

**Community-based management in the Mediterranean:
Innovations in socio-environmental research and action**

**MEDITERRANEAN ENVIRONMENTS REGIONAL ACADEMY (MERA),
2-11 NOVEMBER 2018, HIGH ATLAS, MOROCCO**



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Acronyms

GDF	Global Diversity Foundation
GEN	Global Environments Network
MBLA	Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association
MERA	Mediterranean Environments Regional Academy
Q&A	Questions and Answers

Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to our institutional host, Cadi Ayyad University (Marrakech) as well as our local partner, the Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association (MBLA). We also thank the local communities who joined us at MERA and the staff of Espace Tamount and Kasbah Angour for their great hospitality. We are particularly grateful for the enthusiasm and effort of MERA participants and resource people and also extend our gratitude to MAVA Foundation, the Darwin Initiative and the Open Society Foundations for their generous support for this event.

Introduction

Mediterranean land- and seascapes have been shaped over millennia by reciprocal relationships between people and their environments, resulting in a vast and unique regional biocultural diversity. The Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot is ranked the third-richest in the world in terms of plant diversity and covers over 2 million square kilometres. It is widely recognised that this diversity emerged, in part, due to the practices of those living in these areas, who developed highly specialised knowledge and practices of land- and seascape management for dealing with the region's climatic and geographical challenges.

From 2-11 November 2018, the [Global Diversity Foundation](#) (GDF) organised the first Mediterranean Environments Regional Academy (MERA). Entitled *Community-based management in the Mediterranean: innovations in socio-environmental research and action*, MERA 2018 gathered 16 emerging environmental changemakers from the Mediterranean region who are passionate about, and work in the field of, conserving Mediterranean biocultural diversity, maintaining its cultural land- and seascapes and sustaining the livelihoods of the communities who manage them.

The MERA programme was built around a holistic and transdisciplinary learning approach, explicitly moving away from a 'teacher and student' dynamic. This included inspiring plenaries, roundtable and fish-bowl dialogues, practical workshops, field trips, participant presentations, skills training and one-to-one mentoring sessions. The Academy gathered regional and international experts who played the role of educators, facilitators and mentors. MERA took place in two different locations in the High Atlas Mountains: the Demnate region and the Tahanout region, both close to the rural communes of Ait M'hamed and Imegdal, sites where GDF has worked since 2013.

The academy was held under the auspices of the [Global Environments Network \(GEN\)](#), a transformative action network created in 2011 to connect and support emerging environmental changemakers and leaders.

Objectives and themes

The Academy covered four main themes (see also the full programme in Annex 1):

- *Local product commercialisation, rural livelihoods and the private sector;*
- *Communal governance and management systems in the context of local and national government;*
- *Policy, advocacy and the role of communities in promoting biodiversity-friendly cultural practices;*
- *Gender approaches in agroecology and food systems.*

With a focus on cultural land- and seascapes, the academy sought to:

- Share new methodologies and knowledge to advance socio-environmental research and action, paying particular attention to community-based resource management;
- Facilitate intercultural dialogue and mutual learning amongst participants and resource people;
- Promote networking among Mediterranean environmental practitioners to encourage collaboration, peer-mentoring and joint reflection;
- Strengthen the leadership abilities of Mediterranean environmental changemakers for enhancing personal and professional growth and catalyse the development of finding solutions for pressing socio-ecological and political issues in the region;
- Introduce personal development tools for building inner resilience and self-care.

Participants, Resource People and Organisers

After a rigorous two-stage selection process in early 2018, MERA welcomed over 30 individuals, including sixteen participants, nine resource people and six GEN-GDF team members.

Collectively, participants' research experience spanned 10 countries of the Mediterranean region, including Algeria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey. The MERA programme thus factored in the needs and research contexts of the participants and offered tools and expertise essential for working in community-based management throughout the region.

A participant list with corresponding biographies can be found in Annex 2 and a description of GDF/GEN organizers in Annex 3.



MERA participants with local community members in Espace Tamount, Demnate, Morocco.

