED	300KM ²	23 696	1 733 M	181 KM
IMEGDAL	278 KM ²	5 467	1030 M	75 KM
OUKAIMEDEN	51 KM ²	4 440	3600 M	70 KM
OURIKA	140 KM ²	26 990	1500 M	39 KM

Imegdâl

Marrakech

Ourika

Oukaïmeden

Ait M'Hamed

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Our efforts are purposely concentrated in the High Atlas region due to its rich floristic diversity and the increasing external threats it faces. Factors such as overgrazing, climate change, poor water management and anthropogenic pressure contribute to the degradation of floristic integrity.

That is why we work on documenting, assessing, and monitoring local biodiversity as a vital and preliminary step prior to implementing in situ and ex situ conservation actions to halt biodiversity loss.

2020 KEY ACTIONS

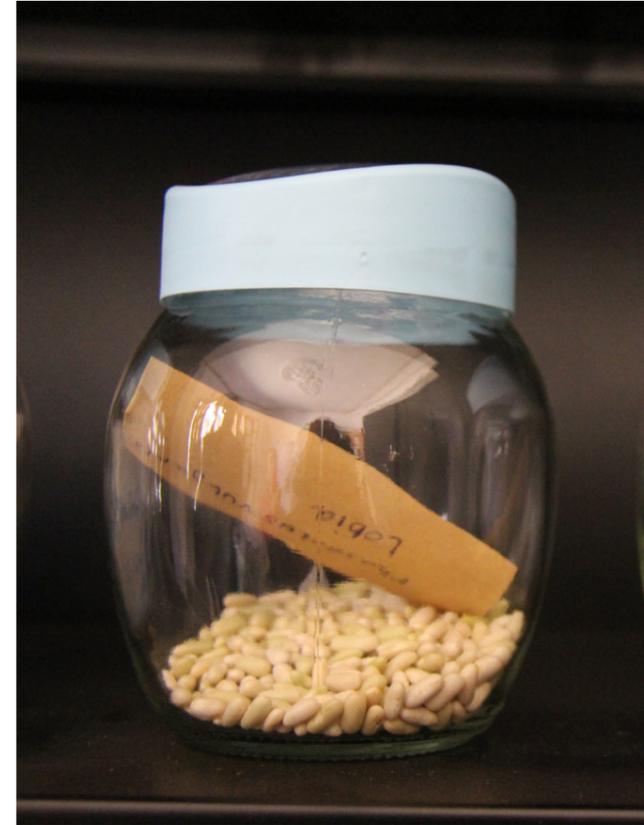
Community Plant nurseries :

In our community plant nurseries, we continued to cultivate over 30 useful, threatened and endemic species. Our annual plant distribution event in 2020 resulted into the following:

- In Imegdâl commune, we distributed 14,700 plants of 22 species benefiting 404 households in 16 different villages.
- In Ait M'Hamed commune, we distributed 10,200 plants of 13 species to 113 households in 12 different villages.

In 2019, we started our new plant nursery in Oukaïmeden. Throughout 2020, we produced about 30,000 of 30 different species in Oukaïmeden in preparation for the 2021 plant distribution event.





Planting in the wild:

In collaboration with local communities, we planted threatened, economically important plants and trees, including walnut, almond and cypress. In 2020, 36,585 seedlings of 32 target species were planted in Imegdâl, and 19,003 seedlings of 22 species in Ait M'Hamed.

Ecological monitoring:

In the gđal of Igourdane and Oukaïmeden, we organized two monitoring field sessions, one during the closing of agdals and the second during their opening period. We documented and collected data on plant and butterfly populations, and assessed soil quality in the High Atlas communities where we operate. This process helps us understand the impact of environmental challenges on biodiversity and to develop targeted actions to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Community seed banks:

In collaboration with local researchers and communities, we continued to foster our community seed banks based in Ait M'Hamed, Oukaïmeden and Marrakech, in order to conserve and provide community access to local plant varieties that are resilient to different environmental changes.

High Atlas Biocultural Database:

In June 2020, we published The High Atlas Biocultural Database (HABD) with our partner Global Diversity Foundation. The database contains over 300 interviews, more than 200 species and 4,972 use reports and was officially published recently as an online public database.

BIOCULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Biocultural and environmental education has been one of our main priorities since MBLA's creation. We have been actively engaging youth and community elders in spreading awareness about local biodiversity conservation practices through a series of actions.

