

Neglected genetic resources: gathered food plants in the urban markets of North-West Morocco

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Gathered food plants, also known as wild edible plants, are an integral part of plant diversity. "wild" refers to species that grow naturally without being cultivated in agricultural fields (Pardo-de-Santayana et al., 2007; Tardio, 2006).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations defines these plants as growing spontaneously, independent of direct human intervention (FAO, 1999). According to Molina and his team (2014), wild edible plants are often regarded as weeds, yet they remain a significant diet component for many people worldwide.

In a global context, Rural communities serve as the main consumers and engaged contributors to the preservation of underutilized and neglected plants in sustainable food systems (Tharmabalan et al., 2023).

Thus, they are non-domesticated plant species that are consumed by local communities. Beyond their nutritional and economic importance, these plants also hold significant socio-cultural value, particularly concerning traditional knowledge.

The foundation of food security has become increasingly narrow. As a result, the number of marginalized or underutilized food plants is continuously growing.

The marginalization of minor local crops and varieties is relatively well-known, and efforts are being made to preserve these genetic resources. However, other plant resources with high food potential are still poorly studied, particularly at the national level. These include gathered food plants.

Thus, this study is significant as it aims to compile and evaluate the existing ethnobotanical knowledge on wild edible plants sold by women vendors in local markets and traditionally used for human consumption.

METHODOLOGY

The approach adopted is based on the collection of ethnobotanical data regarding wild edible plants, conducting surveys in the study area (particularly in the markets (souks), where the activity of women "jebliyat" is notable), and identifying how these resources are utilized by the local population in a domestic context.

Semi-structured interview questionnaires were employed for data collection.

We selected one souk for weekly monitoring and identified sites for seasonal surveys, and we prepared a herbarium of the inventoried species.



Figure 1. The display of products, including gathered food plants, by sales associates.

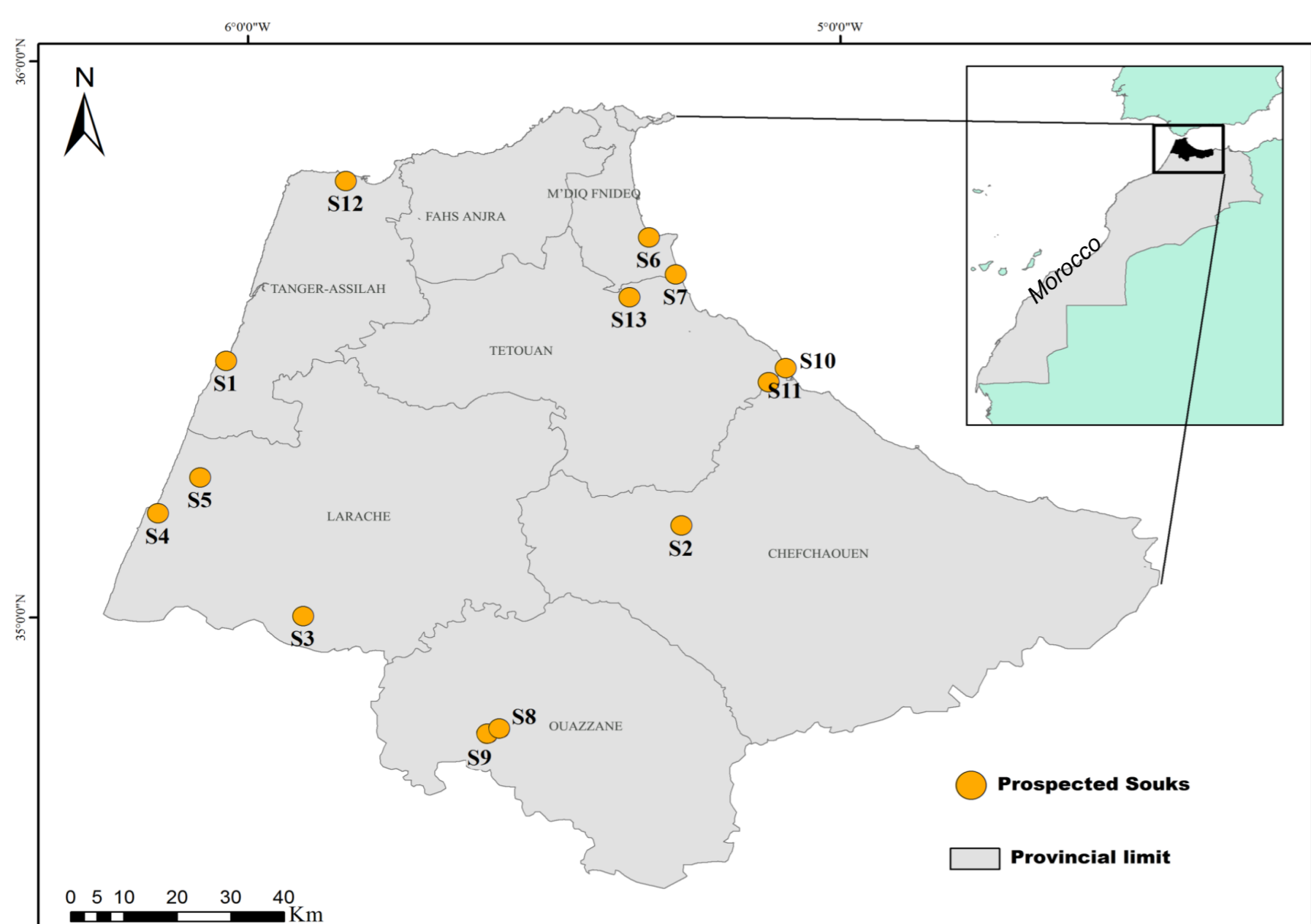


Figure 2. Geographical location of the markets surveyed within the North-West Morocco.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1. Socioeconomic details of female vendor informants.