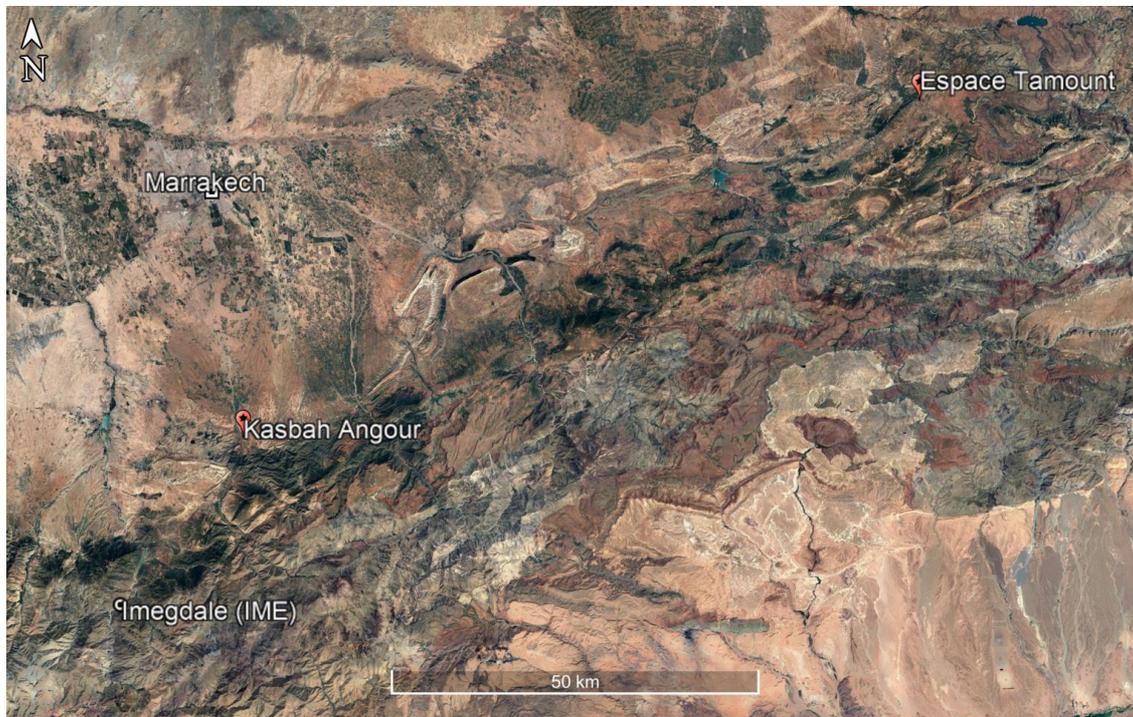
Sessions and discussions

Summary of MERA programme

Saturday 3 Nov.	Sunday 4 Nov.	Monday 5 Nov.	Tuesday 6 Nov.
Introductions	Community exchange and toolbox day	Commercialization	Policy, lobbying, advocacy & communication
Wednesday 7 Nov.	Thursday 8 Nov.	Friday 9 Nov.	Saturday 10 Nov.
Peer-to-peer learning & Videoing	Gender and agricultural research & writing proposals	Agrobiodiversity	Conclusions

On 2 November we travelled to our first destination, [Espace Tamount](#), in Imi n'Ifri (near Demnate). As the summary above shows, each day was dedicated to a specific theme, with time for personal development and team-building woven in. Most days, MERA began with an introductory presentation from resource

people who outlined the key themes and the objectives of the day. This was followed by interactive workshop sessions and discussions, where facilitators created opportunities and guided participants to delve, via embodied exercises, into the questions and issues raised. We organised two field trips: the first involved a tour of Espace Tamount's cooperative and the second included a visit to the plant nursery of [Imegdalen, one of GDF's partner communities](#). These trips provided participants with an insight into the botanical, ecological and cultural diversity and richness of the High Atlas Region.



Locations of MERA (Espace Tamount and Kasbah Angour) and the Imegdalen fieldsite.

