

# When women's hands become a lever for local development

**I**t is 10 a.m. we are at the heart of the “Fendak Chejra” in Tangier, more specifically in the Social and Solidarity Economy support center which accommodates 7 cooperatives.

A large door allows easy access to the premises. Saida Bahi, president of a women's cooperative for the creation of natural cosmetic products, warmly welcomes us.



The female cooperative for cosmetic products. (Photo taken by Ahlam Ghajjou)

Here, the atmosphere is jovial, and the room is lively and filled by different natural smells of cosmetic products.

Sitting on a chair, with a smile on her face, Saida begins to tell us her story: *"Since I finished my studies in*

*biochemistry, the idea of founding a women's cooperative for natural cosmetics has become a dream for me. Thank God I managed to achieve it two years ago"*



Saida selling her natural products to a customer. (Photo taken by: Ahlam Ghajjou)

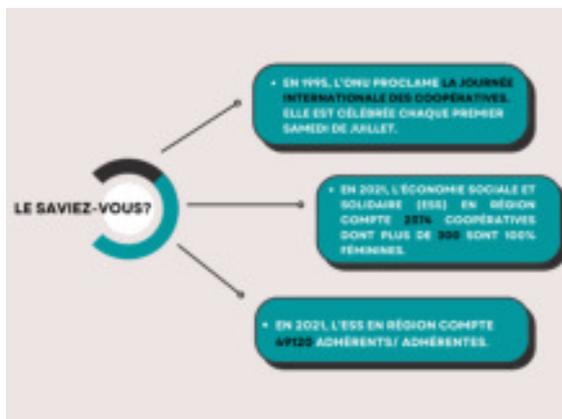
She won the National "Lalla Al Moutaaouina" prize for best idea for the development of a women's cooperative project. This cooperative, chaired by Saida, has become an example of success for women at the national level in just two years.

Despite this success, Saida acknowledges the negative impact the health crisis had on the sector: *"We were very affected by the crisis. we were unable to market our products since we only do direct selling to customers.*

**Ahlam Ghajjou**

She adds: *“The marketing of products online is the pet peeve of cooperatives. Although we have benefited from training in electronic marketing, we have not been able to implement what we have learned in the field.”*

On this subject, we asked Jamal Nowass, the director of the Office for the Development of Cooperation (ODCO) in Tangier. He told us: *“Most of the cooperatives went out of business during the lockdown because they were unable to market their products on social media”*. He concludes: *“We must form unions of women's cooperatives to launch a large commercialization and marketing network”*.



Figures collected from ODCO, by: Ahlam Ghajjou

In light of this, we contacted Karima Habibi, the president of the department of Social and Solidarity-based Economy at the Regional Council of Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima (CRTTA). She told us: *“The CRTTA has launched several programs aimed at developing*

*cooperatives, particularly the e-commerce project, which aims to support women's cooperatives and help them market their products. Regarding its impact, I cannot claim anything because the project is still ongoing.”*

Indeed, the Regional Council and the ODCO are not the only two institutions that make efforts in this respect, civil society, too, is striving to ensure the delivery of training programs for the benefit of women's cooperatives.

Fathia Saidi, the general secretary of the Association for the Union of Feminist Action (UAF) of the Tangier section, tells us: *“Women who are members of cooperatives participate in economic and social development. They create jobs and give value to local resources. Through our training, we aim to unite them around their rights and values of solidarity, equal opportunities, and equal access to resources”*.

Souad Terraf, co-founder of a textile cooperative, is one of the beneficiaries of the training provided by the UAF. She started as an apprentice 15 years ago. Today we are going to her weaving workshop.



Souad Terraf hard at work at the cooperative. (Photo taken by: Ahlam Ghajjou)

Souad says: *“Each year, several women join our cooperative. Our commitment has borne fruit; we were able to participate in national and international exhibitions and women members were able to take care of their families, thanks to their work here within the cooperative”.*

Souad, who feels like she belongs fully in her workshop, declares: *“When I finish my work, I feel very proud to have made a 100% local*

*product that you can’t find anywhere else.”*



The hands of Souad Terraf weaving. (Photo taken by: Ahlam Ghajjou)

More and more Moroccan women are joining cooperatives to carry out income-generating activities, thus increasing the total number of women's cooperatives to 6,000 in 2022, compared to only 1,756 in 2013.

These women's hands prove to be not only the engine of local development and social change, but they also open new doors to the cooperatives adherents.