Namely, weekly garden training sessions at Dar Taliba, a girls' boarding house in Ourika, and intergenerational workshops which bring the youth and community elders together across the High Atlas.



@FabienTouran

2020 KEY ACTIONS

Dar Taliba school garden :

During February and March, the girls participated in 13 garden training sessions and planted hundreds of seeds in their greenhouse, including aromatic and medicinal plants such as sage (*Salvia officinalis*) and lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*). They also made an additional pile of fresh compost, prepared a natural pesticide and planted dozens of baby vegetables in the garden, including carrots, radishes, eggplants and turnips.

In late March, Dar Taliba's weekly garden training sessions were suspended due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.



@PommeliendaSilvaCosme

Knowledge transmission :

In the Ait M'Hamed and Imedgal communes, we programmed a series of environmental and biocultural activities geared towards schools. Only 2 out of the 8 scheduled activities were carried out due to lockdown measures.

Until March, we successfully facilitated an intergenerational workshop on conservation cultural practices, introducing concepts like Azzayn, Amazer and Tawala n waman to the young students of Ait M'Hamed and Tiniskt schools.

The second activity consisted of distributing 1,000 copies of a booklet entitled "Amazigh Basket." The booklet demonstrated the use of local plants in the High Atlas gastronomy and featured drawings by the students.



LOCAL PRODUCT COMMERCIALISATION

Through our local product commercialisation programme, we conduct market analyses for products and by-products made by local cooperatives, develop business plans, and build connections for the equitable trade of community-based, biocultural products in niche markets in Marrakech.

Our efforts seek to raise awareness about the importance of purchasing local products that respect biodiversity and the environment, and support the livelihoods of the local communities.

2020 KEY ACTIONS

Capacity building :

Assessing cooperatives' capacities and providing capacity-building actions accordingly are essential to the success of this program. When devising these actions, we focus on tackling cooperatives' needs through workshops and training sessions. During these activities, we discuss various topics such as market certifications and their criteria, labelling, product quality, packaging requirements, and the sustainable use of natural resources.



Covid-19 response plan :

The High Atlas local economies that relied on travellers and tourists to sell their locally made products were severely hit upon the implementation of lockdown measures and travel restrictions

@IbtissamBouseta

In order to remedy this situation, we developed new project proposals adapted to new ways of living. We submitted a project proposal to Darwin initiative, an online local product commercialisation program which helps cooperatives build and sustain a solid digital presence.

The proposal was approved, allowing us to begin our plan of creating professional websites for cooperatives, providing training on social media usage to their members, and helping them build connections with potential clients in Marrakech.

EthnoBotanica :

In 2020, we continued to foster relationships between the social enterprise EthnoBotanica and local cooperatives. EthnoBotanica was established in 2019 with the help of MBLA to ensure that community members reap the utmost benefit from selling their products to improve their livelihoods.



CULTURAL PRACTICES :

We identify, document and promote cultural practices that maintain biodiversity in the High Atlas through research using a participatory approach. Understanding these practices is fundamental to the collaborative development of biodiversity conservation and landscape management approaches that are socially and ecologically appropriate.



2020 KEY ACTIONS

Study on cultural practices in Oukaïmeden :

Following workshops held with local communities in the Oukaïmeden commune in 2019, we aimed to document cultural practices in the region and identify the causes behind their disappearance. 2020 was the year we focused our efforts on conducting thorough research on the environmental and social features characterizing the Oukaïmeden commune. The research is set to be finalized and published in 2021.



Characterization of Agdal :

Surveys and interviews were conducted in Asni, Sti Fadma, and Oukaïmeden, as part of our study on the characterization of Agdal as a crucial cultural practice of biodiversity conservation. Over 100 community members participated in this study.



Recommendation Workshop in Oukaïmeden :

In February 2020, our team met with local community members in Oukaïmeden to exchange ideas and come up with joint solutions to ensure the sustainability of cultural conservation practices. Men and women from 10 villages in the region took part in this workshop which paved the way for our actions in 2021.



AGRO ECOLOGY FOR HEALTHIER PLANTS

One of our many aspirations is educating local communities on agroecology and permaculture. Through capacity-building workshops, we work to effectively convey their importance for responsible, sustainable and profitable land management. Our target audience includes youth, women, men, local authority members and cooperatives.