Introductions and agreements

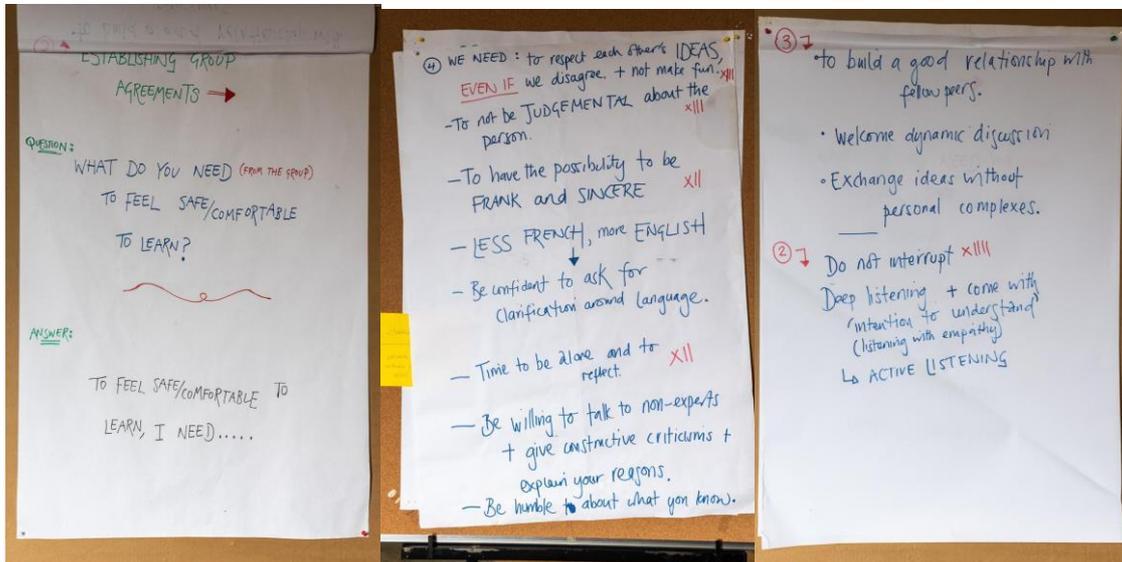
We began the first day with a playful ice-breaker known as the Passport Game. We then used [Points of You](#) photographic cards as prompts for learning more about one another.



MERA participants get to know each other playing the Passport Game: a perfect ice-breaker

Participants were then taken on a tour of the Espace Tamount Cooperative where medicinal plants are grown and dried for commercial purposes and visited a working traditional donkey-and-stone olive oil

press. Following the tour, MERA programme organisers and lead facilitators [Nessie Reid](#) and [Ugo D'Ambrosio](#) officially welcomed participants. This included an overview of GEN, a presentation of the MERA programme and an invitation for questions from participants. During the afternoon, the whole group took part in a 'group agreements/safe space policy' workshop, captured in the images below.



Examples of group agreements/safe space policy for MERA

Drawing upon the transformative teachings of Joanna Macy's '[The Work That Reconnects](#)', Nessie facilitated an afternoon nature connection exercise in Espace Tamout. Participants were invited to engage with their sense of touch and smell, moving away from the more critical, rationalising parts of themselves and into a more intuitive way of being.



A nature connection exercise using smell, touch, trust and intuition.

To encourage participants into a more reflexive way of working, whilst also providing the MERA team with data for assessing the impact of the Academy on participants, we introduced the 'learning journal' process. Led by Nessie, participants were asked a series of open questions each day, such as 'what have I found most challenging today? Or 'what have I learnt today?' They were then asked to compile learning journal entries before, during and after MERA, which will be used as ongoing tools for measuring our impact.

Transdisciplinary Toolkit

On the second day of MERA, participants practiced their presentation skills by delivering [Pecha Kucha](#) presentations. In the weeks leading up to the Academy, everyone received a brief: *to deliver a Pecha Kucha (a 7-minute presentation) on your work and aspirations as a socio-environmental changemaker and leader.* After their first presentation, each participant received constructive feedback and mentorship from the GEN core team and other MERA participants in a facilitated feedback session. Each participant then presented for a second time on the final day of MERA.



Abdeddaim (Morocco) shares his research within the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco with GDF and MBLA. All participants Pecha Kucha presentations were filmed as a learning tool.

Ozge (Turkey) presents her career journey as an activist in Turkey.



Dimitris (Greece) having a mentoring and in-depth

The facilitation team introduced participants to other participatory methods such as [Theory U](#), peer-to-peer mentoring and coaching and took part in a 'Journal Club' session. This involved reading and collectively analysing research articles about participatory research and community-based management.

[Eda Elif Tibet](#), part of the GEN communications and outreach team, presented on the importance of storytelling in community-based work and action. She premiered her most recent film [Awakening: A Fairy Tale](#) about a father and son trying to revitalise an ancient vineyard-keeping method in Cappadocia, Turkey.



Eda Elif Tibet's storytelling session on her local enterprise 'Fairy Dust' during an ethnobotany break.

Session on planning and shooting a video

In MERA'S video workshop, participants learnt the basics of documentary filmmaking including how to create storyboards, handle cameras and audio equipment, record interviews with good sound and image quality, whilst telling stories in a visually compelling and exciting way. Participants produced short video-stories which were shown at a film-screening one evening during the Academy.