Characteristics	Number	Percentage %
Age		
20-40	175	24.0
41-60	474	65.1
> 60	79	10.9
Education level		
Unschooling	582	80
Primary education	146	20
Marital status		
Married	553	76
Unmarried	66	9
Widowed	80	11
Divorced	29	4
Daily WEPs sales revenue (DH)		
50 – 100	72	9.9
101-150	239	32.8
151-200	401	55.1
201-250	16	2.2

- Based on 728 interviews conducted with female vendors on behalf of this survey, a total of 55 wild edible plant species are gathered and sold for consumption in the 13 markets within the study area. These identified species belong to 43 genera and 23 botanical families.
- The most important families are the *Asteraceae* with 11 species, followed by *Apiaceae* and *Lamiaceae* with 5 species each, and *Malvaceae* with 4 species.

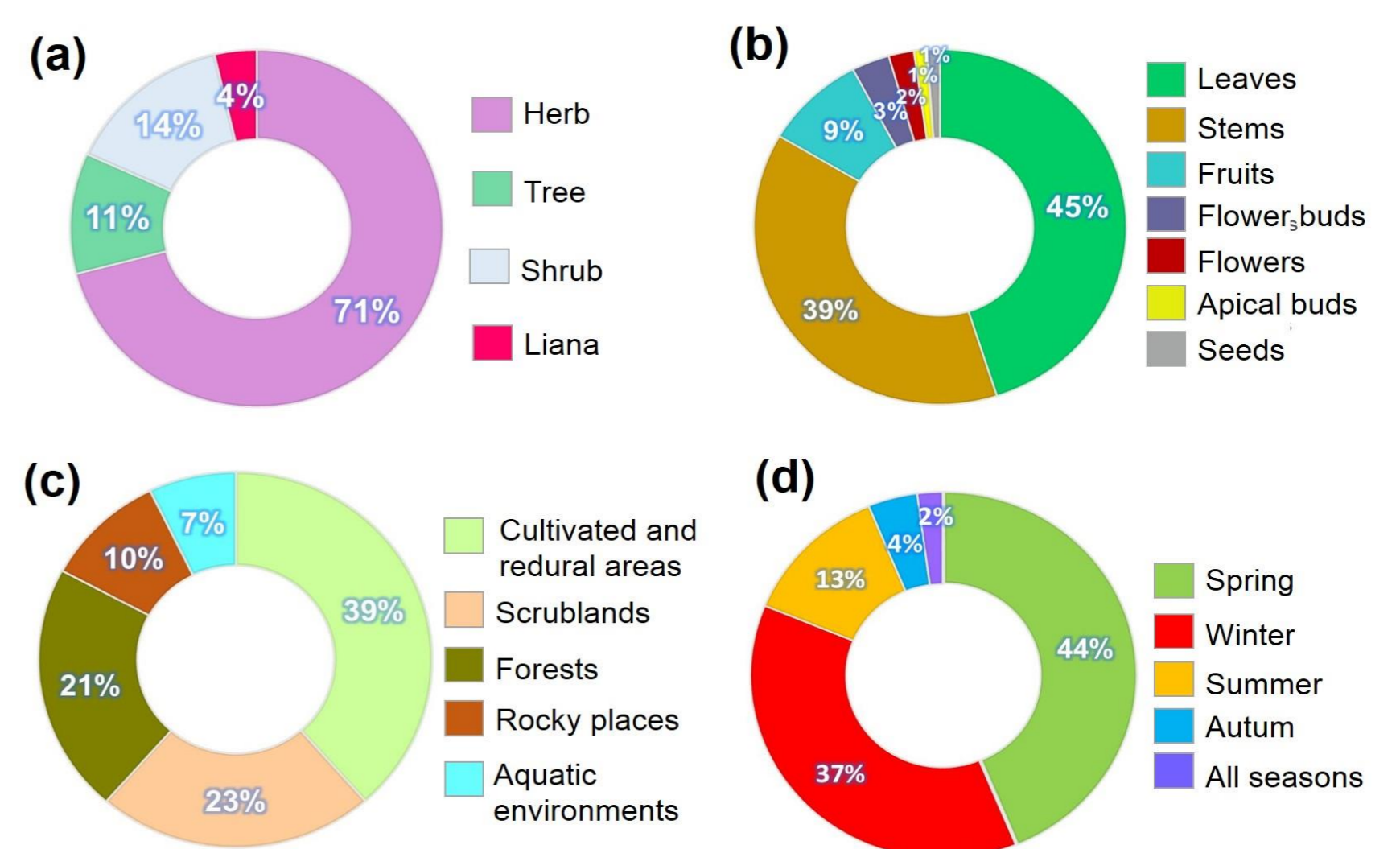


Figure 3. (a) Contribution of different growth forms to the diversity of wild edible plants in the study area (number of species); (b) Parts of the plant utilized by local communities; (c) Habitats where wild edible plants are collected for sale; (d) Seasons during which wild edible plants are collected in the study area.

CONCLUSION

- The results obtained indicate that the souks of the region, north-west of Morocco are rich in food plants of picking, the indigenous societies represented by the jebliats saleswomen who have a knowledge on these plants which depends on several factors (age, availability in the area, accessibility to resources, level of demand by consumers...).
- For that reason it is vital to implement improvements on multiple fronts: organizational, technical, and commercial. This will not only enhance the quality-price ratio but also increase the profitability of selling these plants. Additionally, it is crucial to raise public awareness about their health benefits.

FUTURE WORK / REFERENCES

Based on the results obtained, we will study the possibility of developing an action plan to preserve and enhance these plants.

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