We also carry out research on the characteristics and availability of local, disappearing and new seed varieties to strengthen local seed systems in the High Atlas. We support farmers to make informed decisions about the management of their agricultural plots and crop diversity.

2020 KEY ACTIONS

Studies and publications:

Due to lockdown measures, we were unable to hold our annual farmers field school program aiming to train local community members on plant health and livestock management. Therefore, we focused our efforts on research and documentation.

The first publication discussed crop phenology in different HACL program sites. The second publication discussed participatory characterization of agricultural local varieties in both Imedgal and Ait MHamed communes. The third publication consists of a booklet that is yet to be finalized and published on soil and natural fertilization techniques.



دليل عملي للتربة وتقنيات تسميدها الطبيعي



GOVERNANCE & POLICY

We collaborate with community representatives from all across Morocco to identify and analyse challenges related to community governance systems.

2020 KEY ACTIONS

Capacity-building on policy-making in Tnin village, Ourika :

In February 2020, we organized a policy-making workshop in Ourika, through which farmers, associations and cooperatives working in agriculture from 13 villages in the High Atlas, learned about Morocco's agricultural law and seed regulations that have a direct impact on their livelihoods.



Building an ICCA consortium in Morocco :

ICCA : Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories

Our team contributed to the establishment of ICCA consortium in Morocco, which aims to promote the appropriate recognition and support for indigenous people and community-conserved areas and territories at the local level. Emphasis was placed on a “self-strengthening” process, enabling indigenous communities to preserve their heritage and be recognised as the guardians of their lands. The work underlying this action included the creation of a database comprising candidate national sites and the planning of the first site assessment exercise.

Imedgal registered as ICCA site:

A participatory mapping exercise was carried out by local communities and different partners including MBLA, outlining criteria elements required for this particular status. As a result, Imedgal was successfully integrated in the ICCA registry.



MEET OUR TEAM

Dr. Rachid Ait Babahmad

As MBLA's president, Rachid oversees the overall management of MBLA projects. He manages project activities, collects biodiversity-related data, implements biodiversity conservation actions, and helps community researchers strengthen their capacities in field research. Rachid is also responsible for maintaining fruitful relationships with our diversified partner network, including local NGOs, authorities, cooperatives, and institutions in Morocco.

Dr. Soufiane M'sou

As secretary, Soufiane actively contributes to the development of project proposals and to the implementation and management of project activities. He also focuses on Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs), and conducts research on policy and governance.

Pommélien da Silva Cosme

Pommélien is responsible for managing the High Atlas Landscapes program grants and donor relationships. She also provides creative and engaging communications to effectively present the HACL program.

Sabah Bahiji

Sabah leads the development and implementation of environmental activities in schools in the High Atlas as part of the youth education and bioculture program. She also contributes to the documentation of cultural conservation practices with a focus on community engagement through the development of community action plans.

Ibtissam Bousefa

Ibtissam is responsible for developing and executing a dynamic social media strategy that aims to increase our digital outreach. She is also in charge of drafting annual reviews, blogs and brochures, as well as documenting activities and field trips with written reports, photos, and videos. Her efforts seek to expand MBLA's local media network and spark the public's interest in our cause.

MEET OUR COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

Mohamed Ait Boujamaa

Mohamed is originally from Tiniskt, a small village in the Imegdâl commune. Passionate about his work in Imegdâl's community nursery, he thrives on teamwork and exchanges with the local community. Mohamed strives to cultivate the spirit of environmental citizenship within the indigenous Amazigh communities of the High Atlas.

Touda Atiya

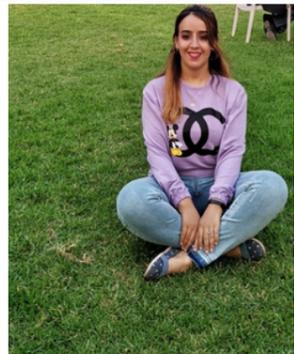
Touda was born and raised in Ait M'Hamed. As a community researcher, she always manages to bring her local community together to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity conservation and traditional land use practices.

Fadma Ait Igh

Fadma spends a great deal of time in the field, particularly in the community of Imegdâl, where she conducts interviews with members of the local community on local conservation practices and the use of natural resources. She is also actively involved in the management of the local herbarium and plant collection in Imegdâl.