Inanc and Eda delivering the four fundamental steps of video making. Photo: Pommelién Da Silva Cosme.



Storyboarding during the video workshop. Photo: Eda Elif Tibet.



Meredith videoing Ozge for their short film 'Zeytun'. Photo: Pommelién Da Silva Cosme.

Community Exchange on Local Product Commercialisation

A community exchange on local product commercialization gathered members of the High Atlas communities of Ait M'hamed, Imegdal, Oukaimeden and Imi n'Ifri with MERA participants and resource people. Held on 4 November, at Espace Tamount, the exchange involved a full-day workshop analysing the current commercialization situation for different plant and animal products within the High Atlas region. Based on the [FAO market analysis and development model](#), the first part of the exchange involved conducting 'an assessment of the existing situation'.



Discussions during the community exchange on commercialization

The following day, MERA hosted a 'local product commercialization' roundtable, at which resource people [Dena Freeman](#), [Nicola Bradbear](#), [Gonzalo Oviedo](#) and GDF Founder [Gary Martin](#) gave presentations on the theme. This was followed by a lively discussion on the benefits and challenges of local product commercialisation, during which participants shared their experiences from different parts of the world on the economic and socio-cultural value of local biocultural natural resources.



Participants learning about ethnobotanical products from the region

Policy and advocacy

Led by Concha Salguero and Blanca Casares from [Transhumancia y Naturaleza \(TyN\)](#), this practical session explored ways to strengthen strategic approaches and develop existing skills and capacities for lobbying and advocacy, especially in the case of the commons. Participants also explored the usefulness and importance of evaluating the impact of policy actions. They were given two case studies of communal governance systems and were invited to reflect on the following questions:

- What information is needed for advocacy?
- What are the key characteristics and phases of an advocacy campaign?
- How to define the stakeholder mapping and its analysis?
- How can the key stakeholders engage in the decision-making process?
- How to get the message out? i.e. message, dissemination, media, strategy.
- Learning for change: the art of assessing your impact and using evaluation tools



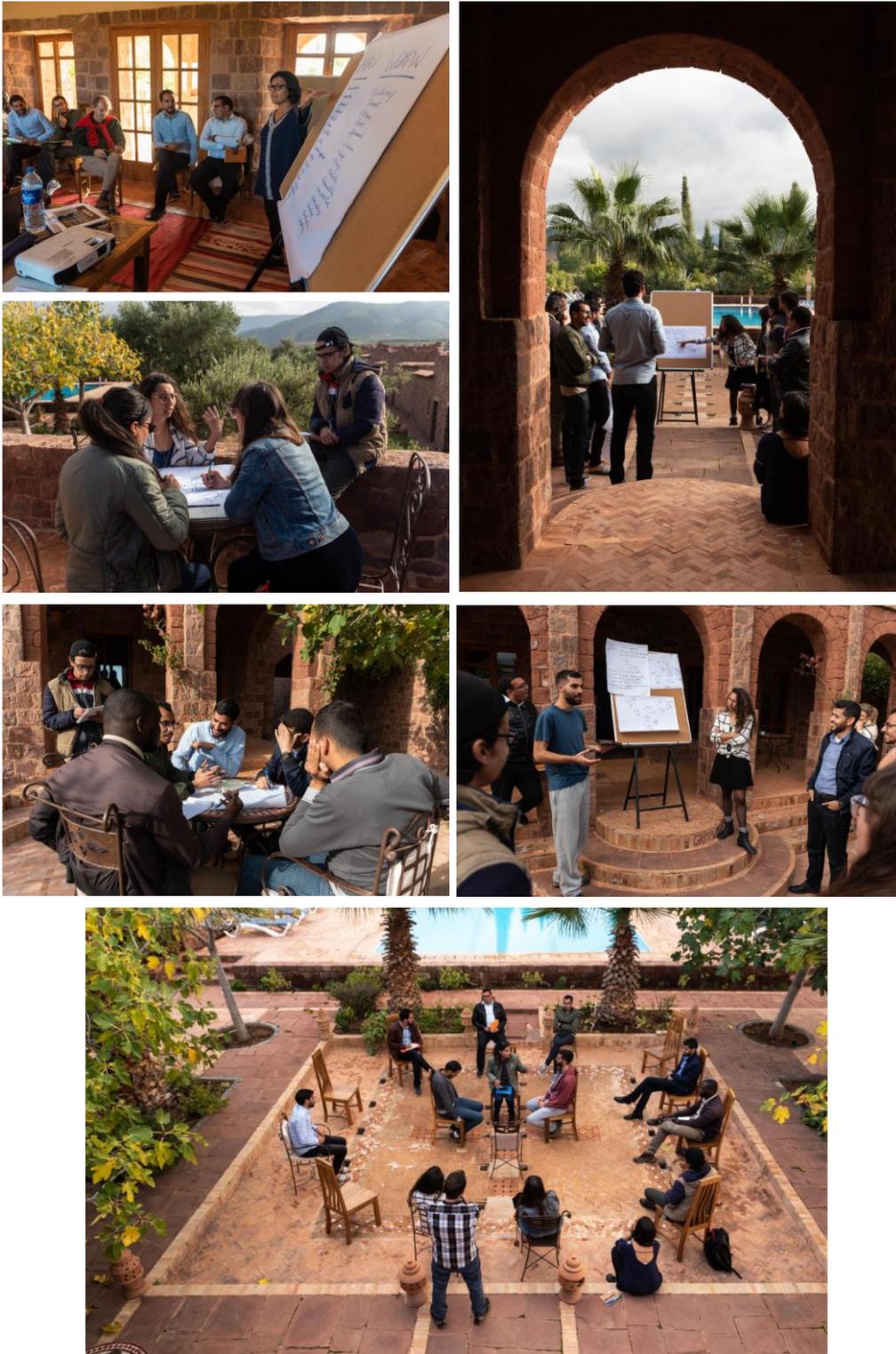
Participants discussing case studies with facilitators Blanca and Concha.



