

# YARD

A DIALOGUE OF GENERATIONS YOUNG AMBASSADORS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT DISCUSS THEIR FUTURE WITH POLITICIANS FROM EUROPE AND THE PARTNER COUNTRIES DURING THE 2008 EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT DAYS



**“BY CULTIVATING DESERT CROPS IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY, I WANT TO IMPROVE WOMEN’S INCOME WHILE PRESERVING OUR MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCE—WATER.”**

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| <b>Name:</b>       | <b>Rachida Izelfanane</b>  |
| <b>Home town:</b>  | Douar Inchaden, ca. 40 km south of Agadir, Morocco   |
| <b>Occupation:</b> | Businesswoman  |
| <b>Age:</b>        | 32   |
| <b>Education:</b>  | Diploma in Business Administration from the University of Economics and Management in Nantes, France |
| <b>Languages:</b>  | French, Berber, English, Spanish   |

## Her background

Rachida was born in France and now lives in Douar Inchaden, her family’s home village, in a valley in the Atlas Mountains. At 1,200 metres above sea level, the rocky limestone hills are covered with olive and almond trees, rosemary and thyme, and prickly pears and argan trees, which before the Ice Age probably covered large parts of Africa and Southern Europe but today only grow in this part of Morocco, a territory only half as big as the state of Hesse.

Prickly pears are sold on markets across Morocco, but the fruit, the tree trunks and seeds can also be used to produce medicinal products, hair conditioning agents and dyes. The fruits of the argan tree, which resemble figs, contain an oil that Moroccans have used for centuries to treat skin diseases. Its vitamin E content is almost double that of olive oil.

## Her business

After studying Business Administration in Nantes, Rachida spent six years working in the sales department of a semiconductor factory and for an internet provider in France. However, she wanted to return to Morocco. She remembered the landscape, the prickly pears and the argan trees, and how she used to collect thyme honey with her father. She rejected job offers from Casablanca and in 2006 returned to Morocco to set up her own business in Inchaden, ca. 40 km south of Agadir.

Today, she buys prickly pears from a dozen farmers’ families in the area. After the harvest ten female workers gather the flowers from the trunk and manually extract oil from the

seeds. While previously only the fruit were sold on local markets; today Rachida successfully exports also the flowers and the oil of the prickly pears through sales partners to Europe.

Since last year, the company has become financially independent. The turnover is increasing steadily. This year, Rachida already hopes to offer employment to her workers year-round, irrespective of the season.

### Her commitment and her vision

Some of the women in her village have managed to gain a seat on the village council, previously a purely male domain. Several of the village women are divorced; others, even though they are married, have to support their whole family. They work 13 hours a day in the fields, with only one day off every fortnight. In the village council they enforced school lessons for children from the age of six and a regular waste collection service. Rachida is also a member of the village council and advises a small cooperative of women who produce goat's cheese. She helps them advertise and sell their products and advises them on production hygiene, in cooperation with professors from Agadir University. As a lecturer at the Agricultural Faculty at Agadir University, she intends to popularise the large-scale production of argan oil.

Rachida is inspired by a vision. The cultivation and processing of prickly pears and the fruit of the argan tree is traditionally a women's domain. At the same time, these native plants have adapted to the natural water scarcity in the region—a scarcity that is expected to worsen due to the cultivation of “thirsty” crops such as tomatoes. Selling the oil and extracts of the prickly pear and the argan tree to the European and international cosmetic and pharmaceutical industry enables women to enter new sales markets with better and more stable profit margins.

### Her expectations as a Young Ambassador

By talking to the other Young Ambassadors, Rachida wants to learn more about how the challenge of water scarcity is being handled in other countries. She wants to improve her understanding of the role of international aid organisations, be it NGOs or public sector institutions. Finally, she would like to find out how to gain financial or technical support from international organisations.

### Contact details

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