Hamid Ait Baskad

Hamid works in Imegdâl's community nursery. He also works as a field researcher and a facilitator with local authorities.



Khaoula Khaldoun

Khaoula joined MBLA in December 2018. Her responsibilities include financial coordination and oversight, assistance in budget preparation, coordination administrative services acquisition, and ensuring the effective running of the association.



Dr. Abdellah Aghraz

As treasurer of MBLA, Abdellah contributes to drafting grant proposals, prepares quarterly accounts and takes care of human resources and procurement issues in collaboration with the MBLA Board of Directors. Abdellah also leads actions on biodiversity conservation, documentation of bio-cultural knowledge and strengthening the capacities of local communities in the commune of Oukaïmeden.



Dr. Omar Saadani Hassani

As a field agronomist researcher, Omar is responsible for carrying out research and capacity-building activities in the framework of our High Atlas Cultural Landscapes program. He holds a PhD in Biotechnology and Environmental Sciences.



Dr. Mohamed Ouknin

As Local Product Commercialization Coordinator, Mohamed oversees the development of processes related to local product commercialization and marketing, including the design of a mechanism for data consolidation and product selection. He collaborates with local cooperatives and associations to carry out feasibility studies for the selected products, conduct value chain analysis, creates and implements business plans, and prepares ethnobotanical monographs.



Meryem Aakairi

Field Agronomist Researcher, Meryem supports the High Atlas agroecology program through the reinforcement of community engagement and the use of participatory action research on the cultural practices of conservation, sustainable land use practices, and capacity-building activities.



Youssef Rouchdi

Youssef plays an important role in the maintenance and production of plants at Oukaïmeden's community nursery. His experience as president of the local association "Ait Lkak" and member of the Oukaïmeden cooperative has enabled him to ensure good communication with the local community and authorities, as well as other actors in the region.



Rachid Ait Elhadj

Rachid joined MBLA in 2019. He works at Oukaïmeden's community nursery. His experience as a farmer ensures successful fruitful cultivation of local plants.



Hassan Ouchacha

Hassan joined MBLA in 2018. He participates in the activities of the community nursery in Bernat, Ait M'Hamed. He is also responsible for coordinating with local communities to ensure the success of our actions in the region.



Hamou Malih

Hamou is a caretaker at Bernat's community nursery. He takes part in other activities in the region, such as the collection of seeds, the collection and dissemination of information, in addition to other tasks related to the conservation of biodiversity in the region.

INVESTING IN OUR STAFF

Personal empowerment is at the core of our work. Not only do we follow a set of guidelines in our hiring process, i.e. prioritizing diversity, inclusion and passion for our cause and vision, we also believe in investing in our staff. In 2020, we developed a range of programmes to support improvement of the working and learning environment.

Benefiting from these programmes were our staff members in Marrakech office and our community researchers working across our project sites in Ait Mhamed, Imegdal, Oukaïmeden and Ourika.

We list below the workshops and trainings we organized in 2020, aiming to enhance team spirit, increase healthy productivity and create better work conditions for all:

- 2 day workshop on time management, held in December. During this workshop, we learned about how each team member can improve their organizational and planning skills and work environment to increase our collective productivity.
- 6 week online training on fundraising strategies, Organized by Acumen academy, called ' Non-profit Fundraising Essentials', to introduce entrepreneurial mindsets and practical tactics for non-profit fundraising.
- 3 day workshop on grant proposal writing, held in January and facilitated by Najwa Es-siari.



- In December 2020, we enrolled our community researchers in English language courses and a year long informatics training program.



OUR TEAM IS :



PASSIONATE



DEVOTED



CHEERFUL



INVOLVED

2020 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

REVENUE

IN MOROCCAN DIRHAM

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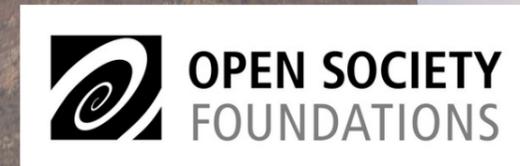
2020 BUDGET BREAKDOWN :



OUR PARTNERS



HIGH ATLAS CULTURAL LANDSCAPES PROGRAM FUNDERS



The High Atlas Cultural Landscapes Program is funded by the MAVA Foundation, the UK Government Darwin Initiative, Open Society Foundations, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and donations through GlobalGiving.



MBLA

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& LIVELIHOODS ASSOCIATION



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