Some uplifting singing and dancing in between activities!

Gender in agrobiodiversity research

This session, led by [Sarah-Lan Mathez](#), explored ways to take a gender-based approach in the context of agricultural research. The morning included a theoretical session exploring gender-based assumptions and different approaches practitioners can take towards gender. Lunch was followed by a practical role-play session participants splitting into groups of ‘men’ and ‘women’ within an imaginary local community. The day closed with a fishbowl-style workshop on the relevance, challenges and opportunities of adopting gender approaches within their own work, whilst also critically reflecting on what arose during the role-play.



Discussions about gender and agricultural research

This session was followed by a short, but intensive workshop by Gary Martin on writing funding and project proposals and concluding with an informal Q and A between Gary and MERA participants.

Agrobiodiversity

[Devra Jarvis](#) presented on agrobiodiversity in Mediterranean cultural landscapes, and this was followed by a practical workshop for developing innovative, 'intra-specific' diversity rich agricultural production solutions. The focus was around marginal agricultural ecosystems where changing environmental and market conditions are the norm. Participants then spent the afternoon learning how to do detailed 'participatory varietal descriptions' of crops, using vegetable varieties (see photos below).



Interactions during a practical session on 'participatory varietal descriptions'



Visit to the nursery in Imegdal, Al Haouz



Ethnobotanical breaks: a delicious opportunity for intercultural exchanges!



A community member at Espace Tamount, High Atlas, makes bread in a traditional Amazigh oven.

Participant evaluations and lessons learned

The final day of MERA involved a field trip to the Imegdâl commune. Participants visited the local GDF-MBLA-supported community plant nursery and took a walk through the town, Ighrem, where they were invited to observe agroecological ecosystems of the region. This was complemented by presentations from staff members Hamid Ait Baskad and [Rachid Ait Babahmad](#).

MERA participants then completed a detailed evaluation of the Academy, the results of which can be found below, including lessons learnt for future GEN events. Finally, participants were given time to reflect together on MERA's activities and themes, and discussed ways to move forward, including how to maintain active participation within the Network. Overall, MERA exceeded the expectations of most participants. Below is a snapshot of from the evaluation process.

What are the three things you liked best about MERA 2018?:

“Getting to know the Moroccan situation, research, and place.”

“The transdisciplinary approach to learning”

“The Participatory diagnostic assessment practical session”

“The organising team, including the choice of ideas and tools within the programme, as well as their energy and flexibility in facilitation”

“The exchanging between different people from different cultural and religious backgrounds.”

“Learning new things linked to my work and to how to facilitate exchanging with others.”

What are the three things you would suggest improving in next year’s MERA?:

“Do the commercialisation workshop with the local community after we have understand their context better.”

“More field trips, maybe at the beginning so we (non-Moroccans) ‘understand’ where we are.”

“Engaging other perspectives from social sciences.”

“Less tasks per day and more focus and detail on specific ones.”

“Maybe a little bit more organized (strict) in following the schedule.”

What are the three most important things you have learned or gained through MERA that you plan to use in the future (providing us with specific examples where possible)?:

“The community action and research tools that we practiced and learned about.”

“Contact with people with similar interests, for joint research and action projects.”

“Policy, advocacy and evaluation workshops.”

“Developing public speaking and networking skills”

“Videos and communication skills and learning how to do Pecha Kucha presentations”

“Tools for working with local communities on the theme of commercialization and agrobiodiversity with a gender approach.

“Working with a group of fellow changemakers with a shared set of values”

“How to work on myself using the learning journal method.”

“How to organize a group of people or an NGO to take action against an environmental or sociocultural threat (workshop with Blanca and Concha)”

“Learning how to do group agreements and creating a Brave Space policy”

Final reflections on the academy included:

“I would add something more specific about diverse economies. The commons exercises were good, also the presentation, but actually dealt more with governance than economics. There are really practical examples in diverse economies and I really think that the only way you can change land management / resource management away from exploitation and degradation is by also changing the economic system. History shows they go together.”

“I liked the two big questions. The first one: what in my life drives me to be an environmental changemaker? The last one: what gives me resilience? Thank you for opening my mind and my reflexion to find the answers.”

“It was an amazing experience for me, and I would like to be a resource person in the future for this network.”

“I would recommend MERA to anyone, and I feel very satisfied that I learnt new skills and approaches and made contacts and connections on both a personal and professional level.”

A number of other questions were related to the balance of various aspects of the academy based on a scale of 1-5); for these queries a positive response would be '3' ('just right').

Focus	2.92	(just right)
Time devoted to personal projects and presentations	2.50	(slightly too much)
Information load	2.17	(slightly too much)
Length	2.17	(slightly too short)



Group discussion during and after participant assessments

Overall, MERA was a great success, where participants were able to share new community-based resource management methodologies and knowledge for advancing their socio-environmental research and action. MERA facilitated intercultural dialogue, promoted networking among Mediterranean environmental practitioners to foment collaboration, offered peer-to-peer-mentoring and tools for individual and joint reflection. It also strengthened the presentation skills and leadership abilities of participants, whilst encouraging personal and professional goals and ambitions and catalysing the development of new solutions to pressing socio-ecological issues in the region. GEN plans to organise similar regional academies with a chief aim of strengthening Mediterranean networks of socioenvironmental changemakers and leaders.

Financial reporting

GDF is grateful to MAVA Foundation, the Darwin Initiative and Open Society Foundations for their generous support. Participant fees made up a small proportion of the final budget and GDF contributed in-kind through staff time.

Multimedia links

GDF-GEN [blog post on MERA](#) and [photo essay](#)

Impact interviews with MERA participants and resource people:

[Abdeldjalil](#); [Diarra](#); [Dimitris](#); [Gary](#); [Hajar](#); [Hassan](#); [Nessie](#); [Ozge](#); [Pomme](#); [Sarah-Lan](#); [Sifeddine](#); [Ugo](#);

Other publications mentioning MERA: [Beyond magazine](#), [steemit](#).

Videos made by participants during the video workshop: [The King](#), [Zeytun](#), [Magigrenade](#)

Annexes

Annex 1: MERA Participants' list and biographies

MERA Participants list

First name	Last name	Institution	Country
Abdeddaim	El Hajjam	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Abdeldjalil	Bougherira	Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University	Algeria
Abdellah	Aghraz	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Ahmed	Bendella	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Alhousseine	Diarra	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Blanca	Casares	TyN	Spain
Concha	Salguero	TyN	Spain
Dena	Freeman	LSE	UK
Devra	Jarvis	Bioversity International	Italy, US
Dimitris	Papageorgiou	University of Life Sciences and Natural Resources of Vienna	Greece
Eda	Tibet	GEN-GDF	Turkey
Emna	Mornagui	Observatory for Food and Environmental Sovereignty	Tunisia
Gary	Martin	GEN-GDF	Morocco
Gonzalo	Oviedo	MAVA Foundation	Switzerland
Hajar	Salamat	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Hassan	Rankou	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Inanç	Tekgüç	GEN-GDF	Cyprus
Lubna	Belqadi	IAV Hassan II	Morocco
Meredith	Root-Bernstein	INRA	France, USA
Nessie	Reid	GEN-GDF	UK
Nicola	Bradbear	Bees for development	UK
Özge	Doruk	Freelance	Turkey
Pommelien	Da Silva	GEN-GDF	Belgium, Morocco
Rachid	Ait Babahmad	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Sarah-Lan	Mathez-Stiefel	Centre for Development and Environment	Portugal, Switzerland
Sifeddine	Ouahdani	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Soufiane	M'Sou	GDF-MBLA	Morocco
Ugo	D'Ambrosio	GEN-GDF	Spain
Youssef	Yacoubi	Freelance	Morocco

MERA participant biographies can be found [here](#).

The Global Environment Network Team



Ugo D'Ambrosio, Spain

Ugo is a Catalan biologist with international education and professional experience acquired in Barcelona, the USA, Costa Rica, the UK and more recently Morocco. He holds a PhD in Ethnobiology from the University of Kent (UK) and two masters, one in Organismic and Evolutionary Biology (University of Massachusetts), and one in Environmental Management and Leadership (University for International Cooperation) and has collaborated with multiple public and private conservation and development institutions. Ugo's most recent post-doctoral work in close collaboration with the Botanical Institute of Barcelona, the Botany Laboratory of the School of Pharmacy at the University of Barcelona and the Global Diversity Foundation, has revolved around Mediterranean ethnobotany and cultural practices of conservation both in rural and urban environments. He heads up the Mediterranean Ethnobiology Programme of the Global Diversity Foundation, which currently focuses on the study and maintenance of High Atlas Cultural Landscapes. Ugo was a participant in the Global Environments Summer Academy 2015 in Bern (Switzerland), and after that also joined the GEN team as the Mediterranean Regional Coordinator, organising Mediterranean events and overseeing Network member engagement at the regional level. In 2017, he organised the first European Community Exchange on Seed Diversity and Sovereignty and will be organising the first Mediterranean Regional Academy in Morocco in 2018.



Nessie Reid, UK

Nessie is the Director of the Global Environments Network. She is a Spiritual Ecologist with a focus on agroecology, food sovereignty, health and food values within both the UK and abroad. She has worked in Indonesia, India, Japan and across Europe on local and Indigenous communities' rights to land for growing food, as well as the preservation of traditional artistic and cultural practices. She is the creator of The Milking Parlour: an ongoing artistic discourse and set of performances exploring our human relationship to food and agriculture's impact on biodiversity and climate change. She is also currently an Associate Fellow at St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. As GEN and GESA Director, Nessie oversees all GEN projects and is responsible for maintaining a dynamic and productive network in collaboration with Global Diversity Foundation staff and GEN alumni. Nessie is a native speaker of English and can converse in Spanish and Indonesian.



Pommélien da Silva Cosme, Belgium & Morocco

Pommélien graduated from the K. U. Leuven (Belgium) with a bachelor's degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies and a master's degree in Business Communications. Her internship with the High Atlas Foundation in Marrakech in 2015 introduced her to the rich culture and diversity that Morocco has to offer. Before moving to Marrakech in 2016, she took a course in International Development at the Belgian Development Agency. As Communications and Field Officer for GDF's High Atlas Cultural Landscapes programme, Pommélien creates engaging communication about GDF's projects and supports the team on the field in Morocco. She is passionate about telling people's stories and connecting with local communities. Pommélien is a native Dutch speaker, and also speaks English, French and Moroccan Arabic. She hopes to communicate in Tashelhit one day.



Gary Martin, USA & Morocco

Gary is a cultural anthropologist and ethnobotanist, is founder of Global Diversity Foundation, Global Environments Summer Academy and Global Environments Network. Gary was a lecturer in the School of Anthropology and Conservation at the University of Kent from 1998 to 2011 and a Fellow of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society from 2010 to 2012. Twice a Fulbright scholar, he has a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley and an undergraduate degree in botany. His applied research and teaching on conservation and ethnobotany has taken him to more than 50 countries over the last 30 years. Gary lives in Marrakech with his wife, designer and hotelier, Meryanne Loum-Martin. He is a native speaker of English, speaks Spanish and French, and is currently learning Moroccan Arabic.



Inanc Tekguc, Cyprus

Coming from Cyprus, Inanc's perspective in photography and videography is complemented by his MA in visual anthropology from the University of Kent (UK). His interest in community-based conservation and biocultural diversity has taken him to Kenya, the Philippines, Malaysia, India and Morocco to carry out independent research, volunteer work or as part of his contribution to GDF projects. These experiences include the use of photographs and videos for geo-tagging and community mapping, inter-community training in the use of visual tools and visually documenting multidisciplinary research training and workshops. Inanc's photo story depicting the motivations of Kenya's Samburu tribe to take on community-based conservation earned him the second place in a global travel photography contest, World Nomads Travel Scholarship 2010, organised by National Geographic's Jason Edwards and the World Nomads scholarship programme. Inanc believes in the power of dance to cross all physical and mental borders to bring people together. He has been involved in social latin dances for some years, as a photographer and a social dancer.



Eda Elif Tibet, Turkey

Eda is an independent documentary filmmaker and an anthropologist from Istanbul. She holds an MPhil degree on Social Anthropology from the University of Kent (UK) and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Bern, Switzerland and a research assistant at PH Bern. Eda's latest films are produced under her independent film label Karma Motion, which she runs together with Inanc Tekguc. Her award winning documentary films, which have made it into worldwide film festivals and international broadcasts, are telling the stories of Tibetan medicine practitioners in Ladakh India, nomadic pastoralists in Turkey, refugee musicians in Istanbul and the cave dwellers of Cappadocia (a UNESCO World Heritage site) where she is rooted from: *Ballad for Syria* (2017), directed with Maisa Alhafez from Syria, received the award for free speech from Calcutta Cult film festival India and award of recognition by Independent Hollywood Documentary Film Festival in the US; *Refugee Here I Am* (2015), directed with Enzo Ikah, political refugee and human rights activist from DRC, received the Gold Human Rights Award from Jakarta Film Festival; *Hey Goat* (2014), made in collaboration with the Mediterranean Consortium and MAVA Foundation, was recognised as the best environmental film by Sustainable Development Film Festival in Slovenia; and *Amchi* (2013), awarded the most inspiring filmmaker of the year and best story by Jakarta film festival. Since joining GESA in 2014, Eda produced various media work as part of the Global Environments Network's communications and outreach strategies together with Inanc Tekguc, including documenting the GESAx talk series and the introductory short film "Where have all our environmental leaders gone?" Her upcoming films are *Awakening* (2018, with Inanc Tekguc), *The Art of Transformation* (2019, Rama Mani) and *Stories from the High Atlas* (2022, with Inanc Tekguc and Gary Martin).

Annex 2. Organisers of the event

GDF-GEN

GDF believes that our future depends on humanity's respectful engagement with the vast biological and cultural diversity of Earth. GDF works at the local level with communities through its [Regional Programmes](#), and at the international level with environmental changemakers through GEN, which gathers and connects inspiring leaders who are actively seeking solutions to environmental and social problems. This Regional Academy was organised under the aegis of GEN, and all participants at the MERA automatically become members of the Network, gaining access to a variety of tools and opportunities for mutual learning and growth. It was organised and facilitated by [Pommélien Da Silva](#), by GEN Mediterranean Programme Coordinator [Ugo D'Ambrosio](#) and by GEN Director [Nessie Reid](#). In collaboration with the [GDF](#) and [GEN](#) teams.

MBLA

[MBLA](#), (Moroccan Biodiversity and Livelihoods Association), based in Marrakesh, is a non-governmental organisation established in 2014. Through community-based research, we implement integrated in-situ and ex-situ conservation measures and strengthen cultural practices of conservation to protect biodiversity and enhance local livelihoods. In collaboration with local communities in the High Atlas, we deliver participatory conservation actions such as assessing the richness of local biodiversity resources, terrace cultivation, building and managing local seed banks, herbaria, community plant nurseries and water infrastructure. We train community members and local cooperatives in sustainable land use practices and the commercialisation of local plants and products to support local livelihoods. MBLA works in partnership with Global Diversity Foundation on the implementation of these activities in the High Atlas.

Cadi Ayyad University

[Cadi Ayyad University](#) (Arabic: جامعة القاضي عياض) is a university in Marrakesh and one of the largest universities in Morocco. Cadi Ayyad University was established in 1978 and operates 13 institutions in the Marrakesh-Safi region of Morocco in four main cities. One of its associated Faculties, the [FSSM](#) (Faculty of Sciences Semlalia of Marrakech, founded in 1978), is amongst the first institutions of higher education open in the Tensift Al Haouz region. It is therefore, and through experience acquired, one of the most important pillars of the University Cadi Ayyad (UCAM).

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